

SONGS OF THE HOUSE

Volume One — Her Voice, continued

Nos. 4-6 of 15 · Two readings, one lyric · For adults 18 and over

TEN QUESTIONS

Hers · No. 4 of 15

[Intro]

Sit down. Take your shoes off.
No — sit down properly.
How was your day, my love?
No. How was your day.

[Verse 1]

Every marriage has an evening
where somebody says how was work,
and the other one says fine, love,
and they both go back to the telly and the dark.
And that's a fine way to lose ten years
in a house where nobody lies —
just two people getting comfortable
with the softness of goodbyes.
So we don't do fine in this kitchen.
We don't do never mind.
I ask you ten straight questions
and I ask them one at a time.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

And you can't hide behind a busy week.
You can't hide behind a mood.
There's no version of the day, my love,
that gets you out of good.

[Chorus]

Ten questions. Ten answers.
Look at me and say them slow.
Not the ones you think I want —
the ones you think I know.
And I'll write it in my own hand
at the end of every night,
and whatever we discover, love,
we'll have it out in the light.
Ten questions. That's the whole religion.
Everything else is show.

[Verse 2]

Question one is easy
and you always start off strong,

and somewhere around the fourth or fifth
you slow down and go long.
And I watch you working out
which answer you can bear to give,
and you always — always — pick the true one,
and that's the reason that we live.
Because a man who tells me a hard thing
at the ordinary hour of eight
will never have to tell me
something terrible too late.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

That's the whole engineering of it.
That's the quiet trick:
make the small confession cheap
and the big one never sticks.

[Chorus]

Ten questions. Ten answers.
Look at me and say them slow.
Not the ones you think I want —
the ones you think I know.
And I'll write it in my own hand
at the end of every night,
and whatever we discover, love,
we'll have it out in the light.
Ten questions. That's the whole religion.
Everything else is show.

[Verse 3]

And there's a number at the bottom
and you always know it first —
you can do the sums before I read them,
and some nights that's the worst.
Because you sit there and you count it up
while I'm still on question nine,
and you know what you've arranged for yourself
in the ordinary line.
And you never once have argued it.
Not once in all these years.
You just say the number back to me
and you let it meet your ears.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

An answer given is an answer, love.
We don't negotiate at ten.
You told me what was true at eight —
so we don't do it again.

[Chorus]

Ten questions. Ten answers.

Look at me and say them slow.
Not the ones you think I want —
the ones you think I know.
And I'll write it in my own hand
at the end of every night,
and whatever we discover, love,
we'll have it out in the light.
Ten questions. That's the whole religion.
Everything else is show.

[Verse 4]

And here's the thing they'd never guess
if they were listening at the wall:
a perfect day still gets an evening.
A perfect day gets all of it — all.
Because if the only nights I held you
were the nights that you'd gone wrong,
you'd learn to be a good performance
and you'd learn it before long.
So the best day of your life, my love,
still ends up over here.
Not a punishment for winning.
Just the shape of every year.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

That's the floor beneath the counting.
That's the part that keeps us true.
You're not answering for failure.
You're just answering to me. To you.

[Chorus]

Ten questions. Ten answers.
Look at me and say them slow.
Not the ones you think I want —
the ones you think I know.
And I'll write it in my own hand
at the end of every night,
and whatever we discover, love,
we'll have it out in the light.
Ten questions. That's the whole religion.
Everything else is show.

[Verse 5]

My friend says she and hers
haven't talked in seven years —
not fought, mind you. Just not talked.
Just two people and their chairs.
And I said, that's a shame, and meant it,
and I didn't say the rest:
that there's a notebook in my bedside drawer
with a decade in it, pressed.

Every honest night we ever had.
Every hard thing, said out loud.
There's no marriage in that whole street
that's half as well endowed.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

So sit down. Take your shoes off.
Let me get the pen and light.
Ten questions and an honest man
is a very good night.

[Chorus (final)]

Ten questions. Ten answers.
Look at me and say them slow.
Not the ones you think I want —
the ones you know I know.
And I'll write it in my own hand
at the end of every night,
and whatever we discover, love,
we'll have it out in the light.
Ten questions. That's the whole religion.
The rest of it's just show.

[Outro]

Number ten.
Looking at the whole day —
the whole day, love, not the parts you liked —
were you mine?
...
Good boy. Write it down.

