

The Voice Bank

*One has a voice like bubbles in sunlight.
One has a voice like polished mahogany.
One has a voice like a dancer in quicksand.
One has a voice like apple pie.
One has a voice like the sun on your back.
One has a voice like antique leather.
One has a voice like a machete.
One has a voice like a stained glass window.
One has a voice like going home.*

You have—nine—saved messages.

First voice message.

One has a voice like bubbles in sunlight.

“Hiii, Angel Pie Cutie Pa-tootie! I just wanted to hear your cute little voice.” *Although three times a mother, her voice possesses the sound and spirit of a little girl.* “I was just thinkin’ aboutcha and really missin’ you today! And I just want you to know that I’m praying for you and Nathan and your business and your marriage... and I love you so much!” *Any perceptive person could tell that she is a singer; it’s unmistakable, even through the crackled fog of a voicemail.* “You can call me back if you get a chance, or... later on. I love you, Hon.” *And despite its bubbling enthusiasm, it perceptibly carries the weight of a family.* “Bye.”

This voice is light and airy, but full of life. It catches iridescent color as it drifts. It is an heirloom passed down in word and melody. This voice is grace. It has comforted you, always hovering nearby, since the day you were born. It is especially beautiful because of its fragility. It is especially precious because of its impermanence.

Next message.

One has a voice like polished mahogany.

“Hey, *You*... just wanted to say thank you for doing all that running around and stuff this morning. Um... totally appreciate it.” *You can hear the smile start to tug at the corners of his mouth.* “I love you, you’re the best.” *His voice softens.*
“Bye.”

This voice speaks carefully. It is low and smooth. Words flow heavily, but are artfully placed. This voice has roots in your heart. It grows towards the sky as it speaks. One simple gesture of appreciation comforts like the sight and touch of polished wood: familiar, strong, and beautifully stable.

Next Message.

One has a voice like a dancer in quicksand.

“Hey... it’s Meg. Um, I’m calling to tell you that I was at a forensics tournament today reading Augusten Burroughs’s book, *Dry*, and in it, he... is... sober for a long time and then...um... relapses, as his best friend, slash, used to be lover, lots of complicated stuff, is dying of AIDS and dies of AIDS...” *Her voice cradles this stranger’s tragedy.*
“And I was like, *so moved* by this story, and I don’t know why, but I just like, the way he describes the death-- cause it’s true, the story is autobiographical, I believe, and-- not that that matters, but like-- I don’t know it’s just very real, and ...I think for the first time ever, I pictured you not being alive.” *Her voice is heavy with the experience of death, but sharply aware of the inevitability of fresh wounds. It begins to flutter with the onset of mild panic.* “Which made me cry harder, which made me be like...like... realize that there is a level of pain that I have not...that has not existed... I mean, I’ve thought about my mom’s death, and how awful that’s going to be, and I’m sure I’ve thought of like, (*flushhhh*) - sorry, we’re in the bathroom- I’m sure I’ve thought of, like, losing you-- I don’t-- This sounds ridiculous for me to be saying this to you, but I’ve never thought about it and I... I just *lost* it, and ...like, more selfishly than anything in the world I just thought... That is something I hope I never have to experience...*ohh!* I just.. It’s not bad, I was just so emotional and I wanted to share it with you, and... um... I’ve already started planning

stuff for your birthday and I just like... like... what if one time there was your birthday and you weren't alive-- AGH! I just started freaking out and I'm sure you do this all the time about people in your life, but I apparently haven't done this to you, or about you, in a long time. So... I freaked out and I love you so much and I really hope you're still alive, so call me if you are!" *Her voice cracks and squeaks with anxiety and urgency. The effusion of words, gathering speed with mounting frustration, is begrudgingly aware of its own inadequacy.* "I love you so much, Natalie. Like so much, like more, like I'm going to start crying in the bathroom and I can't, and I just feel like... I have less people to spread out my craziness on..." *The words become thick as they slow in a rush of tears.* "And you're always the one to take so much of it... I hope you can understand me, I'm sorry- ohh!... I've just been really bad lately... I need to chill out... but my anxiety's been bad, and I need to stop talking about it because I think that makes it worse..." *She begins to accept that her best attempt to express this complex emotion via voicemail, though insufficient, will have to do.* "Ok, I'm going to go watch a D.I. round, which hopefully will be very sad and I can cry a lot, and that will be good, and then I'll look normal... ok, I love you." *Surrender.* "Bye."

