Goodnight, Irene (a.k.a. "Irene" & "Good Night, Irene")

Words & Music: Huddie William "Leadbelly" Ledbetter & John Lomax

This was Leadbelly's signature song and, according to John & Alan Lomax, they delivered a petition for Leadbelly's release from Angola prison to Louisiana Governor O.K. Allen on the flip side of a recording of "Goodnight Irene". Notice the vast difference in the storyline in Leadbelly's own versions and what the song has become.

1. Leadbelly's original "Irene" version:

CHORUS: G D G Irene, Goodnight. Irene, Goodnight. C D G Goodnight Irene, Goodnight Irene, I kiss [gets] you in my dreams. Stop ramblin', stop gamblin', stop stayin' out late at night. Go home to your wife and family; sit down by the fireside bright. CHORUS: You caused me to weep and you caused me to moan. You caused me to leave my home. Last words I heard her say, "I want you to sing this song."

CHORUS:

I love Irene, God knows I do; love her 'til the sea run dry. And if Irene ever turns her back on me, I'm gonna take morphine and die.

CHORUS:

2. Leadbelly's "asked for your hand" version:

Asked your mother for you, she told me that you was too young. I wished to the Lord that I never seen your face. I'm sorry you ever was born.

CHORUS: G D G Irene, Goodnight. Irene, Goodnight. C D G Goodnight Irene, Goodnight Irene, I gets you in my dreams.

Stop ramblin', stop gamblin', stop stayin' out late at night. Go home to your wife and family; sit down by the fireside bright.

CHORUS:

Sometimes I lives in the country, sometimes I lives in town. Sometimes I has a great notion to jump in the river & drown.

CHORUS:

Stop ramblin' & stop gamblin', quit stayin' out late at night. Go home to your wife and family; sit down by the fireside bright.

CHORUS:

I love Irene, God knows I do; love her 'til the sea runs dry. If Irene turns her back on me, I'm gonna take morphine & die.

[no final CHORUS - this version ends on the word "die"]

3. Usual version [pick & choose which verses you prefer]:

CHORUS: G D G Irene, Goodnight. Irene, Goodnight. C D G Goodnight Irene, Goodnight Irene, I'll see you in my dreams.

Last Saturday night I got married; me and my wife settled down. Now, me & my wife have parted; I'm gonna take another stroll downtown.

CHORUS:

Some folks, they like their sugar & some folks, they like their wine. Some folks love their music and they sing it all the time.

CHORUS:

Stop ramblin', stop gamblin', stop stayin' out late at night. Go home to your wife and family & stay by the fireside bright.

CHORUS:

Sometimes I live in the country, sometimes I live in town. Sometimes I take a fool notion to jump in the river and drown.

CHORUS:

I love Irene, I swear I do; love her 'til the sea runs dry. And if Irene ever turns her back on me, I'm gonna take morphine & die.

CHORUS: