

Huddie Ledbetter Was a Helluva Man
(c) 1988 Lorre Wyatt, additional words by Pete Seeger

Huddie Ledbetter was a helluva man.
Huddie got his music from the heart of the land.
In his voice you could hear John Henry's hammering
While his hands would "buck and wing" upon the big 12-string.
Sometimes a lion, sometimes a lamb,
Huddie Ledbetter was a helluva man.

CHORUS

He's a long time gone but his songs live on.
He's a long time gone but his songs live on.
Down in Louisiana, 1888,
There was a black baby born into a white man's state;
He saw the cane and cotton stretch for miles around,
He heard his mama's voice a-singing when the sun went down.
Into a world where having dark skin was a crime,
Huddie was born and started serving his time.

CHORUS

Teenage Huddie went to Shreveport town,
There he got in trouble, was jailhouse bound.
The odds were slim that he would get out alive,
But somehow Huddle and his music survived.
He escaped just once, was put back again.
He was called Leadbelly by the rest of the men.

CHORUS

A collector, name a' Lomax, brought a record machine,
Huddle sang 'em sweet and high, he sang 'em low and mean:
For years to come, they would tell the tale
Of how Huddie Ledbetter sang his way out-a jail.
Sayin', "If I had you. Governor, like-a you got me.
I'd awake up in the morning and I'd set you free."

CHORUS

He got his farewell ticket back in '49.
He caught the Midnight Special on the Rock Island Line;
But I bet you when he wakened from his earthly dream
He was wakened by a kiss from a gal named Irene.
Now millions of people the whole world around
Are taking Huddie's hammer up and swinging it down!
Repeat first verse and chorus