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I Am Whispering at the Top of My Voice

By
JON JORY



Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(I AM WHISPERING AT THE TOP OF MY VOICE)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-100-4

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE: For an all-female cast (8 to 20w.), use the above playing order. If a mixed cast is desired, add the two male monologues and subtract two from the original list. A full evening is 10 pieces, any more and it becomes too long.

SETTING: The play could be done on a bare stage. Beyond that, the only limit is the director's imagination. There could be a different backing for each monologue, or the whole evening could be set in a 19th-century vaudeville theatre, etc.

I Am Whispering at the Top of My Voice

ACT I

The Jersey Shore

(A young woman, LUCY, sits in a beach chair under a colorful umbrella. She has on some form of beachwear, sunglasses and a baseball cap.)

LUCY. Did you say Jason? Raisin? They call you Raisin? Don't worry, I'm not even going to ask. I'm Lucy Tometta. Yeah, Italian to the core. Worse than that, Sicilian. My family wasn't in the mob, but my grandfather was jeweler to the mob. Those guys wear a lot of jewelry, a lot. No, sit down, take a load off. I can't offer anything to eat but ...

(She snaps open a briefcase beside her. It is filled with packets of money.)

Have some money. No really. Yeah, it's real money. Each packet is five thousand dollars. Take a couple. You're worried it's drug money, right? It's not drug money. It's not even faintly drug money. Seriously take some, I can't get rid of the stuff. I got a warehouse full. Seventy thousand square feet, floor to ceiling, five-thousand-dollar packets. My brother and I figure if we each live to be eighty, we would each have to spend a hundred thousand a day to empty out the warehouse before we croaked. You think I'm joking? This is not funny, Raisin. Me and Tony, that's my

brother, would have to spend seventy-two million a year, and that's just an estimate. There might be three times that because the volume in the warehouse is tough to figure. You're worried I'll get robbed?

(She laughs.)

See the guys over there playing volleyball? See the two on surfboards? See the two women over there oiling up? See the three sitting on top of the Jeep Liberty? Those are bodyguards. Every one of those is an ex-Navy Seal or Army Ranger. And they are all looking at you, Raisin. You are on their radar. If you touched me or grabbed the briefcase, you would be extremely dead in about seven seconds. When I go night-night, there are fifteen around the house and a half-dozen in the house. What I wouldn't give for a little privacy I can't begin to tell you. Now I see the question forming in your mind. Where, are you thinking, did the money come from? How did a chick my age ... I am a junior, by the way, at William Henry Harrison High in Tulsa, Oklahoma. So Oklahoma being Oklahoma, my mom and dad bring us up to the Jersey Shore every summer and the bodyguards fly Southwest. How did a chick my age get the money? Right here, Raisin, right at the beach where we are currently sitting. I couldn't sleep. I was up at dawn. I come down and walk on the beach. I'm looking at the sunrise. I stub my toe. Actually, I fractured a toe on some metal something buried in the sand, kinda sticking out. So I sit on the beach and I dig this thing up. Takes me a while. It's a brass kind of teapotty thing, you know, mucked up by being buried in the sand, so I'm like brushing it off and I hear this voice say, "You called?" So I look behind me and there is this unbelievably beautiful mixed-race model-looking girl wearing a red bikini and she's like seven feet

tall with braids to her waist and she has one brown eye and one red eye and fingernails maybe six inches long, and I scream, and she slaps me. I mean, she slaps me hard across the cheek, and says, “Cool out!” She says, “Listen here, chicki-boom-boom, we got one minute here, well fifty-two seconds actually, and you got three wishes so I wouldn’t waste the time.” And I go, “Whaaaaat?” And she says, “You rubbed the lamp, I’m the genie, you got three wishes and thirty-seven seconds, what is it you want?” I’m like stunned and she grabs me by the shoulders and shakes me like a juicer and yells, “What do you want, you idiot!” And I just blurt out, “A Great Dane puppy.” And there’s the puppy licking my foot. And she screams, “Eighteen seconds left!” And I say, “I don’t know, I don’t know, a hundred dollar gift certificate to Forever 21,” and it flutters down and the genie is calling me a hopeless doofus and a bunch of stuff I wouldn’t say out loud, and she grabs me by the hair and says, “Six seconds.” And she pulls out a handful of hair and I’m screaming and I go, “A warehouse full of money!” And there’s a blinding flash and the genie disappears and the brass lampy-thing disappears and I’m alone on the beach and there’s this little key in my hand and it has a tag with the address written on it from somewhere in Philadelphia. Boom! The whole family goes down there and it’s the warehouse full of money. Floor to ceiling. I buy houses for my parents, I buy six cars and a wardrobe that fills six walk-in closets, we start a foundation, we build a hospital, and then we come to a horrible realization—it’s not just the warehouse full of money we have to spend because whenever we make a dent, whenever we clear a space, it fills up again. But can I walk away? Can I do anything but spend money? Because if I don’t get rid of a hundred thousand a day I get a full itchy body rash that I can only

get rid of by spending two hundred thousand the next day. Actually I have the rash now. Do you mind if I scratch?

