

SONGS OF THE HOUSE

Volume Five — Both Voices

Nos. 13-15 of 15 · Two readings, one lyric · For adults 18 and over

TRADE YOU

Duet · No. 13 of 15

[Intro]

SHE: Put the papers down a minute.

HE: They're down.

SHE: Now put your hands down too.

HE: ...They're down.

SHE: Good. Now we're just two people in a room.

HE: God help us both.

[Verse 1]

SHE: Ten years I've had the whole of you —
the ledger and the pen,
the standard and the evening
and the saying-when.

HE: And ten years I've been grateful for it,
which they'd never understand,
'cause they think a man who bends
is a man who lost his hand.

SHE: And tonight I'm going to fix
a thing that's crept in on the sly —

HE: Oh, here we go.

SHE: Don't you 'here we go' me.

BOTH: Ten years is a long time to forget the why.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

SHE: You've knelt so long you've half forgot
there's a reason that you can.

HE: And you've stood so long you've half forgot
you married a whole man.

BOTH: So let's remind each other.

BOTH: Ten minutes. Then we're through.

[Chorus]

BOTH: I'll trade you. I'll trade you.

SHE: Everything I hold for everything you do.

HE: Everything I gave you for one hour of it back.

BOTH: And at the end of it we hand it over,

BOTH: and we take up the slack.

SHE: You'll be king for ten whole minutes.

HE: You'll be mine for ten whole years.

BOTH: Same house. Same wall. Same vow.

BOTH: Trade you, dear.

[Verse 2]

HE: You're going to have to say it plain,
because I won't presume.
Twenty years of not assuming
doesn't leave the room.

SHE: Then I'll say it plain: for ten small minutes
I'm not in charge of me.

HE: ...Say it again.

SHE: You heard.

HE: I'd like to hear it. Properly.

SHE: For ten minutes, husband, I'm not steering.
Not a word, not a hand, not a plan.

BOTH: And that's the bravest thing in this whole house —

BOTH: braver than the bending, man.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

HE: And I'll still be wearing yours.

SHE: You will. That's rather the joke.

HE: A king in his wife's own irons.

SHE: The best line I ever spoke.

[Chorus]

BOTH: I'll trade you. I'll trade you.

SHE: Everything I hold for everything you do.

HE: Everything I gave you for one hour of it back.

BOTH: And at the end of it we hand it over,

BOTH: and we take up the slack.

SHE: You'll be king for ten whole minutes.

HE: You'll be mine for ten whole years.

BOTH: Same house. Same wall. Same vow.

BOTH: Trade you, dear.

[Verse 3]

SHE: And don't be careful with me.

HE: I've never once been rough.

SHE: I know. That's why I'm asking.

HE: ...Alright. That's enough.

SHE: Ten minutes on the little clock,
the same clock, same as yours,

HE: And it'll sound before I'm ready.

SHE: They always do, of course.

HE: And I'll take my hands off you the second that it goes.

SHE: I know you will.

HE: Not because you'd make me.

BOTH: Because after ten years, a good man knows.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

SHE: That's the whole thing, right there.

HE: That's the whole thing, love.

BOTH: Not the taking. The stopping.

BOTH: Not the getting. The giving up.

[Chorus]

BOTH: I'll trade you. I'll trade you.

SHE: Everything I hold for everything you do.

HE: Everything I gave you for one hour of it back.

BOTH: And at the end of it we hand it over,

BOTH: and we take up the slack.

SHE: You'll be king for ten whole minutes.

HE: You'll be mine for ten whole years.

BOTH: Same house. Same wall. Same vow.

BOTH: Trade you, dear.

[Verse 4]

HE: So the bell's gone and my hands are off
and you're taking your own time,

SHE: Water first. Then breathing.

HE: Then that look. That's the sign.

SHE: Sit down, husband.

HE: Yes, love.

SHE: Over. There. Like that.

HE: Ten years and one small hour
and we're right back where we sat.

SHE: Does it hurt more tonight?

HE: ...Yes.

SHE: Why?

HE: Because I know now what I'm handing back.

SHE: Good. That's the whole design.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

BOTH: A vow you make in ignorance

BOTH: is a hope with a nice hat on.

BOTH: A vow you make with all the facts

BOTH: is a fact. And it's a long one.