This voice is in constant battle with its own human limitations of physicality and language. Infuriated, it flails and surges, pushes and pulls, trying to create more than words allow. It asks for your help in its frustration, only intensifying the struggle, playing into the hands of the hungry sand. But even in a frantic thrashing, this voice moves with grace and beauty. It stretches and elongates its muscles, striving for fuller expression. It dreams constantly of using 100% of the brain's potential. It tires, so for now it quiets, resolving to sink peacefully beneath the surface. Only warmth and calm remain. Until the next burst of passion that will inevitably draw it up like a Phoenix for a rematch with words, it sleeps. It will never be silent until it learns to float.

Next Message.

One has a voice like apple pie.

“Natalie??... This is your favorite Grandmother!” *You can already hear the laugh coming. She is the only Grandmother, and always has been.* “I j-h-h-hust wanted to tell you that I found something *just for you* yesterday at WALmart! It’s a kit to bake a roast, with the vegetables and everything in it, all you gotta do is take it out, put it in the pan, and put it in the oven. And you could have roast beef, roast pork, or beef stew!” *She assumes correctly that these are delicacies in your typical diet.* “So I just wanted you to know I was thinking about you w-h-h-hen I saw it! Hahaha...” *Her laugh trails into her last sentence.* “I’ll talk to you later!” *Having hooted her way through the entire message, she can’t resist one last good laugh...it echoes as she hangs up.* “Byebye! Hahahahahahaha...”

This voice is comfort food, affection, history and tradition. It is the voice of a matriarch. It is the voice of a family. It hovers over her you like a protective umbrella. It is sweet and warm, like a holiday. This voice is memory.

Next Message.

One has a voice like the sun on your back.

“Heyyyy, lover. It’s me. How are ya? Um..... I hope you had a great weekend, and I’m sorry I was not able to go bowling, but I hope you guys had fun. Aaaaand, I would love to catch up with you...” *The tone of his voice is rich and warm. It effortlessly envelopes you as if its only purpose is to make you feel loved.*

“But most importantly, I want to talk about the Halloween party...”

Mmwaaa-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah...um... cause I really wanna be there. And I think I’m gonna be.” *He pauses, knowing that this assertion is undoubtedly causing an ecstatic reaction. You can hear the smile on his face.* “And I want to discuss costumes. So I’m just working right now, I work till three, then I’ll be out and about for the day so if you get a chance, give me a call... And I hope to hear-- *OH MY GOD!!! He interrupts himself with a jolt that startles even him.* “By the way, happy anniversary! I think it’s today... oh my god. I hope that you and Nate are just

enjoying each other more and more every day.” *His voice drips with sincerity as he pauses to decide if he wants to continue the thought.* “Um... I love you guys. And I’ll talk to you soon! Ok, bye.”

This voice is complexly emotional. It seeps through the phone like syrup. It is sweet, sticky affection begging you to lick it up. It does not quiet until it drenches light. This voice restores. It is a vessel of care. The specific words it speaks are inconsequential; one phrase continuously rings out: “You Are Loved.” This voice is a hand on your shoulder, offering warmth and support, even and especially when you are facing away from the sun.

Next Message.

One has a voice like antique leather.

“Hi Nana, it’s your brudder Dayday... um... I just haven’t talked to you in a while... well, I have, but now I miss you more...” *A past of pain has made his voice hard. It is laden with the experience of an old man, but still exposes the natural spark of a 24-year-old heart. His voice softens when he speaks to you.*

“But, uh, just wonderin’ how things are going... uh... got a side job, paint job, that I’ve been workin’ on for the last couple days for a few hours, that’s been kind of—um—keeping me afloat, here...” *He hints at struggles, but is proud to be working with his hands.* “But, um, hope everything’s goin’ good for you, I’m prayin’ for you and Nathan and Apstin... to kick ass... and the trowels to be smooth... huhuhuh!...” *His deep, rumbling chuckle assumes your laughter is echoing it. It can only be compared to a giggle; an immeasurably masculine, guttural, growl of a giggle, but a giggle nonetheless.*

“But, um, just give me a call back. I love you.” *He never hangs up the phone without saying it.*

“Bye.”

This voice has been tried. It has spent its life searching for the perfect word. It is venomous in anger, but life-affirming in love. This voice exists in extremes. It has been weathered, stretched and worn. It bears a spider web crackle of life-lines.

But it is also getting better with age. This voice, though gruff, sounds like a little boy to you. It bears scars, but wears them well.

