

The Institution

"A New Shadow"

By

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EXT. OLD ENGLISH MANSION - DAY

A line of endless black SUVs drive through metal gates and up to the doorstep of the mansion. Each car lets out a number of college freshman of different races and outfits. The only thing that unifies them is the fact that they all carry luggages.

INT. OLD ENGLISH MANSION - CONTINUED

ETHAN and DIANA are sitting in the lounge looking out the windows as the stream of students file out from the cars.

DIANA

Look at all the fresh meat.

ETHAN

You know, I'm not surprised if one day you'll be branded a pedophile.

DIANA

Clearly you don't know the english language if you think that it's pedophilc to like someone two years younger than you.

ETHAN

Oh you know what I mean. You're just so... predatorial.

DIANA

And what's wrong with being predatorial? Aren't we all here to understand the different perspectives of the world so that we can have world peace and what not?

ETHAN

"World peace", you make it sound so simple when in actuality it's not. It takes more than just understanding perspectives. Also it's just a little creepy when you refer to them as "Fresh meat".

DIANA

Yeah, yeah whatever. I've sat through enough world government, economic, and international health lectures to last me a lifetime. And it's not creepy. I just like what I see. So don't be hatin'.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

I am by no means "hatin'" on you. I'm simply stating that you sound like Hannibal when you call freshman fresh meat.

DIANA

Well, everyone's gotta eat at some point. Unless they're you. Studious Ethan with his straight A's and never ending perfection. I swear if I didn't see you bleed that one time in basic combat I would've thought you were a robot. Still, I guess you could be a cyborg.

ETHAN

God basic combat! Why do we even need to learn how to fight if we're trying to promote peace?

DIANA

So that we can protect those who can't defend themselves or did you not get that memo?

ETHAN

There are other ways to protect someone besides using physical means.

DIANA

You're just mad that I beat you. It's alright though. I am a Goddess after all. So you need not be ashamed.

ETHAN

Whatever. I'm just glad that I'm done with that class and I can focus on trying to get the shadowing position without aching everywhere.

DIANA

You're still fixating on that?

ETHAN

Yes! Who wouldn't want to shadow the head of a council?! It's a guaranteed job in the UN or any position of influence.

(CONTINUED)

DIANA

But you don't have to kill yourself to get it.

ETHAN

I want to be able to influence a number channels and graduating from here isn't going to get me there fast enough. Only that position will.

DIANA

Okay... Firstly, you've gone completely crazy. Please let me know when you're going to cut your ear off. Secondly, I thought all the shadowing positions were already taken?

ETHAN

Not all. For some reason one of the other students dropped out and now Irina Averin needs a new shadow. So I'm going to apply again.

DIANA

Well, I sure hope Jesus will take the wheel and drive you all the way to that goal, but until then please try not to die from your insanity.

ETHAN

Thanks. I'll keep that in mind

DIANA

Good. I'm glad you still have a functional one.

The trail of SUVs finally ends.

ETHAN

It's time. We should be in place before Irina kills us both for being late.

Diana and Ethan make their way to the foyer and stand among three other upperclassmen. The last SUV leaves the compound and the metal gates seal shut behind them. The last student walks through the double doors of the mansion into a crowded foyer. THUD! The doors shut tight and IRINA AVERIN walks down the grand staircase and stops on the middle island so that they all can see her.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

Welcome to Equilibrium. My name is Irina Averin and I am one of the eleven heads of council here. I know you all must be tired from your journey especially for the international students. So I will be brief. All of you are brilliant which is why you were chosen to be here, but your acceptance here is just that. You may have been the brightest star in your world, but now you are among constellations. So a word of advice as you step through these arches. Aristotle once said "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." Remember that and I have no doubt that you will be able to change the world when you leave this institution. Now if you could follow these five upperclassmen they will show you to your respective halls and living situations. The orientation dinner will begin at 6pm and I look forward to seeing you then. Good luck.

Ethan and Diana along with the three upperclassmen gather their herd of new students and lead them away in five separate directions. Irina watches the last of them file out.

VINCENT (OS)

So how do they look?

VINCENT is on the banister of the second floor.

IRINA

Young.

Irina begins to climb the stairs.

IRINA

Some seem promising. Although I can already tell we will have a hard time with others.

VINCENT

Really?

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

It's always easy to spot pride.

Irina reaches the top of the stairs. They begin to walk down the hall.

IRINA

So what favor do you need of me?

VINCENT

(laughs)

Was it really that obvious?

IRINA

Small talk only masks so much.

VINCENT

Very well. It came to my attention that a student who was supposed to shadow you this year has had... complications.

IRINA

Indeed, but he will be fine.

VINCENT

Well I have come to ask you to carefully consider a student of mine.

IRINA

Tell them to file their application to the council like the rest of the students.

VINCENT

She already has.

IRINA

Then she will be considered.

