

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. The tune, with similar words, is also known as 'Streets of Laredo' sung by Marty Robbins Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, Tom Jones etc. and also used in the film The Ballad of Buster Scruggs. Roud 2, lists 420 sources.

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"

Say "There's a young sailor cut down in his prime"