

SONGS OF THE HOUSE

Volume Four — His Voice, continued

Nos. 10-12 of 15 · Two readings, one lyric · For adults 18 and over

START ME AGAIN

His · No. 10 of 15

[Intro]

It didn't break.
That's what I need you to hear first.
Nothing broke.
It just went quiet.
Six months of quiet.
So — start me again.

[Verse 1]

There wasn't a fight. There wasn't a night
where either of us slammed a door.
There was just a February,
and then there was no more.
Your mother's operation,
my quarter from hell,
the boiler, and the eldest,
and a hundred things as well.
And the pages stayed up on the wall
and the pen went in the drawer,
and neither of us said a word about it.
That's the part that's sore.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

Nobody warns you about drift.
They warn you about wrong.
But it's never the disaster, love —
it's the quiet going long.

[Chorus]

So start me again. Don't start me over.
Don't hand me back day one.
The signatures are still up on that wall
and neither of us is done.
I don't need to be convinced of you.
I don't need to be sold.
I just need your hand back on me
and the evening back on hold.
Start me again. I'm still here.
I never left. I just went cold.

[Verse 2]

Don't make me read the whole thing through
like a stranger at the gate.
I know what's in those pages,
I helped you write them straight.
Just take one paragraph of yours
and let me take one of mine,
and say the words into this room again
and we'll both be fine.
It was never gone. It was never lost.
It just stopped being said.
Say it, love. Say it out loud.
Put it back in my head.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

Two paragraphs. That's all it takes.
That's all it's ever been.
The whole of it's still standing —
it's just waiting to be seen.

[Chorus]

So start me again. Don't start me over.
Don't hand me back day one.
The signatures are still up on that wall
and neither of us is done.
I don't need to be convinced of you.
I don't need to be sold.
I just need your hand back on me
and the evening back on hold.
Start me again. I'm still here.
I never left. I just went cold.

[Verse 3]

And do it the old way. The plain way.
Don't be gentle out of guilt.
The whole point of this bloody house
is the way the thing was built.
Stand me up and look at me
the way you did at first —
the once around, the slow inspection,
the best part and the worst.
You'll find me out of practice.
You'll find me heavier. Late.
Look anyway. Look properly.
I've been waiting at this gate.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

Because I can't restart myself.
That's the entire design.
You hold the standard, love —
it was never mine.

[Chorus]

So start me again. Don't start me over.
Don't hand me back day one.
The signatures are still up on that wall
and neither of us is done.
I don't need to be convinced of you.
I don't need to be sold.
I just need your hand back on me
and the evening back on hold.
Start me again. I'm still here.
I never left. I just went cold.

[Verse 4]

And then it comes in like it always did —
light at first, and low,
and my shoulders drop about an inch
and the whole six months let go.
And somewhere in the middle of it
the room changes key,
and there I am. There I bloody am.
There's the man you married. Me.
Not fixed. Not cured. Not different.
Just switched back on and warm.
God, I'd forgotten what I sound like
underneath the storm.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

That's not a punishment for drifting.
Nobody's paying here.
That's just the sound of something starting
in a house that lost a year.

[Chorus]

So start me again. Don't start me over.
Don't hand me back day one.
The signatures are still up on that wall
and neither of us is done.
I don't need to be convinced of you.
I don't need to be sold.
I just need your hand back on me
and the evening back on hold.
Start me again. I'm still here.
I never left. I just went cold.

[Verse 5]

We'll do this again, you know.
Not the last time. Not by half.
There'll be another February
and another quiet stretch to laugh
about in ten years' time
when we can't recall the cause.

And that's alright. That's allowed.
There's no shame in the pause.
Just don't let it go the whole way, love.
Don't let it turn to fine.
Notice it. And fetch the flogger.
And put your hand back on what's yours. Mine.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

And in the morning, do the ledger.
Ordinary hour. Ordinary pen.
That's how I'll know it's really back —
not tonight. Breakfast. Then.

[Chorus (final)]

So you started me again. You didn't start me over.
You never handed back day one.
The signatures were still up on that wall
and neither of us was done.
You didn't have to convince me.
You didn't have to sell.
You just put your hand back on me
and the whole thing rang like a bell.
Started again. Still here.
Never left. Just cold.

[Outro]

Same house. Same wall. Same names on it.
Same woman, six months older.
Same man, considerably improved.
Nothing broke.
Told you.
...Do it again next February.

THE CROWN

His · No. 11 of 15

[Intro]

Ten years I've knelt in this room.
Ten years, give or take an evening.
And then she took the papers off the wall
and put her hands down at her sides
and said: tonight, you first.

