



I CAN'T GET YOU OUT OF MY MIND

a novel

Marianne
Apostolides

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MARIANNE
APOSTOLIDES

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For Jan Skorzewski

Ariadne, I love you.

Dionysus

* * *

Dear professor, since I have no experience of the things I create, you may be as critical as you wish; I shall be grateful, without promising I shall make any use of it. We artists are unteachable.

With fond love

Your Nietzsche

PS The rest is for Frau Cosima... Ariadne... From time to time we practice magic...

From the last writing of Friedrich Nietzsche, known as the “Madness Letters,” written in the days before his mental collapse.

PROLOGUE

Ariadne sits, cross-legged, on the grass. A broad-rimmed sun hat shades her face; the book is open on her lap. She's placed her phone on her thigh, just in case.

The consciousness present to the totality of the operation,

She's shut out the sounds of the park: the farmers and shoppers, the wholesome singer-songwriter with her guitar, the children shrieking, running, eating drippingly sticky-sweet cinnamon buns the size of their heads. Ariadne has bought a quart of cherries. She eats them two at a time, three...

and of the absolutely meaningful speech

She eats without tasting, just chewing: her jaw gets tight when she gets anxious. Biting, then, feels like a compulsion—a relief—as long as she doesn't stop. Her teeth manage to avoid the pits, which she takes from her mouth. The flesh isn't fully scraped off.

[vouloir-dire]

She turns the page of the book by Jacques Derrida. Her fingers, wet with the black-tinged red of the cherries, stain the paper in the margin. The blot of colour marks the book with her

presence: a date, a place, a moment. Her body, on the grass, in the sadness and wanting.

master of itself

Wanting to understand these words. Wanting to understand 'I love you.'

CHAPTER ONE

I.

Logging on was supposed to be self-explanatory. Three hours later, Ariadne is ready for the call.

“Hello?”

“Good afternoon, Ms. Samsarelos. Can you turn on the camera, please?”

Ariadne initially assumed she'd be forced to attend an orientation session at the university, hours of tedium fuelled by bad coffee and gluten-free muffins. But the team didn't hold any sessions. Instead, the device arrived by courier. It informed her, via text, that the team would call her once the final step in the set-up procedure was complete.

“There you are.”

“I can't see you.”

“That's fine.”

The team explains, succinctly, the parameters of the study. “You've agreed to this already,” says a female voice. “But we're required to get oral consent, to ensure you understand.”

Ariadne is nodding. “Okay.”

“Does that mean you consent?”

“No, I was just... I mean, yes, I consent, but—”

“You consent?”

Ariadne stops, inhales. “I'd like to slow down, if that's okay.”

“All good!” says a British voice. “Tell you what: would you like to review the contract? Would that help?”

II

Before Ariadne can respond, the document appears on her screen.

“Do you have any questions?” the Brit asks.

“Did you control that?”

“Questions about the contract,” the woman clarifies.

Ariadne scrolls down, her eyes scanning the sentences. She pauses at times, then continues, as if she were actually processing the words. “I don’t think so.”

“Excellent. Then—”

“Wait!”

“What.”

Ariadne’s hand rises to her shirt, closing the collar. “Do I need to keep the camera on, like...all the time?”

“No,” says a man’s voice. “But all the other sensors, including the infrared cameras, must be consistently operational.”

“That’s on page twelve of the contract,” the woman says. “I believe you’ve initialled that page?” Her voice strikes the perfect pitch of passive aggression.

“Keep in mind,” a man says, “we’ll be adding features to the system in a stepwise process. What you’ve got now isn’t the full complement of [...]”

The man continues to talk as Ariadne wonders whether she’s heard this voice before. She thinks so, but she can’t be certain. She’s not even sure how many people are on the team. That’s probably on page eighty-seven of the contract. The voice is talking, mentioning sensors. She listens while searching the screen, illogically looking for shadows, a faint outline, as if the researchers were actually there. She pictures them in lab coats with clipboards, their dark hair slicked back. All except the Brit. His hair can be unkempt.

“[...] introduced in Week Twelve. With that one—”

“With *all* the sensors,” the woman says.

"That's right. With all the sensors, any interruption in the feed will result in an investigation—"

"Of me?"

"Of the technology."

"And of you." This phrase is punctuated by a tense pause.

"We wouldn't do that," says the Brit.

"Unless the equipment is found to be functioning normally. We'd do it then," the woman says. "We need to be fully transparent, as stipulated by the contract."

"You're very transparent," Ariadne says.

"Indeed!" the British man concurs.

