

VENTRILOQUY FOR RADIO

A monologue performed by two voices: Protagonist and *Parrot*.

Protagonist's voice is female and feels close and clear.

Parrot's voice has a slightly distant quality, as if it could be coming from another place.

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[Ticking]

Shhhh!

The thing is...

What I'm trying to say...

The point is...

The parrot is dead.

Dead?

Deceased etc. All the euphemisms.

The thing is...

The thing is...

What I'm trying to say...

What I'm trying to say is...

Both: The parrot is dead.

Dead?

Deceased, etc. All the euphemisms.

Is this a joke?

Is this a joke?!

Of course not.

Both: Parrot jokes aren't funny.

They're very repetitive.

They're very repetitive...

Parrot jokes aren't funny.

I don't believe you.

You don't have to.

But I know that parrot isn't dead because

Both: it's me, I'm here, I'm parrot.

I don't believe you.
How do you know?

*You don't have to...
How do you know?*

Well I can tell I'm not dead, I think it would be obvious if I was.
To me at least.

Are you listening?

*Are you listening!
Are you listening?*

I've been paying a lot more attention to my fingernails than usual. I bought one of those little nail scrubbing brushes which I haven't used since I was a child. I'm noticing the rate at which my fingernails grow, what colour they are, what collects underneath them.

You'll be interested to know I've been gardening more too, at least, as much as you can without a garden. So perhaps it has something to do with that...

*Sorry, what does this have to do
with anything? What colour they are,
what collects...underneath them...*

Sorry.

My personal hygiene is particularly good at the moment.
My nails are really clean. I decided to take my nail varnish off, so now I have bare nails for the first time in years.

Both: They look like someone else's hands.

Not this again.

*Oh, not this again.
What?*

Testing.

Testing?

Shh!

Just start from the beginning.

It was in a dream, or, it was yesterday, or, it was last week, or, it was just now. And I was sitting there, I can picture it now, and I was doing nothing, and all I was doing was staring out the window.
Dead quiet.

I saw Parrot outside.
Or Parrot saw me,

I saw you first! Sitting.

Staring.

He was in the garden,
a vision
An apparition.

*I was in the garden.
an alien,
a vision*

He was too heavy for the feeder,
hanging off it, lopsided.

It's empty. It's empty...

What?

The bird feeder, it's empty.

Well that's because there's nothing in it.
I watch the neighbours' birds.

They all talk about you, you know...

Who?

The neighbours.

I don't know the neighbours.

I know you don't know them.

Both: We've never even met, face to face.

Odd.

I keep myself to myself...

They say, "She's a bit... odd."

*You keep yourself to yourself,
you never open your curtains and they
think you're weird.*

Well based on what I've heard, I don't like them either.

Strange chattering through the walls.

The neighbours are shouting, laughing, fucking –
sometimes all at once.

*You've got no neighbourly spirit
at all.*

They hate each other and I hate them too.

You've never even met, face to face.

I've got no need for neighbours.

Gossips and curtain twitchers!

Got no needs! That's your problem.

I hoovered and dusted very thoroughly four weeks ago, so now I know that any dust that has collected since then has been the sum of my body's production in the last month.

The sum of my body's production...

Anyway I was sat at the window,

Gossips and curtain twitchers!

The garden's usually empty, usually it's just me.

Usually it's just me.

Right.

So I was sitting there, this time, the other day, or whenever it was, quite quiet, and parrot tapped on my window.

[Tapping on glass]

Have I got your attention?

Have I got your attention?

He asked if he could come in, I think.

Both: Can I have your attention!

I said, of course, why not?

The window wouldn't open all the way, but he wanted to come in, I could tell. He basically said as much –

Why, based on what I heard...

– so I just reached out, grabbed a wing and dragged him through.

