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Listen to my voice. Listen. As I begin to speak I will tell you a story and as I speak my voice will get slower and deeper and warmer and you will begin to relax as you listen and begin to feel warmer and less constrained by your thoughts or by your worries or even by your physical presence and you will just hear my gentle voice. Just listen.

I was born some time ago.

I entered with the moon tide, thin and milky with fear. Tightened up beneath a bright chain of voices, I waited until you picked me up.

From your shoulder I watched the sky, riddled with stars and birds. I heard the sea singing in green waves.

The moon is *what?* Is the moon something I can talk about? Someone told me it's not there. What with the various ethers, mists and clouds and whatnot it's not clear if it's really up there. We're forced to take it on trust. Its reality is like that of some people—a swarm of rumours. So the moon remains opaque. It's not a bright moon and nothing much can be said of it, except that it is missing tonight. Words also, speaking of nothing much, uttered in darkness, formless.

What words do I have to talk about the voice? What words are on offer?

Aspirate, breathy, coarse, dull, feeble, flat, fruity, gloomy, grating, grave, growling, guttural, harsh, hoarse, hollow, husky...

I was born some time ago.

Plenty happened.

Now years pass like months.

Other words come up like forgotten tastes. I spit them out one by one.

Infantile. Lifeless. Loud. Metallic.

Listen, I'll tell you what—we'll drink some cough syrup, drop some pills and go walking outside. It's a beautiful night. Put on the headphones and listen to the remixes I was sent by my friend. What do you say?

Music is the healing force of the universe. Vibrations reach us even at our worst moments. Through the night sky comes deliverance.

Hear?

Monotonous. Muffled. Neurasthenic. Passive. Pinched. Rasping.

Words are synonymous with our intellects—which we only dreamt up fairly recently. Our larynxes and our voices are older. They're for emotions. For marking territory, signalling fear, expressing pleasure.

You're warm and calm. Can you hear how quiet your thoughts are becoming?

Do you remember the story about the English professor?

He was a man with a very sharp tongue. He would taunt and ridicule his students, who loved him in spite of it. After tributes from other speakers at his farewell dinner, the Professor rose to speak. He stood still for a minute or more. His face was different from normal—it had lost its severity, its look of grave disappointment. His features were pink and kind. His voice was different too. It was gentle, without sarcasm or belligerence. He said:

I cannot say goodbye to you and leave unsaid that which is most important—the most important thing in my life.

He took a deep breath before he spoke again, his voice hoarse with emotion. It became all the more hoarse as he tried to overcome the quiver that was entering it. He then paid tribute to his wife:

I cannot in this leave-taking do other than say to you that I owe all my happiness to her...that she has...

He turned his head. There was silence. Tears were on her cheeks. Their gazes met and remained fixed for some time. Then, without another word, he sat down.

It slips from our grasp. Nothing to be said. The story's worn out.

But you hear it?

Expression disappears, but we still love a storyteller. What makes stories interesting? They are told with fervour and we're caught up in the moment, hanging on every word. A good salesperson has the same qualities.

If you find yourself forced to speak, make a mental note of the other who forces you to speak.

Where are you?

In what I say.

Listen to my voice.

I hear you.

The first night is full of noise. All sounds are words and each is finely chopped, thrown up, dispersed like a handful of rice.

So would you come outside? We can lie on the old blue sofa. Breathe the air. We can pull out the skateboard and tie a rope round the dog and get him to tow us down the footpath. We don't want to get bored.

Soon I'll feel more at home. I'll run my tongue over my teeth and breathe your special smell.

A friend told me once:

When you are silent I am no longer here. When you speak I return.

We live by echoes. They come from some other place filled with love and horror.

All around the town tonight there is singing. The chanting never lets up. It drives us crazy for a while, but then we get used to it. We accept the rhythm and make our contribution, keeping it going. The voices lift.

The original prayer is sung.

There is music before speech.

Listen.

You are calm, very relaxed now. I want you to make a mental note of what I say.

There is a purpose to this. It seems pointless, but there's a reason to it. The word surrounded by silence. The moon's out tonight.

Just outside this room, every substance and physical entity is vibrating.

Occasionally there's the disappearance of expression altogether. Beneath the voice, that carefully manicured American sincerity, comes the end of the truth. Weird cults. TV delirium. Sacred trance spoutings. Some of that old time religion.

My voice. My timbre. My cadences. My voice speaks me. My health. My history.

Saying it to myself, until what is said forgets me.

Clinging to this new place I'll start, however hesitantly, however badly, to speak your name.

In a minute you'll wake up. You'll be very calm and happy. You'll remember nothing of what's been said.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Brent Clough.