VINCENT

No, you misunderstand me. She is a very excellent student and I know that she will achieve extraordinary things if she were given the chance.

IRINA

It was your mistake for not choosing her to be your shadow this year. If she is so promising switch her out with your own.

(CONTINUED)

VINCENT

And lose face to the rest of the council? No thank you. Besides they are both equally skilled in their fields which is why I am asking you to take her on.

IRINA

Since she is so brilliant stop telling me whom I should choose because I'm sure she will be the one. Unless you're afraid of something else?

VINCENT

Only that you will make the wrong decision.

IRINA

Sometimes mistakes can bring about better circumstances than the choices we think are right.

VINCENT

That or it will turn into utter disaster. Do you really want to flip that coin?

IRINA

Always.

They have reached the library doors.

VINCENT

Do it for Kazan.

(beat)

IRINA

She must be something special for you to bring that up.

Irina begins to open the library doors.

IRINA

I will see you at dinner.

Irina enters the library and closes the door. Vincent walks away.

EXT. IRINA'S OFFICE - MORNING

Ethan is walking fast down the hallway towards Irina's office. He enters the waiting area and adjusts his clothes and hair until it is perfectly placed. Then he knocks on the door.

IRINA (OS)
Come in!

Ethan opens the door just as HELEN exits.

INT. IRINA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

IRINA
Ethan, please sit.

ETHAN
Thank you Ms. Averin.

Ethan pulls out the chair across from Irina

IRINA
Just Irina will do. You don't have to be so formal. Although I do appreciate the courtesy.

ETHAN
Thank you, Irina.

Ethan sits down as stiff as a board.

IRINA
There is also no reason to be so petrified. Sit back and relax. Not all dragons bite.

(Beat)

ETHAN
I uh, never implied that you're-

IRINA
I'm just kidding. What's the point in making jokes if you can't poke fun at yourself every once and a while?

ETHAN
Haha- yeah... I agree.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

You must be wondering about your application to being my shadow.

ETHAN

Yes I was and if I may ask did I make a mistake?

IRINA

No. Everything is in order. Your test scores are almost perfect, your essay was intriguing, and your resume was impressive. I just called you in to get a better sense of the students who might be a potential shadow.

ETHAN

Oh I see.

IRINA

Would you like some coffee?

Irina rises and walks to a pot of coffee on the counter to her left.

ETHAN

Sure.

She pours a cup for herself and Ethan.

IRINA

Cream or sugar?

ETHAN

Oh no thank you.

She hands a cup to Ethan and sits back down across from him. Ethan takes one sip and sets the cup down. Irina smiles and drinks her coffee.

IRINA

So what do you want?

ETHAN

I'm sorry?

IRINA

What do you want?

(Beat)

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

Pardon me, but I don't understand the question.

IRINA

Everyone wants something in life and most of the time they are very persistent in finding different ways of attaining it. So let me ask you one more time. What do you want?

ETHAN

Um... I just simply would like a promising future... and I guess you would help me provide the means of getting there if I were to be your shadow. So... in all honesty I would just really like the job.

IRINA

(laughs)

Now don't be boring. Of course everyone wants a promising future otherwise they wouldn't be here. So why don't you try taking another stab at that question.

Irina takes another drink from her coffee.

ETHAN

Well, I guess I just want to be able to protect people.

(Beat)

ETHAN

I mean since we are all constantly striving for happiness and peace in our world that implies that there will always be an opposing force trying to counteract that. So I believe that protection is the first step in helping all of us.

IRINA

So tell me then who do you protect?

ETHAN

Those that have been justifiably wronged and oppressed.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

And how can you tell the difference? After all in the eyes of a terrorist he believes that what he does is justified and that he has been wronged by those who do not stand in his beliefs.

ETHAN

But a terrorist has taken lives. So morally he is the one who has wronged others.

IRINA

Nuclear bombs have been dropped on other nations for the sake of self-defense and going by your moral standards we would be the ones who have wronged others.

ETHAN

Yes, but we had to make the choice of choosing the lesser of two evils otherwise more lives would've been taken.

IRINA

And what if we were wrong? What if we only did that because we had more power, and that what the axis powers believed in could truly create a better world?

ETHAN

Anything that requires the taking of lives isn't better.

IRINA

And yet those bombs flew anyway. So tell me again how do you tell the difference?

ETHAN

I guess... very carefully.

IRINA

(laughs)

Well, we'll just have to see how carefully you do won't we?

ETHAN

I'm sorry I'm not following you.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

You and another student will be taking a mock scenario of potential international events and I will be judging to see who is fit for the job.

ETHAN

Oh.

IRINA

It will be this friday and I will send you the details of when and where. It was a pleasure meeting you Ethan, but now if you will excuse me I have a meeting to attend to.

Irina finishes her coffee and takes both her cup and Ethan's cup that is still full and places it back on the counter. Ethan rises.