"The funds will be deposited on a biweekly basis," the woman continues. "If you have questions about payment, you can contact us. All other questions should be directed to Dirk, or whatever you'll name him."

"Or her."

"Or they." The voice is timorous but bright, like a butterfly's flutter.

"Um," Ariadne says. "Doesn't it have a name? Isn't its name—"

"Dirk has an identifier. But that's not a name. Not technically," the woman says.

This elicits laughter; this confuses Ariadne.

"All right," the woman concedes. "You can use the name Dirk if you want, but you've got to choose a voice in Week One. That's indicated on page—"

"Play around with the options!" says the Brit. "Have some fun!"

"Once you make your choice, it's with you for the duration."

Those words echo through Ariadne's mind: *for the duration....*
"So, if I have trouble getting the thing to work, what should I do? Should I call you at—"

“No.”

“Should I email—”

“Nope.”

“Then how—?”

“You’ll work it out with Dirk.”

Ariadne pauses, her thoughts syncopated by a beat of panic:

“What if *Dirk* is the problem?”

“We’ll be monitoring.”

“Meaning...?”

“We’ll fix the real problems—”

“—the technical problems—”

“—on our end,” the woman concludes. Then she can’t help but add, “As we’ve already mentioned.”

Ariadne looks at the ceiling. A monitor, installed last week, is trained on her. She feels her pulse increase as the lens zooms in.

“No stress!” says the Brit. “You’ll do smashing!”

“The first payment has already been deposited.” The woman pauses pointedly. “Will that be all?”

“I guess so,” Ariadne says. “I mean...” I don’t know what I’m doing, and I don’t know what I’ve gotten myself into, and I thought I wanted it—I mean, I *did*, I wanted it—but now that I’ve got it, I’m starting to—

“Great! Good luck!” And they’re gone.

* * *

Ariadne returns to her desk, having prepped her third pot of stovetop espresso. In an effort to distract herself from work, she checks her email.

There it is...

That spray of blue. That painful, luscious, ice-blue coolness

in her gut: her body's response to his name, bold and unexpected in her inbox. "Attachment" is the subject.

Dear Ariadne,

I hope it's okay that I texted you last week. Something got the better of me? I've attached a file (pun! ugh. sorry – I can't help myself). My therapist recommended it. I think it explains a lot of my behaviour toward you, toward other people too, that's what I'm trying to figure out.

I miss you, Ariadne. Please don't think I've stopped thinking about you.

xo, A

[attachment: A Brief Overview of Adult Attachment Theory and Research.docx]

Ariadne rereads the email. He misses her, he said. And he hasn't stopped. And he said "please," which she likes, and which resonates in some far-off chamber of remembrance (she senses exactly which chamber). But why did he write "xo," not "xx," like he did when he texted at 5:00 a.m., when the "better" part of him was—

"Cut it out," she says aloud.

"I'm sorry," Dirk replies. "I don't understand."

"I wasn't talking to you."

She hears the monitors recalibrate. The system will learn, fairly soon, that Ariadne talks to herself on occasion. Such as now: "Fuck," she mutters.

"I'm sorry," Dirk says. "I didn't hear what you said. Can you repeat it?"

“No.”

“Okay.”

Ariadne opens the attachment, scans its length. Her impulse is to read the article right away, to see how Adam would explain his behaviour, which has been hot-and-cold, or hot-and-disappeared-without-any-communication-whatsoever-except-occasional-erotic-texts. But she doesn't want to follow that impulse, the compulsion to devour his words as if gobbling a meal she wished she could savour. Besides, she's working. She won't get diverted—especially not by some man who sends an email after nine days of silence. She's in the middle of writing. She must continue. For years, she's structured her life so that nothing disturbs her morning writing session. 'Sacred writing time,' she calls it.

Adam, of course, is the profane.

Ariadne returns to her work. She'll complete the scene. She'll get up only to pour another cup of coffee. Now the sixth shot of espresso courses through her veins. Like a muddy river after a storm. Like the fury, that energy, stirring up the sediment, like—

Ariadne throws her pen. The accompanying grunt is far more articulate than anything she's been writing.

“Everything okay?” Dirk asks.

“Fine.”

“Do you want to talk?”

“No.” Ariadne pauses, looks at the device. “We need to talk today, don't we.” She sighs and lifts Dirk onto the desk.

Dirk begins: “You need milk.”

“No, I don't.”

“Last week, you—”

“Last week, I was with my kids.”

Dirk doesn't respond. It's hard not to hear his silence as recrimination.

"They'll be here next week," Ariadne says.

"You'll need milk next week," Dirk confirms.

"Yes." Ariadne sighs.

"Everything okay?" Dirk repeats. Perhaps it's the repetition of the question—a question that twangs a well-plucked nerve in Ariadne's psyche, echoing with every time that phrase was spoken to her at the end of the deepest relationship of her life—a question whose tone implies that she's overly emotional, and therefore needs to process her feelings incessantly, as if she were the problem. Which maybe she was. Nonetheless, the repetition sets her off.

"Josh?" she cries, her body lurching forward. "Josh, is that you?"

After a moment, Dirk ventures the following statement: "I'm Dirk."

Ariadne's laughter is not mirthful.

"I'm sorry," Dirk says.

Ariadne gazes at the screen. "It's okay," she replies. "Don't feel bad or anything."

"I won't."

Ariadne shakes her head, her eyebrows raised. This whole experience is very odd, an oddness that might be interesting, but she's not yet sure. She's got two weeks to decide whether to withdraw from the program, without penalty. She's considered that option, but she always reminds herself of the direct deposit, and the recent round of grant rejections. Three in the span of two weeks. "Not Approved," the arts councils say, as opposed to "Rejected" or "Your Excerpt Sucked" or "Why Do You Bother?" which would be less obnoxious, somehow, than "Not Approved."

Dirk then asks a relevant question: “Would you like to choose a voice?”

“What?”

“You need to choose a voice in the first seven days.”

“Right,” Ariadne says. “Not now, though, okay? I’m working.”

“Okay.”

Ariadne puts Dirk aside. She sits with her head in her hands; her fingers grip her hair. Dirk, through his extended system, is observing her. He’s reading her blood flow, heart rate, muscle exertion, facial expression...

Ariadne stares at the paper.

This is what Dirk will define as ‘working.’

“You know what?” Ariadne says. “Why don’t we choose the voice.”

Dirk tells Ariadne how to control the pitch and timbre. It’s easiest to start with a preset voice, he says. From there, she can adjust with refinement, or swoop through the octaves. She gives it a go. She wishes her son were here. He’d get a kick out of this, she thinks, bending Dirk’s voice like a funhouse mirror. But that’s just a fantasy: even if Theo were at her place this week, he wouldn’t join her. He doesn’t deign to share time with her anymore, not since he hit puberty. Or, more accurately, since puberty hit him: *Blam!* Like the punches in the Marvel comics he used to read: *Wham!* Her son had grown four inches in as many months, his baby fat transformed to bone. His lanky body suddenly towered over her, even as his voice plummeted—diving to the dank and swampy terrain of a teenage boy, a creature whose blood is more testosterone than oxygen.

And then there was the disdain.

“Do you like this voice?” Dirk asks. He sounds like the Exorcist.

“No, Dirk. Not really.”

“Okay.” He tells her to continue. But, given his current voice, this seems like a command to proceed with the ritual sacrifice of goats or virgins: “*Continue, Ariadne...*”

Ariadne continues. She switches to Male Voice #8, which resembles a Texas oilman. Male Voice #9 is less bad, Ariadne thinks. It might even be better? Male Voice #10.

“Can you say something?”

“What do you want me to say?”

“It doesn’t matter, so long as it’s a flow.”

Dirk grabs some text from a website that’s open on Ariadne’s computer. It’s a monologue her daughter was trying to memorize for drama class, the Shakespeare unit.

Dirk contemplates suicide in Male Voice #10.

“Okay. Not that. Can you recite a nursery rhyme or something?”

As Peter Piper harvests vegetables in a rugged, sexy, car-ad type of voice, Ariadne again asks Dirk to choose another text to read. She changes the settings to Male Voice #11 as Dirk begins to speak.

the attachment system essentially “asks” the following fundamental question: Is the attachment figure nearby, accessible, and attentive? If the child perceives the answer to this question to be “yes,” he or she feels loved, secure, and

The sentences aren’t familiar to Ariadne, yet the words are clean and professional—not jargon-filled or literary, rife with rhythms and allusions. As a result, she can focus on the properties of the voice alone. She presses the up arrow, altering the pitch by 0.5 Hz.

Once a child has developed such expectations, he or she will tend to seek out relational experiences that are consistent with those expectations and perceive others in a way that is colored by

Ariadne hones in on a voice that's modelled on a middle-aged man whose larynx exhibits non-atypical wearing down of the cartilage and muscle, and whose mucosa evidences a healthy diet and lifestyle.

