

## The Unfortunate Rake

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THE UNFORTUNATE RAKE

As I was a-walking down by St. James' Hospital,  
I was a-walking down by there one day,  
What should I spy but one of my comrades  
All wrapped up in flannel though warm was the day.

I asked him what ailed him, I asked him what failed him,  
I asked him the cause of all his complaint.  
"It's all on account of some handsome young woman,  
'Tis she that has caused me to weep and lament.

"And had she but told me before she disordered me,  
Had she but told me of it in time,  
I might have got pills and salts of white mercury,  
But now I'm cut down in the height of my prime.

"Get six young soldiers to carry my coffin,  
Six young girls to sing me a song,  
And each of them carry a bunch of green laurel  
So they don't smell me as they bear me along.

"Don't muffle your drums and play your fifes merrily,  
Play a quick march as you carry me along,  
And fire your bright muskets all over my coffin,  
Saying: There goes an unfortunate lad to his home."

This 19th century broadside text may not be the grand-daddy of all later versions of the much travelled "Rake" cycle, but it is probably sufficiently close enough to the original ballad to warrant its use as a starting point for an examination of the whole family of related parodies and recensions.

Only a handful of texts reported from tradition have been as graphically frank in their commentary on the cause of the young man's demise as that given in this early version. Later texts have tended to treat the matter obliquely, or have rationalized the situation by having death caused by other, usually more violent, means. KG

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