

One More Hand

He challenged me to make a bed
Amongst those of the cold and dead
One night to spend, 'neath trees that bend
Away from life and light

For just one night, is that so hard?
A grave decision in this yard
May win a bet, *perhaps*, but yet
Those clouds grow dark and thick

My pulse is quick, my mouth is dry
For all around me dead souls lie,
A chance I'll take, for, what's at stake?
Her hand, is my refrain

Sweet Molly Jane, it breaks my heart,
Her parents dear will soon depart,
They're deathly ill, they feel the chill,
And she'll be left alone

For long I've known sad stars align
I'll care for her, her hand in mine
But here's the thing, I need a ring
Before I ask the question

I've a suggestion, Bentley said.
Your job is gone. Your folks are dead.
You have no riches; tattered britches
But I've a proposition...

*'Tis your decision, but in that pocket
There's no ring, no golden locket
You have no greed, it's coin you need
And of both, I have plenty*

I think *It can't be*, but he beams
Says, *Ten pounds may fulfill your dreams.*
So that's his offer, my empty coffer
Is the seal and stamp

One candle lamp, one flask of sherry
One night within this cemetery
A pack of cards, a haunted yard
A night without a moon

I hum a tune, it doesn't ease
The fear caused by those rustling trees
I slowly stand, my shaking hand
Is reaching for the lamp.

My innards cramp, my nerve may fail
For bushes move beside the trail
Without ado, he's stepping through
A tall man, dark, severe

*A strange affair, I must admit,
To find a soul where none should sit.
My bones are weary, fog is dreary
Perhaps I'll rest a while?*

He speaks with style, a rich dark tone
And indicates a nearby stone
I nod his way, my eyes betray
The fear before the flame

Ronove's the name, his hand extends
There's darkness where his fingers end
And as we shake, I can't mistake
The certain sense of danger

I give the stranger my own name
And softly ask from whence he came
I've crossed the miles, he slowly smiles,
And I'm still inclined to wander

I begin to ponder what he's said
He sits upon a grassy bed
Beside a stone, as white as bone
And lifts my deck of cards.

He then regards me, calls me close
Let's play a game. His fervor shows.
The cards are shuffled, all sound muffled
By the steady, even flicker.

No dealer quicker have I seen
His lips are tight, his eyes are keen,
It's just a game, but all the same
I think I hear him hiss.

I must dismiss this dread I feel
I watch his hands, I watch him deal,
I check my cards, my eyes are hard,
But his have come alive.

He lays a five, I lay my own
A seven, nine and knave are shown.
He gives a grin, it's cold within,
And then I lay a queen.

A look most mean I see replace
The grin that just now graced his face.
I try to settle, show my mettle,
But *God*, the man is strange.

I rearrange the cards I hold,
And lay a nine, the move is bold
His gives a grunt, dislikes my stunt,
And on and on we play

My thoughts give way to Molly gJane
I think the fellow sees my pain
He rubs his cheek, *What do you seek?*
I share with him my plight

And wrong or right, I tell him all
Mayhap it is the alcohol,
He gives a smile. Are his teeth *filed?*
No! No, that *cannot* be.

It seems to me, the man does say
You need a true reason to play.
He's on his feet. Dear Jesus sweet!
Dear God! *He has a tail...*

Can sense prevail o're such a sight
Can I survive this horrid night?
He sits back down, and on the ground,
That pointed tail is winding.

You may be finding this unpleasant
I watch his tail, an oily crescent,
So, here's the deal, it's time, I feel,
To truly raise the stakes

My body shakes, his voice is bland,
Says, *if you win, you'll win her hand,*
But if you lose, you'll have to choose,
Which one of yours I'll take

You cannot make me! I then choke,
He pulls the hatchet from his cloak.
Says, *if you run, both lives are done.*
Now shut your mouth, and deal

My threats are real, the demon jeers
We play the cards, I wipe my tears
A six, a pair, I glance, he glares
We play until the dawn

My will is gone by the final hand
This horror isn't what I'd planned
We've one card left, my soul's bereft
Of all the hope I knew.

He lays... a *two* , I lay a three
I look at him, he back at me.
I guess you win, and from within
His cloak, he pulls my prize.

There were no lies, he slaps it down
Sweet Molly's hand upon the ground
The blood still wet, I've won the bet
His wager has been paid

We made a trade, your girl and I
She couldn't let her parents die,
They now shall live, but she did give
Me something in return

My red eyes burn, I grab his wrist,
I grab the hatchet, give a twist
But here's the thing, just as I swing
He pulls back, just in time.

Her hand and mine now lie together
Joined within the flowering heather
To have and to hold, our fingers grow cold
Much like the demon's smile.

Then from the pile he draws a card,
And drops it in this still graveyard
The red king shown, his voice is stone.
He asks for *one more hand...*