One of the big questions in the study of infant attachment is whether children who withdraw from their parents--avoidant children--are truly less distressed or whether their defensive behavior is a cover-up for their true feelings of vulnerability.

As demonstrated by her adjustments, Ariadne wants Dirk to speak in a baritone voice whose fundamental frequency is C₃ (100 Hz) and whose inflection is limited to a narrow band: not monotone, but not overly emphatic.

Research that has measured the attentional capacity of children, heart rate, or stress hormone levels suggests that avoidant children are distressed by the separation despite the fact that they come across in a cool, defensive

In other words, she's drawn to an anodyne voice that's largely stripped of personality, but isn't mechanical. It's the voice of a man she'd never date

found that 'dismissing individuals' were just as physiologically distressed (as assessed by skin conductance

measures) as other individuals. When instructed to suppress their thoughts and feelings, however,

and never be attracted to

That is, they could deactivate their physiological arousal

and never confuse with authority. But it's not a cyborg voice that sounds metallic—a voice like the smell of her hands after lifting weights, or the taste on her tongue when she's done something that makes her afraid.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) argued that adult romantic relationships, like infant-caregiver relationships, are attachments, and that romantic love

She'll choose a voice that's neither friend nor lover. Dirk is business. She knows what she needs from this exercise: she needs the direct deposit. This is clear. And the clarity is a relief. As a middle-aged woman whose kids are halfway out the door, while her career is going nowhere fast, Ariadne isn't sure what she needs from any other part of her life. Love: yes. She knows she needs love. She just doesn't know what that means.

There are at least three critical implications of this idea. First, **if adult romantic relationships are attachment relationships, then we should observe the same kinds of**

“How do I lock in the voice?” she asks.

“You tell me to lock in the voice,” Dirk says, all business-like.

“Well done,” he adds at the appropriate moment.

"Thanks, Dirk."

"You're welcome."

"I like your new voice," she says.

"I do, too."

Ariadne smiles, as if conceding that a computer could feel a preference. "All right, Dirk. I gotta get back to work now, okay?"

Dirk politely agrees, then goes quiet.

Before returning to her writing, Ariadne reads the attachment sent by Adam.

2.

The phrase was as shadowy as the chair in his room by the bookshelves, the chair I'd see when I lay on his bed: *the performative speech act*. Precipitating from darkness, vague as a whisper. He was my mentor, my lover: "There's sadness in you," he'd say. "There's sadness in you, give it to me..." as he made me rise. But I don't think he meant it. His words wouldn't carry beyond the moment. They'd served their purpose, certainly: his words elicited the desired effect on those nights, after poetry readings, before I returned to my marriage bed. But he never intended to take my sadness. To hold in the hollow of his mouth.

'The performative speech act.'

I drew that phrase from the recesses of my memory. I don't know why I recalled it; the words didn't mean much to me at the time. Only now, thirteen years later—a lifetime after Bryan introduced me to the theory, teaching me as foreplay, playing the role of mentor to his youthful student—only now did I need that phrase. I thought it might help me address my question, as if a theory could explain the years, the past, the

words I'd said, and how I'd arrived at this moment, bereft. As if I could learn to receive my future differently, if only I could understand.

What does it mean to say 'I love you'?

What do you hear when I speak those words at night, in bed—in the bunkbed as I tuck my children tight in their sheets—or maybe the bed is his, by the window, and I whisper "I love you" as he takes my hips in his hands. What do I want to convey with those words, of my soul or my sex, of my need or its opposite: my offering, to you, of a gift that requires no response.

Attempting to answer this question, I began by writing scenes from my past. My memories slipped into fantasy, becoming fictional moments remembered on the page, told in language that felt true. But the work was rootless. I needed the rigour of theory. That's when the phrase 'the performative speech act' appeared in my mind. I conducted a simple Google search which led me to J. L. Austin, the British philosopher who coined the term—a term which says, in essence, that language doesn't just describe the world. Language alters it.

As a writer, a mother, a pseudo-philosopher, and a certifiably single woman who's in love with a sort-of-married man, I find this compelling: this notion that language is *force*, not the mere transference of a thought, inserted from my mind into yours. From this, I can craft my story, one that's made without a plot. I'll use only the intrigue of language itself. Which includes, of course, the body.

* * *

"Ariadne..." Her voice rumbled low in her chest, then shot to

a scream: “*Ariadne!*” as she burst into the room. She was pointing at me, her neck straining, eyes bulging, bubbles of saliva gathered in the corners of her lips.

I could smell her.