ETHAN

Thank you for your consideration.

Ethan begins to exit.

IRINA

Ethan, I wouldn't stress about it too much.

ETHAN

Yes. Thank you Ms. Av- I mean, Irina.

Irina smiles and nods. Ethan exits.

INT. COUNCIL MEMBER'S CHAMBER - DAY

Ten council members are seated in the arc of a semicircle table. They are all talking among themselves as Irina walks through the double doors of the room. She takes a seat on the third left chair from the middle of the table. MARCUS is seated in the middle of the arc.

IRINA

Sorry I'm late. I was in a meeting with a potential shadow.

MARCUS

We know.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

I take it that that is the reason this meeting was called into session today?

MARCUS

That is correct. Your little shadow incident has caused a lot of disturbances recently.

IRINA

The boy will be fine.

MARCUS

No doubt, but has there been any new information on the subject?

IRINA

We're still investigating into who attempted to take his life and if it is still connected to the shadowing position or if it was just because of his family's previous connection to the underworld.

MARCUS

I see. However that is not the only reason we are all called now. It has come to our attention that you have scheduled personal interviews and a test to find a new shadow.

IRINA

That is true.

MARCUS

I didn't think you needed any reminder of how this council operates. The personal interviews with the students are fine, but you should have addressed us when you decided to create your own personal mock examination.

IRINA

Finding a new shadow was my responsibility. Therefore I took it upon myself to see who would be the best candidate.

(CONTINUED)

MARCUS

That is what the application process and exams are for. You should not have used your power to take things into your own hands otherwise this whole council would be out of balance.

IRINA

As I recall each of us are the reason why this council has power in the first place. So do not imply that my power was bestowed upon me from you. And with all due respect every single member at this table has at one point or another used their power without the council's permission, or did you forget the New York incident already Marcus?

Marcus looks infuriated and tightens his whole body. Irina stares back coldly. The other members of the council shift nervously in their seats.

VINCENT

I am responsible.

They all turn to Vincent who is seated to the right of Marcus.

VINCENT

I insisted that Irina take a closer look into the applicants as we did not want another incident like the last to occur again. If it were a student who made the attack because they wanted the position then doing so would allow us to find out who the culprit is, and if it wasn't a student then maybe the culprit would show himself again at the test. Either way we hope that this would entice them to come out. We did not divulge this information because we did not want to scare the culprit away if they knew that the whole council was watching. For that I am sorry. I realize now that I should have brought this up to everyone.

Irina looks surprised for a second, but then regains her composure. Marcus begins to regain his composure as well.

(CONTINUED)

MARCUS

You are right; you should have. We all must act as one now especially after a student has been attacked. With that said I think we can all let this misunderstanding pass.

Everyone nods in agreement.

VINCENT

Thank you all and again I apologize.

MARCUS

Well then if anyone makes any progress into the incident please let us all know. This meeting is adjourned.

Everyone rises and each member slowly files out of the room. Irina and Vincent meet once the other members are out of earshot.

IRINA

The great deceiver works his magic yet again.

VINCENT

What, not even a thank you?

IRINA

I can handle my own problems thank you.

Irina walks out of the room leaving Vincent behind.

INT. DINING HALL - AFTERNOON

Diana enters the dining hall with her tray of food. She goes to the end of a long table where Ethan is finishing his food and reading a book. Helen is sitting in the middle of the table near them. She is also immersed in reading a book.

ETHAN

You're late.

DIANA

"A wizard is never late, nor is she early, she arrives precisely when she means to."

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

Okay then Gandalf do you want to give me some wizard powers and help me ace this upcoming test?

DIANA

"The ring cannot be destroyed, Gimli, son of Gloin, by any craft we here possess."

ETHAN

Or maybe you can just disguise yourself and take the test for me?

DIANA

"One does not simply walk into Mordor."

ETHAN

Are you done Lord of the Rings?

DIANA

"In place of a dark lord you would have a queen! Not dark but beautiful and terrible as the dawn! Treacherous as the sea! Stronger than the foundations of the earth! All shall love me and despair!"

Everyone is looking at Diana. Helen giggles to herself. Ethan shakes his head. Diana bows.

DIANA

Thank you! Thank you so much! I'll be here all year!

Diana sits and everyone else continues their own business. Diana begins to eat the plate of food in front of her.

DIANA

So why are you talking about tests? Classes have barely started.

ETHAN

Well if you were actually listening instead of going all Gandalf on me-

DIANA

I was quoting more than just Gandalf.

ETHAN

Whatever. The point is that I was called in by Irina Averin this morning.

DIANA

And?!

ETHAN

She wants to hold a final test to see who would be her shadow.

Helen looks up from her books.

DIANA

Wait. Really?

ETHAN

Yes. That's why I asked you to come and help me prepare cause I have no clue what to study for.

HELEN

I was actually wondering the same thing.