[Chorus]

BOTH: I'll trade you. I'll trade you.

SHE: Everything I hold for everything you do.

HE: Everything I gave you for one hour of it back.

BOTH: And at the end of it we hand it over,

BOTH: and we take up the slack.
SHE: You'll be king for ten whole minutes.
HE: You'll be mine for ten whole years.
BOTH: Same house. Same wall. Same vow.
BOTH: Trade you, dear.

[Verse 5]

HE: Same time in ten years, then?
SHE: Same time. I'll be sixty-two.
HE: You'll still be the most frightening woman in England.
SHE: And you'll still walk across the room.
HE: Every time.
SHE: Every time. I know.
BOTH: And the wall will have another date on it,
BOTH: and the column will have grown.
HE: And nobody will ever know a thing.
SHE: Not a soul. Not one.
BOTH: Two people and a private country
BOTH: and a decade nearly done.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

SHE: Papers back up?
HE: Papers back up.
SHE: Hands?
HE: Yours.
BOTH: Right. Where were we.

[Chorus (final)]

BOTH: We traded. We traded.
SHE: Everything I hold for everything you do.
HE: Everything I gave her — and she gave it back, and I gave it back too.
BOTH: And at the end of it we handed over,
BOTH: and we took up the slack.
SHE: You were king for ten whole minutes.
HE: And I'm yours for ten more years.
BOTH: Same house. Same wall. Same vow.
BOTH: Traded, dear.

[Outro]

HE: Ten minutes.
SHE: Ten years.
HE: Seems uneven.
SHE: It's exactly even, love. You just can't see the scale.
HE: ...No. No, I can.
BOTH: Goodnight.

ASK ME AGAIN

Duet · No. 14 of 15

[Intro]

SHE: Knowing everything you know now —

HE: Go on. Ask it properly.

SHE: Knowing all of it. The cost. The years.

SHE: Do you put yourself back in my hands?

HE: ...Ask me the whole thing. Don't shorten it.

SHE: Do you choose this. Again. Tonight.

[Verse 1]

HE: There's a version of this evening
where I say yes too fast,
where I give the answer that I gave at thirty
and pretend the years don't pass.

SHE: And I'd know. I'd always know.

HE: You would. You always do.

SHE: A quick yes is a habit, love.

BOTH: And I didn't marry a habit. I married you.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

SHE: So take the whole night if you want it.

HE: I might. I've earned the room.

BOTH: Because a question that can only go one way

BOTH: was never a question. It was a tune.

[Chorus]

BOTH: So ask me again. Ask me properly.

BOTH: Ask me like the answer isn't known.

SHE: Because there's three ways this can go tonight —

HE: And two of them are home.

SHE: Yes. Or yes with something changed.

HE: Or no — and no is real.

BOTH: And the only reason yes means anything

BOTH: is that no is on the table. Still.

BOTH: So ask me again. And mean the asking.

BOTH: And I'll mean what I say.

[Verse 2]

SHE: And now you ask me. Same words. Same weight.

HE: Knowing everything it's cost you —
the evenings when you'd nothing left,
the standing when you'd lost you —
do you take me back? Do you want this?
Do you want to hold the line?

SHE: ...

HE: Take your time.

SHE: I'm taking it.

HE: Take all of it. It's fine.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

HE: Because everyone assumes she wants it.

HE: Everyone assumes she's fine.

HE: Twenty years of people asking me

HE: and no one asking mine.

[Chorus]

BOTH: So ask me again. Ask me properly.

BOTH: Ask me like the answer isn't known.

SHE: Because there's three ways this can go tonight —

HE: And two of them are home.

SHE: Yes. Or yes with something changed.

HE: Or no — and no is real.

BOTH: And the only reason yes means anything

BOTH: is that no is on the table. Still.

BOTH: So ask me again. And mean the asking.

BOTH: And I'll mean what I say.

[Verse 3]

SHE: There's a thing I've never said out loud
in twenty years of this:
some nights I've been so tired of it
I could have let it miss.

HE: I know.

SHE: You know?

HE: Of course I know. I watch you too.

SHE: And you never said.

HE: It wasn't mine to say.

It was yours to bring. And now you have.

BOTH: And that's the whole point of tonight —

BOTH: the hard thing, said, and stayed.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

SHE: So here's my answer, and it's yes —

SHE: but yes with something changed.