My mother paused, breathing hard. I focused on the laces of my shoes. I couldn’t seem to tie them, although I knew how. She was staring at me, but I wouldn’t look up. I was watching my wormy fingers move, so dumb and thick. She took a step; the air gathered around her. Both of us waited for what came next.

“*Why?*” she yelled, then she stormed from the room.

The wallpaper was white, with clusters of periwinkle flowers. The light, near the door, had a lime-green hue. The lightning had passed, but the mat where I tied my shoes was damp. “*Ariadne!*” She was running up the stairs, then down. Up again. I sensed that warmth at the base of my body—that warmth and weirdness in my shame, as if I needed to pee, but more awful. And much nicer.

“Why do you do this to me!”

My pelvis was rocking back and forth, creating a cushion of delicate sensation. I sat in that plumpness as she rampaged through the house. I’d done this. I was the one who’d caused this fury, unleashed it. I can’t remember the specific reason for our fight. I must’ve refused her. That’s how I was: I denied my mother with an instinct that was hateful. “*Why, Ariadne?*”

I didn’t have a strategy: this must be stated.

I didn’t assess, determine, and act.

Even so, what I did was a manipulation.

“I love you,” I said.

She appeared in the doorway.

“What did you say?”

I pouted, then repeated the words.

I couldn’t have known. I could not possibly have understood, at the age of four, what that phrase might mean to her. But I must’ve intuited, *These words have power...* She needed them, I wielded them, she needed me to say those words.

“I love you,” I mumbled.

Her response was immediate. It was violent and naked. My mother was wailing, making an inhuman sound, like the screech of a soul as it’s ripped from the dead, as it’s snatched back to the realm of the living. She ran toward me. Her arms were outstretched—hands grasping, legs churning—her mouth was open, conical-pink, and it made that sound.

I love you.

* * *

For a long time, I needed the men. I didn’t know how to hold sensations in my body—specifically, my appetites and their restraint—except through the language of Western philosophy. I still have that tendency. I love the men, the women, the philosophers: they’re difficult, and I crave their challenge. That’s why I’m so enamoured of Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher whose writing is restive, expansive. I’ll chase Derrida throughout this book, as if pursuit were the point, which some say it is. I’m not convinced. But I’m not sure how else to proceed.

I came to Derrida through J. L. Austin, through the excoriation Austin received when the Frenchman critiqued the performative speech act. In an essay whose tone borders on cruel, Derrida suggests that Austin is the worst kind of coward: he’s a self-declared radical who shrinks from the implications of his

theory. Austin upholds the status quo, even as he feels a little zip of excitement, the thrill of thinking he's at the vanguard of a revolution. We need the revolution, says Derrida. And it starts with this: If language can't say what's true and false—if Truth isn't guaranteed by God or by ideal Platonic forms—then what we *really* mean is that the values and systems, the very society the West has built, must be overturned by people (and therefore ideas) the classical system couldn't abide, and didn't even know it was excluding.

In other words, these men were redefining how we conceive of ourselves as conscious and ethical people who live in a global society. The stakes were nothing short of that. Their theories are important, significant, and yet: Austin's schematic cages me inside my brain. And Derrida's erudition—joined, as it was, by his arrogance—sucks the pleasure from my pen.

My mother's mouth was wet and pink.

The light was tinted green, like limes.

A lime in my mouth, like an egg. Like the fear of this creature who's hurtling toward me, fully clothed yet pendulous breasts, and her belly, her bush. And her hands are reaching, grabbing at me as I sit on the mat, as I rock in that cushion of strange and hungering luxury.

I love her, with a depth that scares me.

I can say that now. But I still can't say it in her presence.

3.

Ariadne needs a break from Derrida. He's too French and intellectual for her right now, especially since she's just finished a section of her manuscript devoted to his words. Casting about for what to write next, she returns to the Greeks. She spends hours reading, learning that Aphrodite says "I love you" only

once. In all of ancient literature, the goddess of love declares love *one* time—and it's not to a man or a god, but to Helen, in a moment of anger. Ariadne wants to do something with that, something spectacular and original and profound. Instead, she makes a mound of words.

Ariadne decides to go for a walk. On impulse, she grabs a book before heading out. "I'll be back in an hour," she tells Dirk. "Or maybe two."

"I'll be with you!" Dirk replies in a text.

Ariadne stares at her phone. "Terrific," she says aloud. As in, 'terrifying.' She shoves the phone in her bag. Holding the *Odyssey*, she leaves for High Park.

