

Laying Up Silver



I once was a young man like these fel- lows here,
 Cheered as we put out to sea: I had youth, I had health, I'd the
 world at my feet, And a young wo- man wait- ing for me. And when
 I got to Cu- ba I swore I'd work hard; Lay up some
 sil- ver some day; ah but lay- ing up sil- ver's like lay- ing up
 sand on the bar at the mouth of the bay.

I once was a young man, like these fellows here,
 Cheered as we put out to sea;
 I had youth, I had strength, I'd the world at my feet,
 And a young woman waiting for me.
(Chorus)
 And when I got to Cuba, I swore I'd work hard,
 Lay up some silver one day,
 Ah but laying up silver's like laying up sand,
 On the bar at the mouth of the bay

I surely worked hard, and I surely worked long,
 For sweat more than silver, I'd say;
 And to keep myself going, I needed a song,
 And a rum at the end of the day
(Chorus)

I watched young men arriving, saw old fellows go,
 Watched as yellow-jack swept them away,
 And the silver I laid up, it ran through my hands,
 Like the sands on the shore of the bay.
(Chorus)

Then a letter from home, I got only the one,
 And that one was only to say,
 That the woman who waited, had married a man
 Who stood in a grocer's all day.
(Chorus)

And I can't say I blame her, for even I know,
 As I sit with the rum and the pain,
 That laying up silver is laying me low,
 I'll never sail homewards again.
(Chorus)
 And when I got to Cuba, I swore I'd work hard,
 Lay up some silver one day,
 Ah but laying up silver's like laying up sand,
 On the bar at the mouth of the bay



Many young men from Britain, and especially South Wales, sought their fortune in Cuba in the 18th and 19th centuries, and many didn't find it. Yellow fever ('Yellow-jack') was rife, and no-one knew how it spread or how to guard against it. The rum probably didn't help, though it made things more bearable.