COLD WATER

Hers · No. 5 of 15

[Intro]

Fridge open. Blue light on the floor.
Three cubes, no more.
You hear it before you see it —
that little knock of ice in a glass
at half past ten at night.

[Verse 1]

There's a sound in this house
that means the evening's turned.
It isn't a raised voice.
Nothing in here gets burned.
It's just water on the counter
and a small hand on the tap,
and a man who's gone completely still
in the middle of a laugh.
You know what's coming, don't you.
You always seem to know.
And you never once have moved, my love.
You just wait, and let it go.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

It isn't cruelty. Cruelty's loud.
Cruelty rushes in.
This is patient. This is measured.
This is where we begin.

[Chorus]

Cold water, love. Cold water.
Nothing in the world so plain.
It doesn't shout, it doesn't argue —
it just takes away the flame.
And I'll hold you while it does it
with my whole warm self pressed near,
so the only heat you've got in the world
is the woman standing here.
Cold below and warm above.
That's the sermon, dear.

[Verse 2]

Ten minutes on the little clock
and it always sounds too long,
and the first two are the easy ones
and the last two prove me wrong.
And I move it when it settles
because still water learns to lie —

it'll build a little warmth around you
and let the whole thing die.
So I stir it. And you feel that.
And your breath goes somewhere thin.
And I put my mouth against your ear
and say — we're not done. Begin.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

Because anyone can start a hard thing.
Anyone can dive.
It's the staying in the middle of it
that keeps a marriage alive.

[Chorus]

Cold water, love. Cold water.
Nothing in the world so plain.
It doesn't shout, it doesn't argue —
it just takes away the flame.
And I'll hold you while it does it
with my whole warm self pressed near,
so the only heat you've got in the world
is the woman standing here.
Cold below and warm above.
That's the sermon, dear.

[Verse 3]

And near the end I do a thing
you've never once complained about:
I take a little sea in a little glass
and I pour the whole thing out.
Just a half a spoon of something old
dissolved and made polite —
and it stings you like a blessing
for a second in the night.
That's the sea, my love. That's all it is.
The oldest thing there is.
Poured out over what I own
by the hand that says it's his — and mine.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

I do it right or not at all.
That's the law in here.
I've never once been careless
with a thing I hold this dear.

[Chorus]

Cold water, love. Cold water.
Nothing in the world so plain.
It doesn't shout, it doesn't argue —
it just takes away the flame.
And I'll hold you while it does it

with my whole warm self pressed near,
so the only heat you've got in the world
is the woman standing here.
Cold below and warm above.
That's the sermon, dear.

[Verse 4]

Then the little clock goes off
and you don't move an inch.
And oh, that's my favourite second
of the whole entire month.
Because the clock has said its piece, my love —
the clock has said time's through.
And a clock has never owned a thing
in this house. Least of all you.
So you sit there in the cold
with your eyes fixed on my face,
and you wait for one small word from me.
And I take my time. And take my time.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

That's the whole of it, right there.
That's the lesson, plain and thin:
the bell says when the time is up.
I say when you come in.

[Chorus]

Cold water, love. Cold water.
Nothing in the world so plain.
It doesn't shout, it doesn't argue —
it just takes away the flame.
And I'll hold you while it does it
with my whole warm self pressed near,
so the only heat you've got in the world
is the woman standing here.
Cold below and warm above.
That's the sermon, dear.

[Verse 5]

And after — always after —
there's a towel and there's my hands,
and I never rush the warming back
and you never once demand.
You let it come the slow way,
you let it ache and turn,
because everything worth having in this life
has a little bit of burn.
And you lie there getting warmer
and you laugh, half asleep, and say:
you're the coldest woman in England.
And I say: only on a Sunday.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

So keep the ice tray full, my love.
Keep the small tub near.
There's nothing in this house I keep
as carefully as here.

[Chorus (final)]

Cold water, love. Cold water.
Nothing in the world so plain.
It never shouts, it never argues —
it just takes away the flame.
And I held you while it did it
with my whole warm self pressed near,
so the only heat you had in the world
was the woman standing here.
Cold below and warm above.
That was the sermon, dear.

