

The Young Sailor Cut Down in His Prime

A cautionary tale about the perils of the pox. This song has evolved through many versions starting in Ireland about 1790. A detailed analysis is available here:

http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/folkways/FW03805.pdf

which is sleeve notes for a 1960 record collecting 20 versions – and our version here is not one of those 20 either!

As I was a-walkin down by the Royal Albion,
Cold was the morning and dark was the day;
Who should I meet with but one of my shipmates,
All wrapped in white linen and colder than clay.

Chorus

*So beat the drums slowly and play the fife merrily,
Play the death march as you carry me on;
And over the side as you lower my coffin,
Say “There’s a young sailor cut down in his prime.”*

Get six of my shipmates to carry my coffin,
Six of my shipmates to carry me high;
And six pretty fair maids to carry white roses,
That no one might smell me as I pass them by

Now had she but told me before she had ruined me
Had she but warned me all in a good time
I might have a-taken those pills of white mercury
But now I’m a sailor cut down in my prime

On a stone at my grave you will see these words written
“Now all you young sailors take warning by me
And don’t go a-courting flash girls of the city
Flash girls of the city were the ruin of me.”