Diana and Ethan turn and stare at Helen.

HELEN

I'm sorry. My name's Helen. I was going to say hi earlier, but you both looked like you were having a great moment and I didn't want to intrude.

DIANA

Any moment that involves the Lord of the Rings is a great. So thank you for respecting the moment. I'm Diana and this is Ethan.

ETHAN

Nice to meet you. I'm sorry, you said that you were wondering the same thing?

HELEN

Yes, about the mock scenario. My mentor Vincent told me about it and the other students who were going to take it.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

You know how many there are?

HELEN

From what I was told I'm fairly sure that it's just the two of us for now. Unless Irina decides to have interview more students.

ETHAN

Why wasn't I informed of this?

HELEN

Actually... what I just mentioned was told in confidence. I just thought that two heads were better than one in preparing for the test.

ETHAN

I see.

(Beat)

HELEN

So... I was wondering if you wanted to work together since there is so much to cover.

ETHAN

Um... sure.

HELEN

Cool! If it's alright with you, we could meet in the library tomorrow for lunch. You don't have to say yes. I was just-

ETHAN

Oh no. I would like to.

HELEN

Alright. See you then.

Helen exits.

DIANA

You're kidding right?

ETHAN

What?

(CONTINUED)

DIANA

Please tell me you saw through that.

ETHAN

She seemed nice.

DIANA

Yes, "seemed". It's basic manipulation.

ETHAN

I know.

DIANA

Then why the hell are you going to work with her?

ETHAN

You know I'm smarter than you keep making me out to be.

DIANA

Really? I couldn't tell from your last move.

ETHAN

Well let me enlighten you. I'd be killing two birds with one stone: Firstly, I'll get the help I need to cover everything for the test. Something, which you have yet to contribute to by the way.

DIANA

I'm sorry I don't revolve around you.

ETHAN

And secondly, I'd be getting to know the competition and see how she works.

DIANA

Did you ever stop to consider that she already knew that was your plan and maybe she's just playing with you?

ETHAN

You can't know that for certain.

(CONTINUED)

DIANA

And you can't not. Either way, say she doesn't have a clue, what's to stop her from coming up with the same plan you have?

ETHAN

Even if she did I'm pretty sure I can handle it.

DIANA

You're not the greatest lair.

ETHAN

I'm good enough to get through it. It's all about half truths and having the appropriate reactions.

DIANA

Sure, it's easy enough to look at it analytically, but you know what your problem is?

ETHAN

Oh god.

DIANA

Your problem is that you're too empathetic.

ETHAN

What?

DIANA

It's true. You care too much. So much that even if you were to lie your guilty conscience would weigh down on you.

ETHAN

Seriously?

DIANA

That or she'd find that small little soft spot you have and twist it until you dance.

ETHAN

And what makes you think you know me so well?!

(Beat)

(CONTINUED)

DIANA

Look. For the past three years that I've known you I've seen how you react to the horrors of this world.

ETHAN

Yeah so? Everyone wants to make a difference.

DIANA

But you take it further than that. You make everything personal. You can try to hide behind that poise of perfection and intelligence, but I see the toll it takes on you when the world doesn't end right. If you're going to play this game you're gonna have to let things go.

ETHAN

I know how to let things go.

DIANA

Really? Then what about Gabriel?

Ethan glares at Diana.

ETHAN

Alright then. Since you're the Queen of 'letting things go' why don't you enlighten me about how you got so good?

DIANA

Don't.

ETHAN

Oh! Touched a nerve did I?

DIANA

I said don't.

ETHAN

No really, Diana, please tell me.

DIANA

Stop!

ETHAN

Tell me, how did you just "let go" of the fact that you let your parents die?

(CONTINUED)

Diana flings her chair back and towers over Ethan. Ethan refuses to back down from her gaze. She tosses her backpack over her shoulder and storms out the room. Ethan then collapses in guilt.

Ethan quickly leaves the room.

INT. HOSPITAL ICU FLOOR - DAY

Irina steps out of the elevator doors. She glides down the hallway passing patients in dire conditions. Two guards stand outside the door of BRIAN EVERSTONE. Brian is sleeping soundly inside the room with his parents next to him. Irina flashes her ID to the two guards and they step aside. MR. EVERSTONE looks up as Irina enters.

MR. EVERSTONE

Have you found who poisoned my son?

IRINA

I'm afraid not.

MR. EVERSTONE

How do you people not know anything?! You've had the whole summer to investigate!

MRS. EVERSTONE

Honey please. Not here.

MR. EVERSTONE

No. We've been patient enough. Our son went into a coma because of them and you think there'd be some kind of improvement by now.

IRINA

You are completely correct Mr. Everstone, but like I've said before things aren't as simple as they seem.

MR. EVERSTONE

The poison wasn't as simple as it seemed, but at least the doctors knew what they were doing and finally brought Brian back to us.