[Verse 1]

I have never in my life
been so completely at a loss
as the night my wife stood up in front of me
and handed me across.
She said, I govern nothing here tonight.
She said, you owe me none.
And I stood there like a schoolboy
with my whole world coming undone.
Because I'd built a decade knowing
exactly where I sit —
and she'd just gone and moved the chair
and asked me what I'd make of it.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

And there's no page that tells you how
to be handed back your hands.
You just breathe. And you look at her.
And you take what a king takes when he stands.

[Chorus]

She calls me her king. She's always called me that.
Ten years I thought it was a joke.
It isn't. It never was.
It's the truest thing she's spoke.
Because she'd have nothing to hold, my love,
if I'd never put it down.
The whole of her authority
was mine before it was her crown.
So once in ten years — only once —
she gives it back to me.
And I hold it for ten minutes.
And then I hand it back. Gladly.

[Verse 2]

And she stood there and she gave herself
the way I've given for a decade —
everything on offer,
nothing held, nothing weighed.

And I've never seen her braver.
Not the wedding. Not the birth.
Not the year the money vanished.
Nothing on this earth.
Because it's easy to be sovereign.
God, it's easy to command.
It's a different kind of woman altogether
who'll lie down in her own hand.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

That's when I understood the thing
I'd never quite believed:
she's not above this. She's inside it.
She's been in it since we agreed.

[Chorus]

She calls me her king. She's always called me that.
Ten years I thought it was a joke.
It isn't. It never was.
It's the truest thing she's spoke.
Because she'd have nothing to hold, my love,
if I'd never put it down.
The whole of her authority
was mine before it was her crown.
So once in ten years — only once —
she gives it back to me.
And I hold it for ten minutes.
And then I hand it back. Gladly.

[Verse 3]

And she set a clock down on the side
the way she's done a hundred times,
and for the first time in our whole long life
the ten minutes were mine.
And I'm not going to tell you what I did.
That's not a thing for songs.
I'll only say I took my time
and I took it slow, and long.
And she made every sound she's ever made
and not one word of steer,
and the woman who has run my life
just let me hold her. Here.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

And the whole time — the whole ten minutes —
I was locked and I was hers.
That's the joke, and it's a good one:
the king in her own irons. Yes, sir.

[Chorus]

She calls me her king. She's always called me that.

Ten years I thought it was a joke.
It isn't. It never was.
It's the truest thing she's spoke.
Because she'd have nothing to hold, my love,
if I'd never put it down.
The whole of her authority
was mine before it was her crown.
So once in ten years — only once —
she gives it back to me.
And I hold it for ten minutes.
And then I hand it back. Gladly.

[Verse 4]

And when the little bell went off
my hands came off her. Straight.
Nobody told me to. Nobody had to.
Ten years teaches you the weight.
And she got up, and she took her time,
and she drank a glass of water,
and she looked at me across that room
like a woman looks at an altar.
And then she sat down in the chair.
And the whole world changed hands.
And I went over her lap at fifty-three
like a boy who understands.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

And it hurt more than it ever has.
Not the hand. The knowing.
I'd just held everything she is —
and I gave it back. That's the going.

[Chorus]

She calls me her king. She's always called me that.
Ten years I thought it was a joke.
It isn't. It never was.
It's the truest thing she's spoke.
Because she'd have nothing to hold, my love,
if I'd never put it down.
The whole of her authority
was mine before it was her crown.
So once in ten years — only once —
she gives it back to me.
And I hold it for ten minutes.
And then I hand it back. Gladly.

[Verse 5]

There's men who'd take that decade night
and never give it back.
There's men who'd feel the weight of it
and go the other tack.

And I understand them, honestly.
It's a heady sort of hour.
But I've had that. I've had power.
I ran a firm. It's sour.
Give me the woman with the clock instead.
Give me the ledger and the pen.
I held the crown for ten whole minutes
and I couldn't wait to hand it back again.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

Because the crown was never the good part.
The crowning was. The choosing.
Any fool can wear a thing.
It takes a man to keep on losing.

[Chorus (final)]

She calls me her king. She's always called me that.
Ten years I thought it was a joke.
It isn't. It never was.
It's the truest thing she's spoke.
Because she'd have nothing to hold, my love,
if I'd never put it down.
The whole of her authority
was mine before it was her crown.
So once in ten years — only once —
she gives it back to me.
And I hold it for ten minutes.
And I hand it back. Gladly. Gladly.