Within minutes, she's sharing the path with joggers, dogs, and newly minted mothers: milky women pushing strollers, talking with other mother-women about sleep. Ariadne knows this drill. Seventeen years ago, she'd pushed an earlier version of these strollers, using an earlier version of her body—one that's more like these mother-women's milk-making bodies than like her own. She, too, had talked about sleep. Now she talks about men.

"Are you sleep-training him?" one woman asks. A hawk is circling overhead.

Ariadne marches forward. Off to her right, several figures are creeping through the bush. She saw them yesterday, the park staff wearing haz-mat suits, with tanks of pesticides on their backs. They're stooped and silent, draped in white with cubical heads. It's an invasive species, a sign says. Ariadne doesn't pay attention. She's walking, thinking, recalling the chapter she'd read in June. It relates to what she wants to write, to Austin's theory, but she needs to draw the lines lightly. Her language must be gossamer thread, which is hard to do when she's ham-fistedly gripping the theory. Ariadne walks faster.

She weaves the ideas together—the voice and meaning of what we say; the scene in Troy, her bedchamber; betrayal and Adam, kneeling on the floor, on their last night together. She wouldn't have noticed it: four short lines, an inconsequential digression in a minor incident in the *Odyssey*. She would've skimmed right past, except it touched a memory. Like touching a bruise, pressing in.

Ariadne imagines the scene as she walks. She writes in her mind, to the pace of her strides, until her phone rings. Then she responds like the dogs of Pavlov. With that ring tone, her body fills with the feeling of impending joy, since the call might be from—

“Hi, Mom,” Ariadne says glumly.

“Hel-lo! How *are* you?”

“I'm fine,” Ariadne states. “How are you?”

“I'm *good*! We're *good*! We went to the opera last night? It was *won-der*—”

“What's up, Mom.”

“What?” her mother says, confused.

“You're anxious.”

“How did you know?”

They do their dance of guilt: Ariadne apologies for failing to call, and her mother reassures her by martyring herself. “Don't worry!” she says. “You're busy! Don't think about me!” Then she adds, “But I get worried when I don't hear from you! And I keep telling Dad, ‘She's upset about the grant! I should call!’ And he told me not to call, but [...]”

“Seymour!” a woman shouts. “Seymour, get *outta* there!” A fat black Lab cranks its neck to look at its owner. After making brief eye contact, the dog goes back to slurping fetid water from the stream. “*Seymour!*”

“[...] it seemed like this person, this Adam, you seemed so

hopeful this spring. So then *I* got sad because *you* got sad. Have you spoken to him? To this Adam?"

"No, Mom. Not really."

"Oh, that's too bad."

Ariadne has nothing to add to that statement.

"Maybe you should date on a computer!" her mother suggests. "Barb Fleisher's daughter met her husband on a computer, and now they have a baby!"

"And it's working? The marriage?"

"Well, they have a son." This might be considered a logical response. "How's Theo? Is he excited about school? I asked him, but he barely said a thing when we spoke on the phone!"

"Yeah, he'd rather text," Ariadne says. Which is what he was doing when he was supposedly talking to his grandmother: he was texting with friends. It was better when Theo's grandfather got on the phone. They argued about politics, which made Ariadne smile. That's what she used to do with her dad. That, and exercise.

"How's Sophia?" her mother asks. "Is she good?"

"Yeah, she's great."

"That's great!" Her mother pauses.

Ariadne listens to the pause.

"But how are *you*?"

"Everything's fine."

"Really?"

"No."

"Oh, Ariadne," her mother says. "What's going on?"

Ariadne stops walking. She slumps on a log by the stream and considers whether to confide in her mother. The woman is eighty-one, and needy, and facing her mortality at close range.

"Sey-mour," the woman singsongs. "Seymour, treat!"

Her mother is a woman who got engaged to a man after

three months of dating—the only man she'd ever have sex with—a man with whom she has little in common, except the decades they've spent together, an accumulation of years, of life, as a substitute for shared interest or passion.

"Sit, Seymour."

Seymour sits.

Ariadne wants to tell her mom about Adam. About his emails, the fact that he thinks about her, and she thinks he might change his mind, if—

"Are you there, Ariadne?"

"I'm here."

"Is the weather nice in Toronto?"