Brian begins to stir.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

Perhaps we could take this elsewhere?

Mrs. Everstone nods at her husband.

MRS. EVERSTONE

You stay with him. I will go.

MR. EVERSTONE

Alright.

Irina leads Mrs. Everstone into a corner of the floor.

IRINA

As I was saying, Brian's connections to the criminal world make things a little more complicated.

MRS. EVERSTONE

Can't you make a deal with his biological father to help you find who wanted my son dead?

IRINA

Ever since Brian ran away his biological father has fallen off the grid to protect himself and his associates. And I doubt he would give himself up for his son.

MRS. EVERSTONE

Wouldn't he still care about his son?

IRINA

Power and self-preservation can be very alluring.

MRS. EVERSTONE

Surely you must know where the poison came from then?

IRINA

The poison was definitely applied at the school, but as to it's whereabouts before hand it is uncertain. It could have been bought of the black market or simply brewed anywhere as it's ingredients are not too hard to find.

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Everstone approaches Irina and Mrs. Everstone

MR. EVERSTONE
Brian is waking up.

MRS. EVERSTONE
Would you like to speak to him Mrs.
Averin?

Mr. Everstone looks cross at his wife. She ignores him.

IRINA
Oh no I suspect he could use
another days rest before any
questioning begins.

MRS. EVERSTONE
Alright. Come on darling.

Mr. and Mrs. Everstone return to the room as Irina heads for the elevator. Right as the elevator arrives alarms go off in Brian's room and a wave of nurses rush past the Everstones. Brian is convulsing as he is brought out of the room and down the hall. Irina paces back towards Brian and stops one of the guards.

IRINA
What happened?!

HOSPITAL GUARD
I don't know. He just started
shaking the moment his parents
returned.

IRINA
Did anyone enter the room besides
us?

HOSPITAL GUARD
No it was just you and his parents
and then he had his daily check up.

Irina's eyes widen. She begins to scan the room and notices that a nurse breaks from the clump around Brian and takes a turn down a different hall.

IRINA
Follow me.

HOSPITAL GUARD
But I need to escort Brian.

IRINA

Now!

Irina grabs the guard and they run after the nurse who takes the staircase.

INT. BASEMENT PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

They speed down the stairs after the nurse and burst through the door of the basement parking lot. Irina takes the gun out of the guard's holster.

HOSPITAL GUARD

Hey! You can't-

BANG! BANG! BANG! Irina hits her mark on the last shot. The nurse tumbles down at the end of the road. He clutches his thigh and disappears into the cars.

IRINA

You circle left and cut him off at the entrance.

Irina tosses the gun back to the guard and trails after the nurse. The guard hesitates for a moment and continues on. Irina stops as the trail of blood leads to the back of a yellow truck. She takes off her heels and tiptoes to the truck with a heel raised in one hand. She pops her head over the back of the truck, but it's empty. Looking up she sees the reflection of the nurse behind her.

NURSE

You shouldn't have followed me.

The nurse wraps a chain around Irina's neck. He pushes her down to her knees and chokes her from behind. Irina elbows his wounded thigh and he crumbles down. She pulls the chain off her neck and whips his face. She gets on his back and strangles him.

IRINA

It's not that nice is it? Now you can come with me consciously or unconsciously.

NURSE

I... I-

IRINA

So what's your decision?

Irina looses the chain enough for him to speak. A car pulls out into the road.

(CONTINUED)

NURSE

I pick neither.

The car begins to speed towards them and the driver shoots at Irina. She rolls out of the way and takes cover behind the truck. The nurse gets in the car and it races toward the entrance. Irina gets up and runs to the entrance.

IRINA

(to the guard)

Stop that car!

The driver shoots the guard in the chest before he can pull the trigger and breaks past the barrier into the street. Irina checks on the guard.

HOSPITAL GUARD

I'm fine.

The guard reveals his kevlar vest. The assassin's leave a car wreck in the street.

INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Ethan paces past rows of bookshelves and stops in the center of the library. His eyes shift around the circular study area passing over hunched students until he finally spots Helen's red hair. He crosses in front of her.

ETHAN

Hi.

HELEN

Hey.

Ethan nods to Helen's book.

ETHAN

So we're studying the War of the Roses?

HELEN

Oh no, I was just indulging myself until you got here.

ETHAN

Not many would find the War of the Roses indulging.

HELEN

I know. A lot of people start nodding off once any kind of dense history is mentioned.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

I'm sorry. I didn't mean for that to be offensive.

HELEN

It's alright. I understood what you meant. It's just that it's baffling how some people here don't have any interest in the past.

ETHAN

Well when there is so much promise for them in the future why look back?

HELEN

Yes, but history is filled with wonderment as well.

Helen rises clutching her book.

HELEN

There is so much drama contained within these pages. Complex ideals, multiple desires, and conflicting emotions. There is so much power in it!

