

The Fatal Ball - song lyrics

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THE FATAL BALL.

Written by Richard Henry Buck.

'Twas in a Western mining camp, down by the Rio Grande,
When pick and spade were laid away and darkness ruled the land,
And gathered 'round a blazing fire before a canvas tent,
Red-shirted miners passed the time with book And merriment.
Good-natured oaths flew thick and fast, And as the flask went 'round,
The liquor trickled downward with a mighty pleasing sound,
But suddenly each voice was hashed, the curling flames leaped higher,
And lo, a careworn stranger stood within the line of fire,
With eager eyes he scanned the group, as if twixt hope And fear,
Then turned to go, as bitterly he hissed, "he is not here."
"But hold! "a bearded miner cried, "who are you seeking, pard?
And why is it you're looking on myself and chums so hard?"
The stranger paused, as if in doubt, then passionate and wild,
He cried: "I'm looking for the man who robbed me of my child."
Again the bearded miner spoke: "Prove what you say is true,
An' if that man's in this yar camp we'll give him up to you."
"You will?" the stranger eagerly turned to the list'ning men.
"We will; we will," the miners cried. "We will," they cried again.
Assured thus of their friendliness, the man, with painful stoop,
Swung slowly 'round his form, and stood the centre of the group.
'Twas the same old story over that his wan lips told again,
Of the trusting ways of women and the wicked wiles of men:
"I had a little daughter, pards "-his voice grew soft and low,
And from his deeply-sunken eyes the tears began to flow.
"I loved her-oh, I loved her as only fathers can,
And my heart was bound up in her, since her little life began.
I watched her grow to womanhood, a perfect little gem,
Unfolding into beauty like a rose upon its stem;
And everything went well with us until one cursed day
A serpent came into our home and stole its peace away.
I was out that day prospecting when I saw an Injun band,
With a city dandy captive, bound and helpless, foot and hand;
They tied him to the stake, and piled the faggots 'round his feet,
Applied the torch, And soon his skin was blistering with the heat.
I thought it time to act, pards, so I raised my trusty gun,
And poured shot at the Injuns 'till I had them on the run;
I kicked aside the burning brands and set the prisoner free;
I bandaged up his awful wounds, And took him home with me,
And Nellie took and nursed him, and brought him back to life,
Just like a loving sister would, a sweetheart or a wife;
And I saw she kinder took to him, and seemed unsatisfied
Unless she walked around with him, and lingered by his side,
But things must have an ending, so one day he came to say
That he was strong enough to work And needs must go away;
And I noticed Nellie's lashes were a glist'ning like with tears,
And it seemed as though a sort of sob came softly to my ears.
he left the cabin shortly, so I stroked her curly hair,
And asked her what the trouble was her father couldn't, share.
She didn't want to tell me, but between her sobs I heard
That the man I saved had wronged her, And refused to keep his word.
Mad with passion, wild with anguish, I'd have have killed him
then and there.
But I kinder choked it down, and held my grip upon a chair.
So I called him back and told him he'd make my gal his wife,
And give her back her honor, or by heaven, I'd have his life!
When he said, with mocking coolness, 'I've a wife in yonder town,'
Mad with rage, I raised the heavy chair and struck the rascal down;
He drew his gun, took rapid aim and fired it all unseen,
Straight sped the bullet to my heart, but Nellie sprang between,
Deep in her breast the fatal ball, with aim unerring, sped,
A spurt of blood, a piercing scream, And she, my child, was dead.
I wept above her cold, still form-oh! how I wept that day,
But though my tears were pitiful, they fell on senseless clay.
Then-then, the spirit of revenge into my bosom crept,
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And like a demon wild for blood, up from my child I leapt,
And found, too late, the miscreant, with fear And terror blind,
Had vanished from the cabin, but had left his gun behind.
I kissed my Nellie's face, and swore above her cold, still form,
That I'd search for him And find him through sunshine and through storm,
And I made a vow to kill him, though for mercy he should call,
And the gun that killed my Nellie should speed the fatal hall.
You've heard my story through, pards, what is your verdict now;
Would you search for him And kill him, or go home And break your vow?"
"Kill him! kill him!" cried the miners. "Kill him like a cringing cur;
Seek him here, and if you find him, kill him as he murdered her! "
Down the line of waiting miners, eagerly the old man passed.
Peering in the bearded faces, vainly till he reached the last.
Then a yell of rage escaped him, and his face grew stern And white,
As he dragged a cringing miner out into the range of light.
Crying fiercely: "Now I've found you; here I mean to keep my vow;
On your knees and pray for mercy, for your soul's in danger now."
Ere his hand could press the trigger, "Crack!" there came a pistol's sound,
And the old man, shot and dying, sank upon the fire lit ground,
Then the miscreant who fired it, turned away And would have fled,
But the miners caught and held him, like a lamb to slaughter led.
Painfully the dying wanderer, creeping slowly to his knees,
Raised his gun and slowly aimed it, crying softly, "Nellie sees!"
"Crack! "and wildly the assassin, clutching at his bleeding chest,
Reels And falls across the camp-fire with the bullet in his breast.
Slowly spoke the dying wanderer: "Nellie, Nellie saw him fall,
And it was the gun that killed her that sent forth the fatal ball."
Tender arms were there to hold him-lower, lower sank his head-
Just a single cry for Nellie, and the poor old man was dead.