

You Have Two Voices

You have two voices when you speak
in English or your mother tongue.
When you speak the way your people spoke
the words don't hesitate but flow
like rivers, like rapids, like oceans of sound,
and your hands move like birds through the air.

But then you take a stranger's voice
when you speak in your new tongue.
Each word is a stone dropped in a pool.
I watch the ripples and wait for more.
You search in vain for other stones to throw.
They are heavy. Your hands hang down.

You have two voices when you speak;
I have two ears for hearing.
Speak to me again in your mother tongue.
What does it matter how little I understand
when the words pour out like music
and your face glows like a flame.

- Nancy Prasad