The librarian shushes Helen.

HELEN

Sorry.

(Beat)

HELEN

I guess we should start studying for the exam?

Helen heads toward the history section of the library.

ETHAN

Uh, I guess we should.

Ethan follows.

ETHAN

So how do you want to go about this?

HELEN

I thought that one of us could start with the first UN events and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HELEN (cont'd)
work their way up while the other
would start with current UN events
and work their way down.

ETHAN
Cool! I'll start with the current
events and meet you in the middle?

HELEN
Alright.

Ethan goes down a few rows of bookshelves and files through a couple of books. He takes some and combs through the other rows closer to Helen. She is doing the same from the opposite direction. They meet in the middle and head back to their seats. They start scribbling notes down.

HELEN
So... where are you from?

ETHAN
All over really. I was born in
America, but my mom was a very
active humanitarian and ambassador.
You?

HELEN
I'm just plain old English.

ETHAN
You make it sound so boring.

HELEN
It kinda was.

ETHAN
Really? I was always fascinated by
English history and how they carry
on.

HELEN
History's great. The present
however can be... a little less.

ETHAN
Yeah.

More scribbling of notes occurs.

ETHAN

So... what made you come here?

HELEN

Old family ties. Can't disappoint the ancestors.

ETHAN

Seriously?

HELEN

What?

ETHAN

I'm sorry. I just couldn't spend my whole life doing something I hated.

HELEN

I never said I hated this.

ETHAN

Oh, I'm sorry I assumed...

HELEN

Well you know what they say about that.

ETHAN

Yes, I am an ass.

HELEN

And I will "forget not that you are an ass" dear Dogberry.

ETHAN

I'm sorry?

HELEN

"Much ado about nothing"?

ETHAN

Shakespeare never really sat well with me.

HELEN

Heretic! He was really one of the greatest, if not the greatest, writers ever to live.

ETHAN

Maybe you should pursue that then.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

A writer in my family? I wouldn't like to be disowned. Still, it never felt much like a calling for me.

ETHAN

You must love something at least.

HELEN

I do love it, but it doesn't mean I meant to pursue them.

ETHAN

And you were meant to settle for this then?

HELEN

Perhaps. Perhaps not. Either way it doesn't matter. You do what is needed and "carry on".

Helen heads back to taking notes. Ethan stares.

ETHAN

I'm sorry.

HELEN

You should really stop apologizing for things.

ETHAN

I'm- I empathize.

HELEN

Why?

ETHAN

To not be in control...

Helen begins to laugh.

HELEN

I'm not a slave. There is no gun to my head. These are simply the choices I made.

ETHAN

Oh.

Ethan bends down to read his books.

HELEN
Is that why you found your way
here? To be free.

ETHAN
In a sense.

HELEN
To free someone then?

Ethan looks up at Helen.

HELEN
Well with the amount of passion you
spoke just now I took a stab in the
dark.

ETHAN
I... My mother always instilled in
me to try and help others.

Ethan goes back to taking notes.

HELEN
I see... Well, that's a good thing
to have.

(Beat)

HELEN
I'm just going to get another book.

ETHAN
Alright.

HELEN
Alright.

Helen fades into the bookshelves.

INT. COUNCIL MEMBER'S CHAMBER - DAY

The ten council members gather around the round the council
table. Marcus glares down at Irina as she presents herself
before them.

IRINA
... and now that we have the
assassin's identity we may finally
discover who is behind this.

(CONTINUED)

MARCUS
Yes... hopefully.

Irina locks eyes with Marcus. He breaks away.

MARCUS
I propose that we batten down the hatches and double security. An imposed curfew might do us some good as well.

He turns back to Irina.

MARCUS
And as for your mock examination, Irina, there is no longer any need for it.

IRINA
Pardon me?

MARCUS
The bait was set and now the enemy is out, making the reason for your examination void.

IRINA
We still have no idea who we're dealing with. The--

MARCUS
Precisely. And now a student is dead.

(beat)

VINCENT
If I may?

MARCUS
Covering for Irina once was enough.

IRINA
You do not run this council.

MARCUS
And you have cost this council too much!

Marcus, Irina, and Vincent begin a shouting match. A gavel bangs silencing the voices.

(CONTINUED)

JADE

Enough! We are the heads of
Equilibrium and we do not bicker
like children.

The three settle back down.

JADE

Now, all those in favor for
increasing security and imposing
curfew?

Everyone raises their hand.

JADE

All those in favor in canceling
Irina's mock examination?

Marcus and five other heads raise their hands.

JADE

It is settled then.

IRINA

I would like to appeal this
decision.

JADE

On what grounds?

IRINA

All of the students can grow from
this experience and I don't expect
the enemy to show it's face again
after their recent attack. However,
if they do we will be prepared--

MARCUS

Haven't you risked enough lives?