*Well, he wanted to come in,
I could tell...
dragged him through...*

Have you ever had a bird from outside suddenly be inside your house? They grow twice as big, all of a sudden. Inflated by the walls. All of a sudden this bird, which looked beautiful from a distance, is now festering and grotesque and scrabbling spreadeagle about my ceiling.

Not eagle, Parrot.

Not eagle, Parrot. Sorry. Clawing at the artex.

*Clawing at the artex!
He got caught on the lampshade so I –*

He got caught on the lampshade so,
I grabbed at him, grabbed at the wing –

Both: I tried to hold him still...

but he wriggled and wriggled – not in the mood for a cuddle.

*Terrible theatre of noise it was, he
made all these sounds from his belly
that I'd never heard!*

He made all these sounds from his belly I'd never heard,
I've never heard anything like it. Broke right through my silence.

Flapping around, he started picking up noises to play with. He did a
great impression of the fridge,

*floorboards,
flushing toilet,*

creaky door... the kettle wouldn't stop boiling.
It was as if the house was alive.

Never known anything like it.

He was barely able to contain himself –
Broke right through my silence!

Tea for two?
The milk has split.

"Sorry, I haven't got any food," I said, after he'd calmed down a bit.
"I wasn't expecting guests."

Both: No bother, I'll have a go on this banana.

Nibbles in the corner of the room.

It's rotten!

It's rotten!

It's good enough.

It's good enough...

I don't mind that it's gone soft and black, in fact, I like it that way.

*I don't mind,
it stinks the house out.*

I can't get rid of these fruit flies, they're everywhere... they breed quicker than I can kill them.
I don't event eat bananas at home.
I don't know why I keep buying them.

Wasn't expecting guests...

Let's go halves. Two's up!

Parrot couldn't talk then, not yet. But I think he asked me –

***Both: Should I stay?
Can I stay for a bit?***

Bored, I thought, well ok, just for a bit.

Both: I could do with a friend.

This was all before he could speak of course. That took some doing, getting the chat going. It was all small talk in the beginning.

That's an interesting accent you've got.

Who's?

Both: Mine.

Which one?

Yours.

Yours.

Where's it from?

The accent?

I don't know, picked it up, I pick things up.

Picked it up, I pick things up.

My parents ran a pet shop, and their parents before that, so I knew what I was doing, more or less, and I trained him up, bit by bit... He was very good.

You're very very good!

Pretty soon, I got a good response.

Very good listener!

Parrot was a very a good listener.

Is.

What?

You said 'Was', but you meant 'Is'.

I meant is. Good listener. Fast learner.

It took a long time to get through my entire vocabulary.

A long time to get through the entire vocabulary.

Parrot had to study me closely, and, I'll be honest, it's the first time in my life I'd been noticed like that.

Noticed with intent.

Both: That kind of attention is addictive.

So he was always watching me, observing over my shoulder.

A birds eye view of whatever I was doing, reading, watching...

Good listener, fast learner...

No privacy, I had absolutely no privacy...and I absolutely loved it.

And I absolutely loved it...

Sometimes you can just feel eyes on you, without even looking up.

Anyway, the point is, the more attention parrot paid to me, the more attention I paid to myself. I became more and more conscious of myself, for example, I noticed my eyebrows for the first time.

It was a Tuesday I think, or a Thursday, I always get those confused
And there was one big thick hair, a bit longer than the rest on the
left eyebrow.

Noticed with intent...

So I gave it a little tug, and out it came with very little resistance.
Once I'd done one I noticed another, and another, and well, soon enough
it got a bit out of hand,

Got a bit jealous...

it was out of my hands, I just plucked them all out, one hair at a
time, pluck pluck pluck

pluck pluck,

pluck pluck pluck.

...Until suddenly they'd all gone, basically nothing.
And then, I worked my way from basically nothing to completely disappeared.

The whole project took about twenty minutes, but when I came up for air it was like waking from a nap. I asked parrot what he thought:
"What do you think?"

But he ignored me.
I guess, I was barely recognisable.