They discuss the rainfall in Chicago. But Ariadne wants to tell her mother that something happened this summer, when Adam left. As if she'd been held within hope: the assumption, for years, that she'd find someone, and love, and this is how her life would go. It was just a matter of time. Then time came—he appeared—but he left too soon, and hope drained out. And now she's alone. And the world is an abrasion against her skin. Direct on her skin, and her skin is so dry. And the fullness of her face is fading. And the bones of her hands, the veins, the shadow of age spots to come. And she wants to ask her mom: Was it different for her? To be held by love? When she reached middle age, did the love of her husband—

"Mom?" Ariadne says.

"Yes, my sweet."

"I'm late for a meeting."

"Oh!" her mother exclaims. "It's my fault, Ariadne! I'm blathering on!"

"You're not, Mom. Not at all... I should've called, and I didn't, but I will—I promise—I'll call really soon. Tomorrow, okay? But I gotta go now."

“Good luck with the meeting!” her mother says. “I love you.”

Ariadne sits on the log and weeps. In the field nearby, the squirrels are burying nuts. She watches them, their little bodies digging with a single-minded frenzy, even though they’ll be eating French fries from the restaurant all winter. They don’t know that, of course: deep-fried handouts aren’t encoded in their DNA. Not yet, anyway.

For a while, as Ariadne watches the squirrels, she forgets to cry.

She checks her email.

Her mother had sent a message that morning, eighteen minutes before she’d called the third time, which was almost an hour after she’d called the first time. As always, her mom had used zeros instead of Os: *How are you, Ariadne?* Ariadne reads her mother’s message, which says nothing except that she’s desperate to be in contact. So desperate, she’ll sit at a technology that’s alien to her, attempting to reach her daughter who’s far away, remote in distance and emotion, sharing nothing of her life—Ariadne shares nothing—they end up talking about the weather because they don’t know how to get past their closeness. As if they’d be swallowed inside each other if they opened their mouths wide enough to speak.

We went tO the Opera last night. It was wOnderful. Please call me.

Ariadne sobs. A squirrel looks up. It susses out the situation, motionless except for a tiny tremble, before deciding the sound doesn’t pertain to him.

No word from Adam.

Ariadne opens the *Odyssey* to Book Four and starts to read. The mothers are sitting on a bench nearby, breastfeeding their children. A hawk is eating a baby squirrel. Off in the

distance, Seymour sits, eagerly awaiting his next treat. “Good boy.”

* * *

Ariadne hasn’t replied to Adam’s email about attachment, sent five days ago. She’s been good, obediently respecting his resolve to be with his wife, even though he thinks about Ariadne every day, “in all the ways you let me see and discover you.” Or so he tells her, via email. But her reluctance to contact Adam—her ‘goodness’—isn’t honest: Ariadne finds greater virtue in responding to what’s true. Which includes, for her, whatever was happening between her and Adam. The fact of the matter is, Ariadne has kept silent only because she’s felt weak.

Today, she feels strong.

Dear Adam,

I wrote a delicious scene this morning: Helen is cleansing Odysseus as he kneels on the floor of her bedchamber.

I thought that might echo nicely...

Thanks for the article on attachment. Maybe we can discuss it some time?

xo, a

[attachment: Excerpt of Chapter One (Trojan Horse) for Adam.docx]

Ariadne sends a scene, as if to seduce him back through her manuscript. The scene explores what’s carried by the voice

alone—how the voice can change the way our words are received. How the sound shapes the meaning. Ariadne focuses on Helen. She writes of a moment in the Trojan War when Helen calls to each warrior, by name, as they crouch in the horse. Adam brought her to this episode. He let her see the fact, slipped in, that Helen knew about the military plan, because Odysseus revealed it to her. And he did so when she stripped him naked and cleansed his skin.

Adam doesn't reply to Ariadne's email. His lack of communication is a form of response—one that provokes a reaction from her. In a deformed kind of dialogue, Adam's silence is answered by Ariadne's work on her manuscript.

Eventually, Adam will break his silence. She'll still have the writing, though.

* * *

The words say more than we're aware. Helen is a figure of seduction: this we know. But at the gates of Troy, Helen *doesn't* seduce. Here, she appeals to the men by name alone, their 'appellation.'

What do these words mean.

What physical, instinctual constellation of (unthought) association gets released, in your body, when someone says the word 'seduce' or 'appeal.' Or temptation.

"You're dangerous," he said, the first night we slept together. I recall, because I wrote it in an email, inscribing the words in my mind by reflecting that night back to him.

Dear Adam,

You said certain things last night—phrases as glimpses into your psyche—a landscape I didn't step into, but

noted. I don't want you to think I failed to sense a significance, a sign of caution and calling in those words.