IRINA

In order for battles to be won
moves must be made instead of
hiding behind chairs.

MARCUS

Your--

The gavel bangs.

JADE

The two of you have spoken enough
about this matter. And as Irina
mentioned it is now time to act.

IRINA

Thank you.

Jade turns to Irina.

JADE

However, education is not enough grounds to trump the safety of this institution. And right now the enemy is too unpredictable and dangerous for us to directly confront. I'm sorry Irina, but you will have to make your decision without the exam. Now is there any other business?

Everyone shakes their heads.

JADE

Good. And let us remember why we called this place Equilibrium.

Jade bangs the gavel. The heads slowly file their way out. Irina takes a sip of water as Vincent comes up behind her. He places a hand on her back and she flinches.

VINCENT

I'm sorry.

IRINA

I've had worse.

Irina rubs the bruises on her neck and back.

VINCENT

Please tell me that you at least gave him hell.

IRINA

Bullet through the leg and a chain around his neck.

VINCENT

You're growing soft.

IRINA

I wasn't about to kill my only lead.

VINCENT

Still...

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

And his friend interrupted me with
a car and a 9 millimeter!

VINCENT

There was a time you took down a
military grade helicopter with a
screwdriver.

IRINA

Romanticizing the past isn't
flattering. It's stupid and
dangerous.

VINCENT

My point still stands.

(Beat)

IRINA

Time... can be a tricky thing.

VINCENT

I know.

Irina looks at Vincent. She turns away and takes another sip
of water.

VINCENT

So do you know how long the
security department will take to
track our assassin?

IRINA

What do you have planned?

VINCENT

I never said--

IRINA

No, but you asked. So naturally...

VINCENT

(laughs)

Well, I was going to offer my
contacts if you could give me the
details of the report.

IRINA

And there it is.

(CONTINUED)

VINCENT
You know me too well.

They stare at each other.

VINCENT
Well?

IRINA
Any whispers about this.

VINCENT
Are we really going to have this
talk?

IRINA
Fine.

Irina finishes her water and starts collecting her things.

VINCENT
What about his friend you
mentioned?

IRINA
I didn't see him, but the bullets
he shot might help us. You'll find
it in the report.

Irina hands him a folder.

VINCENT
They'll get what's coming to them.

IRINA
Indeed.

Irina begins to exit the room.

VINCENT
Where are you going?

IRINA
To solve the shadow problem.

VINCENT
You've made a decision already?

Irina smiles and exits.

INT. COMBAT TRAINING HALL - DAY

Ethan slides into the training hall and makes his way around. He passes a boxing ring as a skirmish is happening, a room of gymnasts in midair, and finally steps into a room filled with various types of melee weapons. He approaches the fencing area where two figures are locked in a duel. The figure on the left gains the upper hand and lands a blow to the heart on the MALE FENCER.

MALE FENCER

One more round!

The figure on the left shrugs and nods. They take their place and the male fencer stabs forward. The left fencer counters. He hits again and another counter is returned. He starts an assault that pushes the other fencer back to the wall. CLING! The male fencer is hit in the heart again. He storms off and removes his gear.

DIANA

Now don't be a sore loser!

Diana removes her helmet. She spots Ethan and begins to pack her stuff.

ETHAN

Peace offering.

Ethan hands her a box of chocolate truffles. She eyes the truffles and Ethan then pushes past him.

ETHAN

Come on! I know you love these.

Diana puts her helmet away.

ETHAN

I had to special order them.

Diana puts her foil back on the rack.

ETHAN

Try at least one.

Diana begins to walk away. Ethan takes a foil from the rack and hits Diana on her shoulder. She stops and slowly turns around.

ETHAN

If you win I will leave you alone.
If I win you take the truffles.

(CONTINUED)

Diana takes a foil from the rack without breaking her glare and stalks toward him.

ETHAN
Wait. No helmets?

She strikes at his head. He barely blocks her attack.

ETHAN
Okay. No helmets then.

Ethan backs up to the fencing lane.

ETHAN
So, are you going to say anything?

Diana delivers three heavy blows. Ethan flinches more as he blocks each hit.

ETHAN
Fine. I'll go then.

Ethan lunges Diana, but she just flicks away his attacks. Their foils lock.

ETHAN
Look I didn't mean what I said,
but-

Diana pushes him off and attacks. CLING!

ETHAN
Hey!

CLING!

ETHAN
Will you-

CLING!

ETHAN
Just let me-

CLING!

ETHAN
Talk?!

CLING! Diana's foil is gradually pushing down Ethan's foil to his face.

ETHAN

I'm sorry...

Diana softens and stops pushing. She pulls back, whacks away his foil and stabs him hard in the heart.

ETHAN

Ow!

DIANA

I win.

She turns and walks away.

ETHAN

(Sarcastically)

Please don't leave now that we're friends again!

She continues to ignore him.