(Scratches herself wildly.)

I'm sorry, I know that's gross. But ...

(Scratches even more wildly.)

It's uncontrollable. Listen Jason or Raisin or whatever your name is, take the money. Take the money! Take the money!!

(Scratches wildly. Stops. Speaks almost in a whisper.)

Save me from the money.

(Blackout.)

Me

(A bus. A young woman, BARBARA, comes down the aisle.)

BARBARA. Hi, is this seat taken? Great. The bus is pretty full, huh? *(Sits on the stage.)* Me? I'm going to Fort Worth to visit my grandmother. She's ninety-four and sharp as a tack. I'm Barbara. That was my grandmother's name too. She was one of the first woman doctors in Fort Worth. She's a pulmonary surgeon. What do I do? Well, I'm about to become myself, because I have been another self for a very long time. I should explain that huh? I have had a problem and it's a very serious problem. I am—I'm really sorry to say this—very smart ... really smart. I mean off the charts smart, like crazy smart. And the really terrible part of that is that it has nothing to do with me. It's a quality, not an accomplishment. Like blue eyes. I'm not proud of it, in fact I'm horrified. When I had just started to walk, I saw my dad play chess. One game I saw. And then I beat him. My mother read to me. And when she finished, I could say the book back to her word for word. I don't even want to tell you the things I could do before I was five, or before I was seven. A very famous college. It was disastrous. And parents are confused about such a thing. They think it's their doing. They show you off as if you were a dog that could play dead or a parrot who could recite *War and Peace*. It's not their fault, they can't help themselves and you—me—we want to please our parents and they like it so much when you win things. They wanted me to win the National Spelling Bee. So I did when I was four. I won National Science Fairs, and speech contests, and the United States of America Mathematics Olympiad—I won that blindfolded. I won all these things I never cared about. Things I didn't

think were me, it was just something I could do. And the more I won, the more the other kids didn't like me and the other parents didn't like my parents, but my parents were obsessed. Finally my only real friend, Tina Bardick, told me that my being so smart really hurt her feelings and she wouldn't come over any more. So I knew I had to stop. I had to stop being smart if I wanted any happiness at all because I was a freak and people would laugh at me and point at me and play tricks on me and I cried all the time. So I fell down the concrete stairs at the college on purpose. And they took me to the hospital in an ambulance and I had a broken wrist which was really the only damage, but I played as if I couldn't wake up for two days and then I pretended I wasn't smart anymore, that I was just a ten-year-old with a ten-year-old brain. That I didn't speak seven languages and didn't know game theory or matrix theory or set theory or convex geometry and that I couldn't solve the problem of additive number theory or dynamic systems which of course, I could. I just seemed to know the stuff you were supposed to know in fifth grade. My parents were devastated, but they didn't have to go around being brilliant and being hated for it like I did. But kids and people who hadn't known me before were really nice because I was nice and I was just like them. It felt wonderful, like I was on a team and kids would eat lunch with me. So I got a whole lot of positive reinforcement for not being who I was. But, the thing is, I hope I'm not boring you, the thing is it's been sort of like going blind. By being what I'm not I gradually forgot what I am. Does that make sense? See, after I see grandma I'll come back and graduate from high school again, only this time I'll be seventeen instead of nine. See, I went back to high school in a different city under a different name. I was very careful only to have a B average, but I've been

accepted at the University of Nebraska and I'll go there and let myself be smart again. Do you think it will be all right? Do you think people will let me, because I'm the right age? I hope so, I hope so. I've been so lonely for myself. It's hot isn't it? See if I was myself I would say it's hot because of the tilt of the earth's axis. It has a slight "lean" as it rotates relative to the plane of its orbit and this axial tilt causes the earth's northern and southern halves to be in different levels of sunlight leading to seasonal changes in the amount of energy received from the sun. Oh my. It's almost feels like being drunk to say something I know. Did you mind? Oh I'm so glad you didn't. I do think it's dangerous not to be who you are. In the end, when you look in the mirror there's no one there. I think when I'm myself again I will throw a party for me. I will pop out of a giant cake in a red swimsuit and throw confetti on everyone and I will say, "Hi everybody, I was someone else and now I'm not, and to celebrate my escape from darkness I will prove, which no one has been able to do, that in mathematics there does exist what is called a "Hadamard matrix" for every positive multiple of four. And there will be some people who will cheer and hug me and invite me into their lives and know me. Oh dear, you went to sleep. But I don't care. I'm me.

(Blackout.)

Cheers

(A CHEERLEADER, with pompoms, appears.)

CHEERLEADER. Defense, defense that's our cry. You try to pass on us, you're gonna fry!