What do you think?

I liked it, I liked the way my new skin felt, even though it was sore. Pretty soon it wasn't enough to pluck it bare. I became very focused on catching the growing hairs at their first presentation... to the point where I would use the sharp end of the tweezers to more or less dig the prospective hair out of its follicle.

My brow was punctuated by all these red dots which then, of course, I would pick.

What does this have to do with anything?

*Well, the thing is,
the point is.*

The better Parrot got at talking, the worse he got at listening. And I've never been a particularly good listener either, I've got very little patience.

*And I've never been a particularly
good listener either, I've got very
little patience.*

They talk about you, you know.

I'm a lengthy monologue.
Acceptable circumstances to recite your monologue:
in therapy, drunk, or on stage..
It's all the same to me.
In therapy, drunk, or on stage... it's all the same. Ha.

Ha!

We were always interrupting each other, just waiting for our turn to talk.

We were always interrupting –

Ha.

Ha!

Never disagreed much though did we parrot?

No. Well,

Not much,

no.

Just waiting for our turn to talk...

we always knew what the other one needed to hear.

We always knew.

I couldn't imagine we'd ever be one of those couples who ran out of things to say.

Couldn't imagine.

...Is there a point to this?

What do you mean?

Is there a point, do you have a point?

No.

This story is very tedious.

I know.

I'm not much of a storyteller.

Parrot became bored.

Boring people get bored.

Boredom is just waiting.

Free floating, waiting...

Waiting for what?

Waiting for... anticipation.

Anyway, parrot was bored, wanted his own mirror.

I thought, why not, he's always liked shiny things.
So I showed him one, gave him his own.

Both: But thing is –

he got really into the mirror. He loved it!
He loved it so much, but he had no idea what he was looking at.
He had no idea what Parrot was.

He had no idea what a parrot was...

I had to say, and I wish I hadn't,

Both: "Look, that's you! Look, that's Parrot!"

*Well, not Parrot,
but a reflection of Parrot.*

Parrot in reverse.

He shut up for a second to take it all in.

I realised then, that the reason he didn't recognise himself was because
all he'd ever known was the version of himself that I had taught him.
So when he got to know himself, when he realised we were separates,
well, all hell broke loose.

He became obsessed.

He became obsessed, completely obsessed with his own reflection,

not Parrot, but a reflection of Parrot,

struggling to navigate it because, well, I know now that, there's no
centre or edge to a parrot's world view.

Because of the way his eyes are, you know, one on each side.

Both: He couldn't see the whole of himself at once,

he could only see each side with each eye,

Both: one part of himself at a time.

And so that was that.

And so that was that.

That was what?

Both: That! It!

All the conversation had dried up. All he wanted to do was to take himself in, turning left to right, this way and that, regarding himself in two halves.

Well, I'll be honest with you.
I got a bit jealous.

Both: You get like that.

I know.

Very possessive,

I know.

Very controlling.

I know.

[Silence]

Anyway, let's cut a long story short.
Now, Parrot is dead.

He's what?

You'll just have to accept it.

He's dead?

Back in the flat.

What?

Flat on his back.

Well what happened?

That's not important.

Well you've just cut out a big plot point there, it doesn't make sense.

I'm not much of a storyteller.

My nails have gotten really long and if they get too long, I start to bite them. So I cut them with some nail scissors but I went too close to the quick, and now my fingers feel swollen and tender around the edges.

What does that have to do with anything?

The thing is,
what I'm trying to say is...
It's gone too far.
It's gone too far now, and I don't know how to end it.

Endings are very difficult.

I know.

[Kettle boils]

So, the parrot is dead, stuffed and nailed to the perch.

Is this a joke?

No.

So it's over?

It's not you, it's me.

I don't believe you.

It's me.

[Kettle clicks]

I think the kettle's boiled...

The milk has split.

[Silence, except for the faint sound of birds in the garden]

END