

Death Letter Blues (Leadbelly version)

Words & Music:
Eddie "Son" House

The version by Leadbelly is often quoted as the original. It apparently isn't, but draws heavily on Son House's version.

Yes she wrote me a letter, what do you reckon it read?
Yes she wrote me a letter, what do you reckon it read?
"Come home sweet papa, now that baby dead."

(narrative)

He goes to the graveyard, he goes back home.
He goes to his friend when he got that letter.
He goes to the depot and he catch the longest train he's seen.
And he didn't stop at no short stops.
He read something got it in the hand.
And when he got home he went and told his mama:

(sung)

"Yes, I went to the depot; caught the train that blowing.
I went to the depot caught a train that blowing.
When he walked in Lord, she was long laid down."

(narrative)

His mama met him at the doorstep.
Papa ran to the bedside and told his daughter
And his daughter-in-law goodbye.

(sung)

My mama's dead, papa's dead, goodbye.
My mama's dead early, papa's dead, goodbye.
Poor boy couldn't do nothing, but hang your head and cry.

(narrative)

He went to the bedside and looked down at his baby's face.
She didn't know him from nobody else because it's too late.
When he looked down in her face, here's what he said to his mama:

(sung)

"Yes, I went to the bedroom, looked down in her face.
Yes, I went to the bedroom, looked down in her face.
Lord, I love you pretty mama, just can't take your place."