You know, stuff like that. My daddy, Augustus Aurelius Catsap ... Gus for short ... he played on a softball team called the Denton Silos till he was fifty-eight years old. Every Sunday during the season, Mom would pack a bologna sandwich lunch and go out to Andrew Jackson Park and cheer Augustus on. "Go get 'em, Gus! Knock the skin off that ball." And words to that effect. She must have gone to a couple hundred games even though the Denton Silos were kind of "no hit, no field," if you know what I mean. So we were sitting down to breakfast one day, an' she looks up from eggs over easy, country sausage and home fries, like she had just been hit by a train, and Mom says, "See here, Gus, how come you never cheer for me?" And that's where Daddy made his mistake, because he said, "Darlin' you don't play a thing but the piano." So Mom leans forward and cups his chin in her hand and says, "Augustus ... " an' you know trouble is on the fast track when she calls him by his full name. "Augustus, last time I looked, we resided in the twenty-first century where I may not get equal pay, but I believe the time has come for equal cheers." Boom! See I had this white flash go off in my brain like I get sometimes in bible study, which I asked Pastor Greene about and he called it "revelation," which I wrote down his definition of being "something surprising made known in a dramatic way," and that says a mouthful in the present case. Well Mom and me instituted some, what you might call, structural changes in the cheers department, based

on Dad's desire to eat meals, because that man's attempt to cook were an apocalypse. Mom figures she spent three hours weekly for Dad down at the softball games, but she knows the twenty-first century and all its equality issues are pretty hard on Gus, she only wants one hour of cheer time back. Mom, she's some kind of genius at hooking rugs. She won the hooked rug blue ribbon nine out of eleven years at the state fair. She's like the LeBron James of rug hooking. So she made the following deal in exchange for continued meals: For one hour, every Sunday night, I put on my cheerleader stuff and Dad puts on a white sweater Mom gave him that says "hooker" in big red letters across his chest, and while Mom hooks her fabulous rugs, Dad and I are her cheer squad. As in:

Loop that yarn

Stick it under the hook

Do it just like the instruction book.

Gooooo, Chastity!

Chastity, for clarity, being Mom's first name ... who knows why. Now to add a little flash and dash, I taught Dad some real simple cheer choreography like this:

Da dadi da

Da de dadi dadi da

Da dadi dadi dadi da da da

Goooo Chastity!

He was a little embarrassed at first, because he's not too agile, but that man wanted supper so he persevered. He got pretty good, really he did. Didn't satisfy Mom though. She said she cheered for him in public at the ball park and she wanted him to do the same at the state fair, where she shows

her rugs and the judges, who are about a hundred years old, walk in-between the tables eyeballing the rugs like they was checking a dog for fleas before they hand out the ribbons. Well Daddy, he just about had a conniption fit, red in the face, spewing out Red Buffalo chewing tobacco while he talked, his eyebrows knit so close together they looked like one eyebrow and he's yelling, "You think I'm going to dance around like this in front of people at the state fair and yell this stupid stuff? I would rather kill myself by eating those rugs like a pepperoni pineapple pizza, Chastity!" Which is her first name, remember? And he stomped off, slamming three doors and making the floor shake like a five-point-two earthquake. I looked over at Mom and she just looked away with this funny little smile pulling up the corners of her lips, and she was humming her favorite song, which is Justin Bieber singing "Wait a Minute." See, she thinks Justin Bieber is sensitive and misunderstood. After a little bit she whispers to me, "Your father has redneck tendencies, but after a little bit when his brain re-engages, he will see what's right and do what's right, otherwise, I might have to revoke some privileges." Well she was off on the timing some because it was bone-chilly around the house for three weeks and there wasn't a shred of dinner, so he ate poblano flameburgers at the drive-thru every night and it was a burp festival straight on through till dawn. That poor man said he threw away the fries because he said they tasted like month old cardboard dipped in grease and salted. Finally, one week before the fair, he just came right up and threw a bear hug on Mom, and said, OK, he would cheer at the fair, but he was wearing dark glasses, a false moustache and a Donald Trump wig. And Mom, she hugged him back, but she told him he would do it in his own face and his own hair. And thus it came to pass that Daddy and me went down

to the state fair in our matching cheerleader costumes. And when they laid that blue ribbon on Mom's rug, which had this perfect picture of a python eating a naked mole rat on it. We went right into our routine:

Hook 'em, hook 'em
Shake 'em till you shook 'em
Salt 'em up and cook 'em
Chastity, Chastity!
Blue ribbon blue!

We did three more, but you get the idea. Well, there was this real deep, real profound silence for about fifteen seconds and then the hooked rug exhibit just rocked out! People cheered till they was so hoarse it sounded like a bullfrog convention. After that, there was a hundred bodies lined up for his autograph and we got our picture in the paper and he went on to be nominated as feminist of the year! Though he finished second on a technicality, which I thought was gender bias, but we just let it pass. Daddy and me, we've been doin' it at the state fair for three years now, and the crowds is ginormous. Daddy, he went whole hog and started doing it in a skirt. It's a sight to behold. You come on down, he's got pompoms.

(Blackout.)