HE: Then say the change and write it down

HE: before a thing gets signed. Arranged.

[Chorus]

BOTH: So ask me again. Ask me properly.

BOTH: Ask me like the answer isn't known.

SHE: Because there's three ways this can go tonight —

HE: And two of them are home.
SHE: Yes. Or yes with something changed.
HE: Or no — and no is real.
BOTH: And the only reason yes means anything
BOTH: is that no is on the table. Still.
BOTH: So ask me again. And mean the asking.
BOTH: And I'll mean what I say.

[Verse 4]

HE: And if you'd said no tonight —
SHE: Don't.
HE: No, let me. I want it said.
 If you'd said no tonight, my love,
 I'd have held your hand instead.
 And we'd have walked to the other door
 the way the pages say:
 sober, slow, and side by side,
 and never in a rage.
SHE: And we'd still have been a marriage.
HE: We'd still have been a pair.
BOTH: That's what makes it safe to ask at all.
BOTH: That's what makes it fair.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

BOTH: Because I'd rather be chosen once
BOTH: than kept a hundred years.
BOTH: And I'd rather hear a hard no
BOTH: than a yes that isn't there.

[Chorus]

BOTH: So ask me again. Ask me properly.
BOTH: Ask me like the answer isn't known.
SHE: Because there's three ways this can go tonight —
HE: And two of them are home.
SHE: Yes. Or yes with something changed.
HE: Or no — and no is real.
BOTH: And the only reason yes means anything
BOTH: is that no is on the table. Still.
BOTH: So ask me again. And mean the asking.
BOTH: And I'll mean what I say.

[Verse 5]

SHE: Then say it. Out loud. Your own mouth.
HE: With open eyes, a second time.
 By my choice, by my words, by my actions —
 I bend to one woman. Mine.
SHE: And with open eyes I take you back

into these hands, knowing what they hold.
You're mine to govern, mine to keep,

HE: — and mine to grow old.

BOTH: And there's a pen, and there's a wall,

BOTH: and there's a column of dates that grew.

BOTH: And under my first name at thirty

BOTH: there's my name again. At fifty-two.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

SHE: Ask me again in ten years.

HE: I will. On the day.

SHE: And ask it like you don't know the answer.

HE: I never do. That's why I stay.

[Chorus (final)]

BOTH: So you asked me again. You asked me properly.

BOTH: You asked me like the answer wasn't known.

SHE: And there were three ways it could go tonight —

HE: And two of them were home.

SHE: And I said yes. With something changed.

HE: And I said yes as well.

BOTH: And the reason that it meant a thing

BOTH: is that no was on the table. Still.

BOTH: Ask me again. Ask me always.

BOTH: And I'll mean what I say.

[Outro]

SHE: Pen.

HE: Here.

SHE: You first. You always sign first.

HE: I know.

SHE: Why?

HE: Because it's mine to give before it's yours to hold.

SHE: ...Good. Sign.

UNTIL

Duet · No. 15 of 15 · Finale

[Intro]

BOTH: Two of us. One address.

SHE: A frame on a bedroom wall.

HE: A column of dates that nobody reads.

BOTH: And a whole life underneath it all.

[Verse 1]

HE: They'll say we were devoted.

SHE: They'll say we were a pair.

HE: They'll say they never heard us argue
and they'd honestly be right there.

SHE: And they'll never know a single word
of anything we made.

HE: Not the questions. Not the evenings.

BOTH: Not one page. Not one blade.

SHE: And that's exactly how I want it.

HE: That's exactly how it's built.

BOTH: Some love goes up in monuments.

BOTH: Ours went up in silt.

[Pre-Chorus 1]

SHE: Layer on layer on layer.

HE: Ordinary night on night.

BOTH: Nothing anybody would photograph.

BOTH: Everything that held us tight.

[Chorus]

BOTH: Until. That's the whole word.

BOTH: Until — and not a day before.

SHE: Not until you're tired of me,

HE: Not until it's hard or poor,

BOTH: Not until we're old or ill

BOTH: or something takes the shine.

BOTH: Until death. That's the only until.

SHE: You're mine.

HE: I'm yours.

BOTH: Until.

[Verse 2]

SHE: We built a thing that can survive us
being human. That's the trick.