Next Message.

One has a voice like a machete.

“DAM STRIT!!!.... I LOVE YOUR DIRTY ASS WHEN NO ONE’S LOOKING! ...” *A booming, cartoonish voice with a Spanish and somewhat Jamaican accent bursts through the receiver. “I EVEN LOVE YOUR DIRTY ASS WHEN EVERYBODY’S LOOKING!!!! IN THE COLLOSSEUM! EVERYBODY SCREAMING! It sounds like nonsense at first, but after spending some time with Cootiechochonkey, it’s easy to pick up on the underlying messages of his ear-piercing rants. “Cause I do little black tsings... not in a dark corner... BUT IN FRONT OF EVERYBODY’S EYEEEEES!” Cootiechochonkey has a violent streak. He’s a vigilante with something to prove, but underneath all that, he’s really a very loving monkey. “I love your dirty ass. Is TRUE! Dam striiiiiIIIIITTT!!!”... Scuffling ensues. “Cootie, gimme the phone!... Sorry, hello?”*

One has a voice like a stained glass window.

“Oh, he was leaving you a message. Well...I just wanna say ‘I love you’ to my best friend.” *All goofing around aside, he suddenly drops the character. His voice takes on its most personal tone. “Um.. If I was gonna share anything cool, like go to six flags, or something fun like that... going camping or canoeing... I’d wanna invite you first. I always have, ever since we were little kids. And even though there’s been years where we haven’t talked, nothing’s ever changed. You still bring so much life and energy into my heart like nobody, literally, nobody, ever has.” The acknowledgement of childhood friendship sits deep in his voice, permeating his words with familiarity and comfort.*

“Also...One of my revelations that I had the other day as to why you’re back in my life now is because...um... one of the major things that sucked about my breakup with Gabby was just the life and little world that I had with her and Cootiechochonkey and Sueno. And I just never thought that

would ever be replaced, but... this is...I don't want you to take this lightly, but...you're *way better* with the monkeys than I could have ever imagined." *A pause reflects the depth and sincerity of the compliment. There is a vulnerable confidence in his voice. Even though the monkeys are rambunctious stuffed animals, he seems to know that you won't, as he says, take this lightly.* "And I think that the monkeys represent how a girl would be as a mother. And... out of all the people that have ever interacted with the monkeys, I think you are the most *loving, and caring, and understanding... mother* to 'em that they've ever had. And I can honest to God say that, like... you totally understand 'em, you never raise your voice to 'em, *and... you know how to calm 'em down with just a very nurturing, loving voice.* Most people, if they need to calm 'em down, they'll yell at 'em, or like, you know, ground 'em, or shout at them, and you never have, you're just always so kind to 'em...and that just proves that you're gonna be such a wonderful mother. *The wonder of childhood begets compassionate wisdom in adulthood, if you let it.* "So... the phone's beeping, I don't know if that means I'm running out of time... or something, but... anyways...um... yea." *His tone is resolved; he has said all he needs to say.*
"I love you."

A machete's not a weapon, it's a tool. It clears a path. When there isn't time to beat around the bush, a machete will slash that bush in half. Now the stage is clear... Say what you need to say.

This voice splits into many colors, each appealing to a different eye. As the light from the sun illuminates the window, you can see one artist's rendition of the truth. This voice is here to teach. This voice is here to reach. It lets the light flow through it, a vessel for something greater. It colors the world with imagination. This voice will not let you forget your childhood. It will flood your big picture with all the hours of daylight until you can finally see.

Next Message.

One has a voice like going home.

“Hey craysee lady! It is me leaving you a craysee message!”
Her voice conveys laughter, even when she isn't laughing.
“Um... yea! So, hope you're having a fantastic day, and I love you so much... and... don't forget to bring my stuff tomorrow!” *Her expressions of love are light-hearted and genuine, as is her gentle admonition against your notorious absent-mindedness...* “And give me a call whenever, K? Love you, sis!” *Love you, too.* “Bye!”

This voice is familiarity and closeness. It is relaxed and playful. It carries the admiration of a youngest sister speaking to an oldest sister, but it still pokes fun. This voice has grown into something unique and beautiful, but still asks for protection. It reminds you of the place you first learned to be responsible for someone littler than you. It contains the essence of your family name: your grandmother's hoot, your father's belly laugh, your mother's softness, your brother's affectionate teasing...

But most of all, she sounds like you.

End of messages.