

Goodnight, Irene

Attributed to Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter (1888-1949)

CHORUS G D7 D7 G

I - rene, good night, I - rene, good night. Good

G C(7) D7 G

night I - rene, good night I - rene, I'll get you in my dreams. *End last time.*

VERSES G D7

1..I asked your moth - er for you,
 2..Some - times I live in the coun - try,
 3..Stop ram - bling, stop gam - bling,
 4..I love I - rene, God knows I

D7 G

She said that you was too young. I
 Some - times I live in town. Go
 do, Stop stay - ing out late at night. If I -
 Love her 'til the seas run dry.

G C(7)

wish, dear Lord, that I'd nev - er seen your face, I'm
 Some - times I take a great no - tion To
 home to your wife and fam - 'ly, Sit
 rene turns her back on me, Gon - na

D7 G

sor - ry you ev - er was born.
 jump in the riv - er and drown.
 down by your fire - side bright.
 take mor - phine and die.

Huddie William "Lead Belly" Ledbetter performed this as early as 1908, but by the 1930s it was his signature song self-accompanied with a 12-string guitar. (He never claimed to have written it; he learned it from an uncle, and evidence suggests connections to many of the "Irene" songs common to the mid-1800s.) Musicologists John and Alan Lomax, who heard Lead Belly playing in the Louisiana State Penitentiary, recorded his performances of several songs (including this one) for the Library of Congress in 1936; these recordings received a Grammy Hall of Fame Award in 2002. Lead Belly's "Irene" was popular in the New York blues scene of the 1930s, and with the emerging "leftist" folk music audiences of the 1940s, but commercial success eluded both the song and the singer. Less than a year after Lead Belly's death in 1949, a deeply edited "Irene" (called "dehydrated" and "prettied up" in a contemporary Time Magazine article) was released by the folk group The Weavers, and their version stayed at #1 on Billboard Magazine's charts for 13 weeks. Within months, at least seven other artists (including Frank Sinatra) released similar versions to commercial success in multiple genres, and the sanitized, no-longer-folk-blues rendition of "Irene" became an enduring American folk classic. The melody, lyrics, and chords given here reflect Lead Belly's original field recordings from the 1930s.