

# Goodnight Irene

*Lead Belly*

Last Sat - u - rday night, I got mar - ried,  
 Me and my wife set - tled down Now me and my  
 wife are par - ted, I'm gon - na take an - oth  
 er stroll down town. Ir ene, good  
 ni ght, I rene, good night, Good  
 night Ir ene, Good night Ir ene, I'll see you  
 in my - dreams.

1. Last Saturday night, I got married,  
Me and my wife settled down  
Now me and my wife are parted,  
I'm gonna take another stroll downtown.

## Chorus:

Irene, goodnight, Irene, goodnight,  
Goodnight Irene, Goodnight Irene,  
I'll see you in my dreams.\*

2. Sometimes I live in the country,  
Sometimes I live in town  
Sometimes I take a great notion,  
To jump into the river and drown.
3. I love Irene, God knows I do,  
I'll love her till the seas run dry  
But if Irene should turn me down,  
I'd take the morphine and die.

*\*Lead Belly's original line was "I'll get you in my dreams"*

4. Stop rambling, stop your gambling  
Stop staying out late at night,  
Go home to your wife and your  
family  
Stay there by your fireside bright.

---

"Goodnight, Irene" or "Irene, Goodnight," is a 20th-century folk standard first recorded by Huddie 'Lead Belly' Ledbetter in 1933. Huddie William Ledbetter (January 20, 1888 – December 6, 1949) was an American folk and blues musician notable for his strong vocals, virtuosity on the twelve-string guitar, and the folk standards he introduced. He is best known as Lead Belly. Though many releases credit him as "Leadbelly", he himself wrote it as "Lead Belly", which is also the spelling on his tombstone and the spelling used by the Lead Belly Foundation. Lead Belly served time in prison between 1915 and 1925 for various offenses. In 1930 he was imprisoned again for attempted homicide for stabbing a white man in a fight. He was "discovered" there three years later during a visit by folklorists John Lomax and his son Alan Lomax. They petitioned for and obtained his release and helped him begin a performing career. The specific origins of "Irene" are unclear. Lead Belly was singing a version of the song from as early as 1908, which he claimed to have learned from his uncles Terrell and Bob. An 1892 song by Gussie L. Davis has several lyrical and structural similarities to the latter song; a copy of the sheet music is available from the Library of Congress. Some evidence suggests the 1892 song was itself based on an even earlier song which has not survived. Regardless of where he first heard it, by the 1930s Lead Belly had made the song his own, modifying the rhythm and rewriting most of the verses.

Lead Belly continued performing the song during his various prison terms, and it was while incarcerated at the Louisiana State Penitentiary that he encountered musicologists John and Alan Lomax who would go on to record hours of Lead Belly's performances. A few months prior to his release in 1934, Lead Belly recorded a number of his songs, including "Irene", for the Library of Congress.

The song was recorded by Lead Belly, The Weavers, Pete Seeger and others. The Weavers single lasted 25 weeks on the Billboard Best Seller chart in 1950, peaking at #1 for 13 weeks.

Ernest Tubbs and Red Foley had a #1 country music record with it. It also moved into the pop song repertoire and Dennis Day and Jo Stafford released versions which made the Best Seller chart.