HE: A framework for the average Tuesday,

not the day the world gets sick.

SHE: Because anyone can love in an emergency.

HE: Anyone can rise.

BOTH: It's the ninety-nine ordinary evenings

BOTH: where a marriage lives or dies.

SHE: So we made the ordinary evening
into something that gets said.

HE: A question and an answer

BOTH: and a hand, and then a bed.

[Pre-Chorus 2]

HE: No guessing. Not one night of it.

SHE: Not one hour of not knowing.

BOTH: We killed the fog on the first evening

BOTH: and we've never let it grow in.

[Chorus]

BOTH: Until. That's the whole word.

BOTH: Until — and not a day before.

SHE: Not until you're tired of me,

HE: Not until it's hard or poor,

BOTH: Not until we're old or ill

BOTH: or something takes the shine.

BOTH: Until death. That's the only until.

SHE: You're mine.

HE: I'm yours.

BOTH: Until.

[Verse 3]

HE: And there'll be a February
where the whole thing goes to sleep.

SHE: There'll be a year we hardly touch it
and a silence we don't keep.

HE: And we won't call that a failure.

SHE: We'll call that being alive.

BOTH: And one of us will notice it

BOTH: and reach across and strike.

HE: And it'll start again like nothing.

SHE: Light and low and slow.

BOTH: And we'll wonder why we ever worried

BOTH: and we'll let the whole thing go.

[Pre-Chorus 3]

SHE: Never from the beginning.

HE: Never back to page one.

BOTH: The names are still up on that wall —

BOTH: there's nothing to be undone.

[Chorus]

BOTH: Until. That's the whole word.

BOTH: Until — and not a day before.

SHE: Not until you're tired of me,

HE: Not until it's hard or poor,

BOTH: Not until we're old or ill

BOTH: or something takes the shine.

BOTH: Until death. That's the only until.

SHE: You're mine.

HE: I'm yours.

BOTH: Until.

[Verse 4]

SHE: And when the bodies change on us —

HE: And they will. They're doing it now.

SHE: We'll change the pages, not the vow.

HE: Same wall. Softer bough.

SHE: And it'll mean more at seventy
than it ever meant at thirty-three,

HE: Because a symbol chosen freely, old,

BOTH: outweighs whatever we were then. Easily.

SHE: Give me your hand in a smaller room.

HE: Give me a chair and a shorter night.

BOTH: We'll still be the strangest, luckiest pair

BOTH: on that whole street. Alright.

[Pre-Chorus 4]

HE: And whoever goes first —

SHE: Don't.

HE: Love, we have to. Once.

SHE: ...Alright. Once.

[Chorus]

BOTH: Until. That's the whole word.

BOTH: Until — and not a day before.

SHE: Not until you're tired of me,

HE: Not until it's hard or poor,

BOTH: Not until we're old or ill

BOTH: or something takes the shine.

BOTH: Until death. That's the only until.

SHE: You're mine.

HE: I'm yours.

BOTH: Until.

[Verse 5]

HE: Whoever's left, burn the pages.
SHE: Or keep them. Then burn them at the end.
HE: And owe the other nothing after.
SHE: Not a standard. Not a pen.
BOTH: The vow was made to a living person
BOTH: and it's finished at the stone.
HE: Whatever we made of one another
SHE: is walking round in other people. Grown.
HE: It's in a boy who shakes hands properly.
SHE: It's in a girl who won't be small.
BOTH: Burn the drawings, love.
BOTH: Look up. The building's standing tall.

[Pre-Chorus 5]

SHE: One more evening then.
HE: One more ordinary night.
SHE: Ten questions?
HE: Ten questions.
BOTH: And the lamp. And then the light.

[Chorus (final)]

BOTH: Until. That's the whole word.
BOTH: Until — and not a day before.
SHE: Not until you were tired of me,
HE: Not until it got hard or poor,
BOTH: Not until we were old or ill
BOTH: or something took the shine.
BOTH: Until death. It was the only until.
SHE: You were mine.
HE: I was yours.
SHE: You're mine.
HE: I'm yours.
BOTH: Until.

[Outro]

SHE: It is done.
HE: Again.
SHE: You are mine.
HE: And I am yours.
BOTH: Until death do us part.
BOTH: ...Same time in ten years, love.