[Outro]

Same time in ten years, love.
I'll be sixty-three.
You'll still call me king.
I'll still hand it back.
That's the deal.
That was always the deal.

WHAT SHE MADE OF ME

His · No. 12 of 15

[Intro]

My son shook a man's hand yesterday
and looked him in the eye,
and stood the way I stand,
and said the thing I'd say.
And I had to go and sit in the car for a minute.

[Verse 1]

I was a decent sort of man
when she got hold of me:
a bit late, a bit loose,
a bit too easily free.
I said yes to things I didn't want
and no to things I did,
and I called that being easy-going
and I hid the way I hid.
And she never once said fix yourself.
She never said you're less.
She just held a line up somewhere
and said: here. Reach. Then rest.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

And I've reached at it for twenty years
and I've missed a hundred times,
and not one of them was ever held
against me. Not one line.

[Chorus]

Look at what she made of me.
Go on — look. I'll wait.
The man who's never late for anything.
The man they call when it's late.
The man his daughter rings at midnight.
The man his firm can't lose.
There's a woman in a kitchen somewhere
who decided I'd be who I choose.
Look at what she made of me.
And I gave her the clay.

[Verse 2]

It's not that she demanded much.
It's that she never let it slide.
Not a single lazy afternoon
went quietly to hide.
And that sounds hard when you say it flat
to a stranger in a bar.

It isn't. It's the opposite.
It's knowing where you are.
Because a man who's never measured
never knows if he's alright,
and so he lies awake at fifty
doing sums in the night.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

I've never done that. Not one night.
I've always known my score.
There's a peace in being answerable
that nobody warns you's there. Or more.

[Chorus]

Look at what she made of me.
Go on — look. I'll wait.
The man who's never late for anything.
The man they call when it's late.
The man his daughter rings at midnight.
The man his firm can't lose.
There's a woman in a kitchen somewhere
who decided I'd be who I choose.
Look at what she made of me.
And I gave her the clay.

[Verse 3]

The children never knew a thing.
That was the whole design.
They just grew up inside a house
where nobody crossed a line.
Where the answer was the answer
and the promise was the deed,
and the two of us were something
that they didn't have to read.
My daughter picks her people well.
My son does what he says.
They think that's just how people are.
God — let them think that. Yes.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

That's the inheritance right there.
Not the house. Not the will.
Two kids who think devotion's ordinary
because they watched it. Still.

[Chorus]

Look at what she made of me.
Go on — look. I'll wait.
The man who's never late for anything.
The man they call when it's late.
The man his daughter rings at midnight.

The man his firm can't lose.
There's a woman in a kitchen somewhere
who decided I'd be who I choose.
Look at what she made of me.
And I gave her the clay.

[Verse 4]

And I know what it cost her.
That's the part I mostly hide.
Every single evening,
whether or not she'd anything inside.
Tired. Ill. Grieving. Forty weeks pregnant.
Still the questions. Still the pen.
Do you know how hard it is
to be the standard, again and again?
I bent. That's easy. Bending's easy.
Anyone can go down.
She had to stand up every night
and hold the whole damn crown.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

So don't you ever let them tell you
that she got the better end.
I gave a body. She gave a lifetime
of not being allowed to bend.

[Chorus]

Look at what she made of me.
Go on — look. I'll wait.
The man who's never late for anything.
The man they call when it's late.
The man his daughter rings at midnight.
The man his firm can't lose.
There's a woman in a kitchen somewhere
who decided I'd be who I choose.
Look at what she made of me.
And I gave her the clay.

[Verse 5]

One of us will go first
and the other one will stand
at a graveside in the wrong coat
with a folded piece of card in hand.
And whatever's on those pages
will be ash by then, or gone.
And it won't matter in the slightest,
because the building's standing on.
It's in a man who shakes hands properly.
It's in two grown kids who don't lie.
You can burn the drawings, love.
Look up. That's why.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

So while we've got the both of us,
and the wall, and the ordinary night —
ask me the ten questions, love.
I'd like to get them right.

[Chorus (final)]

Look at what she made of me.
Go on — look. I'll wait.
The man who was never late for anything.
The man they called when it was late.
The man his daughter rang at midnight.
The man his firm couldn't lose.
There was a woman in a kitchen once
who decided I'd be who I choose.
Look at what she made of me.
And I gave her the clay. Gladly.
I gave her the clay.

[Outro]

He shook a man's hand yesterday
and looked him in the eye.
Stood the way I stand.
Said the thing I'd say.
...
You did that, love.
Through me. But you did that.