[Outro]

Out you come.
Not because the bell said.
Because I said.
Now — come here and get warm.
Slowly, love. Slowly.
You've earned the long way back.

A SMALL COUNTRY

Hers · No. 6 of 15

[Intro]

Two of us. One address.
No flag, no anthem, no army.
Population: two.
And I have never lost an election
because we've never held one.

[Verse 1]

We're not a couple, we're a country,
and the border's the front door,
and everything inside these walls
runs by a private law.
There's a constitution on the wall upstairs
in a frame nobody reads —
your mother thinks it's poetry,
my sister thinks it's deeds.
And every year we take it down
and read the whole thing through,
and every year we sign it back,
and every year it's true.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

Most people never write it down.
Most people guess and hope.
And that's how good men lose good women
at the far end of the rope.

[Chorus]

I run a small country, love,
and you're the whole economy.
You bring it in, I make it work —
that's the treaty, you and me.
I set the budget, keep the books,
and hold the standard high.
You'd be a rich man without me, darling.
You'd just be a poorer guy.
Small country. Two flags.
One hand on the wheel.

[Verse 2]

You earn it and you hand it over
and you never even flinch,
and I've watched grown men in restaurants
die a little at an inch.
But you put the card down like a king
and you never look my way,

and the table sees a generous man
with a lot of things to say.
And nobody at that table
and nobody in this town
knows the budget for that dinner
got written by me, sitting down.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

Earning isn't ruling, love.
The general doesn't hold the purse.
You'd think that was a small thing.
It's the difference. It's the verse.

[Chorus]

I run a small country, love,
and you're the whole economy.
You bring it in, I make it work —
that's the treaty, you and me.
I set the budget, keep the books,
and hold the standard high.
You'd be a rich man without me, darling.
You'd just be a poorer guy.
Small country. Two flags.
One hand on the wheel.

[Verse 3]

And there's a law in my small country
that I wrote myself, in ink,
and it's the strictest one we've got
and it's not the one you'd think.
It says the door is never locked.
It says the road stays clear.
It says he keeps his own two feet
and everything he'd need to disappear.
Money in your name. Papers in your hand.
A life you could walk into tonight.
I built the exit myself, my love,
and I keep it lit.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

Because a man who couldn't leave me
never chose to stay.
And I don't want a prisoner.
I want the one who stayed.

[Chorus]

I run a small country, love,
and you're the whole economy.
You bring it in, I make it work —
that's the treaty, you and me.
I set the budget, keep the books,

and hold the standard high.
You could walk out any morning, darling.
That's the reason that you don't. That's why.
Small country. Two flags.
One hand on the wheel.

[Verse 4]

And when the lean year came around
and the numbers all went thin,
we didn't lose a single law —
we just tightened up within.
The evening cost us nothing.
The standard cost us less.
You can't repossess a covenant
and they never came to press.
So we sat down with the books face-up
and we named the whole hard thing,
and we came out the other side of it
with everything but the ring.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

That's a country, love. Not a mood.
That's a thing you can stand in.
Anyone can rule a good year.
The bad one's where you win.

[Chorus]

I run a small country, love,
and you're the whole economy.
You bring it in, I make it work —
that's the treaty, you and me.
I set the budget, keep the books,
and hold the standard high.
You'd be a rich man without me, darling.
You'd just be a poorer guy.
Small country. Two flags.
One hand on the wheel.

[Verse 5]

And one day one of us goes first
and the country closes down,
and the papers come off that bedroom wall
and nobody's found out.
They'll say, weren't they devoted,
weren't they something to behold —
and they'll never know a single law
and they'll never break the mould.
And that's the way I want it, love.
Let the whole street wonder how.
Some marriages are monuments.
Ours is just a vow.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

So pass the salt. Pass the ordinary evening.
Pass the small talk and the tea.
There's a country under this table
and it's only you and me.

[Chorus (final)]

I run a small country, love,
and you're the whole economy.
You brought it in, I made it work —
that was the treaty, you and me.
I set the budget, kept the books,
and held the standard high.
You could have walked out any morning, darling.
Fifty years. You never did. That's why.
Small country. Two flags.
One hand on the wheel.

[Outro]

Population: two.
No flag, no anthem, no army.
Just a wall,
and a frame,
and a very long list of dates.
Come to bed, husband.
The country closes at eleven.