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“Elizabeth My Dear” (0:59)

*...her very Lowness with her head in a sling
I'm truly sorry—but it sounds like a wonderful thing...*

—The Smiths
“The Queen Is Dead”

Although “Scarborough Faire” is an English ballad written in the 16th Century that—as far as we know—didn’t chart very high at the time, it did do very well for Simon and Garfunkel, who popularized the song with a dreamy, honeyed interpretation that is so far lodged in the listening public’s collective consciousness that many think the duo wrote the song themselves.³⁶ So when the Stone Roses rightfully borrowed the melody from the public domain for “Elizabeth My Dear,” many were a bit stunned they would

³⁶ “Scarborough Faire/Canticle” reached #11 on the Billboard chart in 1968.

have the gall to reinterpret a Simon and Garfunkel classic. But the fact was, the Stone Roses were simply taking the song back for England and in the process, firing a shot straight at the monarchy. Comprised of one stanza, one acoustic guitar and one gunshot, “Elizabeth My Dear” is a gently strummed 59-second ad hominem attack on the Queen that in spite of its tranquil delivery is deeply vicious:

*Tear me apart and boil my bones,
I'll not rest till she's lost her throne.
My aim is true,
My message is clear,
It's curtains for you, Elizabeth my dear.*

More than a mere repossession of the folk ballad, in spirit this is really the Stone Roses’ “God Save the Queen,” in that it openly rails against Queen Elizabeth much in the same way the Sex Pistols did in 1977. But while the Pistols’ protest took over three minutes, “Elizabeth My Dear” gets the job done in 2:18 less. Looking back, it very well may be the shortest protest song since those fiery and delicious 29 seconds of “Old Mother Reagan” by the Violent Femmes, who in 1986 howled their hope the First Lady would go “Far away / She better go far away.”

While it lacks the obvious sonic fire of “God Save the Queen,” “Elizabeth My Dear” is haunted by a subdued sense of menace, stemming from its eerie, conspiratorial insomnia that will only subside once she’s out of power. Meanwhile, the boastful attestation of the surety of his aim and his intention, and the deadly promise of “It’s curtains for you / Elizabeth My Dear,” seem to be scribblings

straight from an assassin's notebook.

It should be pointed out that "Elizabeth My Dear" wasn't included on the album as a quick political pose. In fact, the Stone Roses seemed to be dwelling on the subject of the Queen in interviews. For example in *NME*, there was this exchange with the band:

NME: And who do you despise?

Mani: Maggie and the Royal Family. Six hundred years of piss-taking is long enough, don't you agree?

Ian: The Queen Mother. Because she seems so aware of the hypocrisy of what she's doing. I think that's so patronising.

And in *Melody Maker* there was this:

Ian: We're all anti-royalist, anti-patriarch. Cos it's 1989.

Time to get real. When the ravens leave The Tower,
England shall fall, they say. We want to be there shooting
the ravens.

John: Just a bunch of cattle rustlers, the royal family.

After openly attacking the royal family in the press, saying that the Stone Roses would play Buckingham Palace only after it was burned to the ground, Ian Brown later admitted to *Smash Hits* that there were less than subtle consequences for such loose anti-Monarchy lips: "We've already had The Sun on our backs," he said. "They were outside me mam's house all week tapping on the window because of what we said about the Royal Family nine months ago in an inter-

view.³⁷ I said there wouldn't be a revolution in England unless someone put a bag over the Queen Mother's head. And I said I'd do it. I think Buckingham Palace should be turned into flats for old people who live in cardboard boxes because that's common sense. So The Sun knocked on our neighbours' door and said 'D' you know that lad Ian Brown that lives next door? Well he wants to kill the Queen....'"

The Stone Roses may have been unapologetically vocal about their wishes to overthrow the Queen in the press, but onstage they were a bit shy with "Elizabeth My Dear," not even playing the song live until 1990. It seems odd that the band opted to skip it up to that point, but thankfully it finally found its place at the close of the show, where it was utilized as an introduction to "I Am the Resurrection."

It should be noted that "Elizabeth My Dear" is a song that certainly has its share of detractors; the *Wedding Present's* Gedge calls it "a bit embarrassing," while the *Guardian's* Robin Denselow wrote that it had "dodgy lyrics." But in spite of the criticism, it's always been one of my favorite tracks on the record. The idea that a thorough disemboweling and subsequent boiling of his bones as being just not enough to extinguish Brown's hatred of the Queen, rendering him instead eternally dissatisfied, made it one of the most convincing protest songs I'd ever heard. The end-note of a silencer-wrapped gunshot, combined with the

³⁷ Speaking to *Melody Maker* in 1989 about Prince Charles, Brown said, "I'd like to see him dead. I'd like to shoot him. He owns acres and acres of land, with big houses, that he's never seen. And there are people living in squalor in some of those places." This probably didn't help matters much, but it did cause Tory MP Geoffrey Dickens to insist the Stone Roses to be banned from playing on "Top of the Pops." They weren't.

asseveration of finally dispatching her himself, turned the song into a Manchester murder ballad, as visually disturbing as anything by the Misfits or the Brothers Grimm. It was intimate, confessional and so outwardly dastardly it made me feel almost complicit to the crime it was referencing.

“Elizabeth My Dear” is beautifully played and lyrically direct; a creepy number, sure, but its irresistibility lies somewhere between Brown’s saccharine vocals, Squire’s gentle picking and the sheer force of its political subversion.

While “God Save the Queen” spit long and loud with lines like “God save the Queen / She ain’t no human being / There is no future / In England’s dreaming,” “Elizabeth My Dear” is a murderers’ meditation, plotting and Shakespearean, bringing to mind the machinations of Richard III, who knew the power of patience and restraint before taking action. And it’s the restraint of “Elizabeth My Dear” that makes it a dark and hungry anthem. It’s a cut-throat’s lullaby, a slayer’s rumination—tender, cold-blooded and quietly ruthless. A killer.