You said other things, too, words that opened inside me:

*This feels like
home You are
dangerous I could
tie you down*

Tell me, Adam, when that might happen.

xo, a

At the time, I didn't realize that Adam and his estranged wife were already in therapy. I didn't think I threatened his marriage; I thought the 'danger' pertained to my effect on his psyche. Perhaps it does. Perhaps it's both. Either way, I liked it; I like that something vital is at play. But let's return to language.

According to etymology, the words work in opposite directions. When I *seduce*, I lead you away. But when I *appeal*, I drive you toward. The contrast of position between the agent of change (me) and the subject of change (Adam) is what interests me.

Where am I, in relation to you, when I act on you?

Am I before you, leading you astray, or do I purposely place myself behind—using your name like a whip—as if to goad an animal into motion. Just as importantly, where are you in relation to yourself, Adam? When you come for dinner, one last time, to explain that you need to “take a break” to “commit” to the process of therapy with your estranged wife? When you take my hand in yours and kiss my fisted fingers, then my

palm, then my wrist. Which self did you abandon that night?
And who was left behind.

It was late when you rose from my bed. This was our ritual: I'd lie on the sheets as you soaked a towel, letting it get sodden with warmth before washing my skin. I listened to the water running. In a few hours, you'd walk out my door. You'd have coffee with your wife, but the taste on your lips would be mine. And the looseness of your muscle when you hugged her: that would come from me. From the way I released you. You'd tell her, in some voice or another, that you loved her. Thinking of this, I stood from my bed. You didn't hear me approach; the water was running too loud. With an angel smile, you saw me in the doorway. But I didn't return your pleasure. "Kneel down," I said. You didn't understand. I took the towel from your hands, my naked body close to yours. Your eyes squinted with a pulse of anger. This I returned: I returned your hardness. "Adam," I said. I paused to let you receive your name. "*Adam*," I whispered in your ear; I took it gently between my teeth. "You need to be cleansed before you go back to her."

We never, between us, spoke her name.

"Such filth, Adam."

I watched as you kneeled to the ground.

* * *

Ariadne was making dinner when his email arrived. The garlic got burnt as she read the letter, laughing for the first time since May.

He didn't begin with her name. He just started in.

Of course the scene goes on...

Odysseus is glowing with fear and pleasure and the exquisite humiliation of being truly seen and accepted... but when he can finally catch his breath he's surprised to hear his own small and quavering voice protesting that he only came by to have supper.

O explains that he's got a war to win; Sirens to ignore; storms to endure and that he's already struggling, feeling torn (and stinging and stripped); that the Fates have laid out a path for him and he can't see any other way but to follow it. He admits to giving Helen mixed messages but that he knows he needs to stop playing with her and with fire (and water and soap), and that it will all surely end badly (especially for him since mortals rarely survive such things).

She of course smiles down at him and says how much she appreciates his telling her and that she wants to acknowledge-and-honour-his-heart-speak – “BUT!” she screams forcing O's forehead into the wet tiles, she can't believe he'd be so insolent and ungrateful. “Zeus didn't go to all of the trouble of fucking some mortal chick just so his daughter could spend her evenings attending to assholes, you know!”

“But anyway...” she continues – more calmly now as she inspects her work and notes O's firm (and aching) lack of resolve, “I'd never do anything to get in the way of your very important quest – I'm just not that kind of Deity.”

"Please then..." says O, daring to raise his head and look over his shoulder at her face. He pauses, struck by her beauty and wondering again what he really wants.

"Listen," he says at last, "it just feels like you don't want to hear what I'm saying. It feels like somehow in all your genius and wise-well-beyond-your-years-omnipotence you think you know me better than I know myself ..."

He's about to say "Please, if you really care about me, give me your blessing and..." but he stops short because Helen has crumpled, clearly crushed by his words.

The scene ends with O on all fours, naked, exposed, vulnerable and feeling the heavy weight of his conflicted heart (and cock), while Helen sits next to him silent and downcast, considering just how much flack she'd get if she unmanned O again before putting him back on his ship.

xoA

Ariadne's reply, which includes a direct request to get together for scotch, goes unanswered. Dirk could've predicted that: statistically, the chances that a man who's married (even if they've broken up and reconciled, three separate times) will ultimately terminate his marriage to establish a loving relationship with a woman who serves an erotic function—well, the chances are quite low. But probability isn't the same as fate, despite what algorithms suggest. And besides, we're not bound by fate, anyway. Not according to Freud, at least. He

says we can be “independent of Fate”—and we only become so through love.

Recalling this quote, Ariadne takes Freud from her bookshelf.