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Excerpt of lyrics from "Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads"

Almeda Riddle

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From *Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads*, Roger D. Abrahams (ed.), Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970, pg. 21- 22

We'd write out ballets on any song that we wanted to remember, and even some that we already knew, if we wanted them in our collection. I guess that my father even did that, for I found a sheet in his hand with a song about the tornado at Heber Springs which I think he and our neighbor, Ruby Dylan, wrote right after the storm. I remember that he sang and hummed around on it, but I never knew he wrote it out until I found it in a box with some of my mother's things in it, pictures and letters and other things. He had the ballet dated – November 25, nineteen and twenty six – in which I was a victim also. "The Storm of Heber Springs" is what he called it.

After my husband and baby were killed, and most of the rest of us were very badly hurt, we had to stay in the hospital. I stayed for four months, and I guess he wrote the song then, while I was in the hospital. That spring he did sing around a little on this. I heard him hum this tune and sing some of these words. I didn't stay around to hear it particularly. I don't think I told him it bothered me, but maybe he thought it did. I know he made it up to some tune of an old song, one that I know but can't place right now.

We'd just got home from the Thanksgiving dinner that they'd given at the factory where my husband worked. And we had just returned home when the storm came.

I think the churches were all blown down . . . I believe someone told me that the churches were either unroofed or damaged. That's why some people thought that it had been God's wrath. I don't believe things like that part, but then again it's possible.

When the storm came, I was taken to the hospital and stayed there four months. I came back to my parents' home and stayed two or three months. So I was not in the town of Heber Springs. It was rebuilt by the time I went back. Grass was growing over the wreckage. Of course, you could tell where the storm had been. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to visit any of the scenes where it was – and *didn't*. I only went down to where our house was and they had built another house there. And then I turned around and went back. So I didn't do any prying, and I didn't do any asking about this song. I guess I didn't feel like talking about it.

THE STORM OF HEBER SPRINGS
NOVEMBER 25TH, 1926

'Twas on Thanksgiving Day
The town of Heber Springs
Was visited by a cyclone
And partly swept away.

The people no doubt was feasting
And never thought so soon
That by a dreadful cyclone

They'd shortly meet their doom.

They saw the storm approaching
The clouds looked low and black,
And through that little city,
It left a dreadful track.

They saw the cyclone coming,
And it's too sad to relate
The happiest of families
That had to separate.

They saw lightning flashing
They heard the thunder roar.
Such tears were in that city
Was never known before.

And as the storm came near them,
They heard the people cry:
"O Lord, have mercy on us!
Is this our time to die?"

Some people in that city
Declared it was God's wrath,
To curse the great tornado
To take them in its path.

They pointed to the churches
Where they'd refused to go
To pay to their Redeemer
The debts of love they owed.