ETHAN

Don't you want to know what happened with me and Helen?!

Ethan is still ignored. He runs up behind her and is about to hit her shoulder with his foil again, but she blocks the attack without turning around. As she whips back around she shifts his foil to his side.

ETHAN

Diana, I understand that you're mad and I know what you we're trying to do when you brought Gabe up and I know I shouldn't have reacted the way I did... I'm sorry.

(Beat)

Diana begins to turn. Ethan jabs. She parries.

ETHAN

Is this what I have to do to keep your attention?

Diana doesn't move. Ethan jabs again. She parries.

ETHAN

Come on Diana it's been three days.

Diana remains still. Ethan jabs harder. She parries.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

Just say something! Do something! I don't care!

Ethan swipes at her face, but it is blocked. Diana begins a deadly onslaught of attacks. Ethan manages to block some of her blows, but she stings him with most of them. She finally smacks his wrist causing him to throw his foil into the air. She kicks him to the ground, catches his foil with her other hand and surrounds his neck with both blades.

ETHAN

(Winded)

Feel better?

Diana throws both foils to the ground.

DIANA

How. Dare. You. How dare you use my parents' death against me! Did you think it was easy not to make a decision to save them?!

ETHAN

No...

DIANA

No. It wasn't. It wasn't easy to face them right before they died. It wasn't easy to erase all evidence of their lives and pretend like they never existed. It wasn't easy to bear all that weight and learn how to be around people again. None of it was!

Ethan turns his head away from Diana's eyes.

DIANA

But I did it anyway. And you came along. Restoring my faith in people.

Ethan stays silent.

DIANA

So you can imagine how furious I was when you said those things to me. And especially how hurt I was since you are the only person that knows that about me.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

I didn't mean-

DIANA

Yes you did. That's fine. I get it. You were mad and I pushed you. But I didn't think that you would've gone there.

ETHAN

I'm sorry...

DIANA

I know. I am too.

ETHAN

Then we're okay?

DIANA

Maybe. But not right now.

ETHAN

Why? I thought you understood.

DIANA

I do. But I just need to process.

Diana helps Ethan up from the ground.

ETHAN

Diana-

DIANA

I'll see you later. Thanks for the chocolates.

Diana takes the truffles, her stuff and leaves the room.

EXT. LABYRINTH GARDEN - DAY

Irina strolls through the simple garden maze, double backs and arrives at a greenhouse.

INT. GREENHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Irina passes many different ferns, flowers, and a tall tree in the center. She makes her way down a hall of vines and enters a zen garden.

EXT. ZEN GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Jade is trimming a bonsai tree. Irina hops on the stone pathway towards her.

JADE

Ten years.

IRINA

Ten years?

JADE

Ten years and you and Marcus still can't be in the same room without burning it down.

Jade cuts a tiny piece off the bonsai.

IRINA

Sometimes you need a little fire.

JADE

Not when it destroys more than it builds.

IRINA

Regardless, we've built a decent kingdom here.

JADE

True and now we need that fire to protect us not trap us.

IRINA

We're not trapped.

JADE

For now.

Jade cuts another piece off the bonsai. Irina is crossing a wooden bridge over a tiny stream.

IRINA

I've done all I can with that man, but there are only so many moves I can make besides being aggressive.

JADE

Not everything's a chess game, Irina.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

We live on a huge chessboard.

Irina steps on a new stone pathway towards Jade and her heels click on each new stone.

IRINA

In this secret world everything comes down to moves and counter-moves. The trick is to figure out who you play and how to win.

JADE

Then tell me what happens when someone comes along and flips over that chessboard?

IRINA

There will always be players and there will always be games.

JADE

Yes, but you're not accounting for one thing.

IRINA

And what's that?

JADE

Not all actions come from reactions. Sometimes, a divine hand intervenes.

SNAP! Jade cuts a misplaced branch on the bonsai.

IRINA

(laughing)

There's no place for God here.

JADE

Maybe not, but there isn't always a reason for why things happen.

IRINA

Only if you can't find the answer.

JADE

I'm sure one day we'll find out who's right.

Jade puts down her sheers, takes off her gloves and turns to Irina who is now next to her.

(CONTINUED)

JADE

Until then my point stands. You and
Marcus need to bury the hatchet.

Jade sweeps up the pieces of bonsai on the ground into a
dust pan and hands the broom to Irina.

IRINA

There is no hatchet to bury.

JADE

Right.

IRINA

He is entirely responsible for his
own choices.

Jade empties the dust pan into a trash bag of filled with
leaves and dead branches.

JADE

Your choices didn't help either.

IRINA

I will not be responsible for his
shortcomings.

Irina pushes the broom back to Jade who takes it and places
it next to the dust pan.

JADE

Well, whatever it is we all need to
pull together because someone is
coming to flip over our chessboard.

IRINA

God?

JADE

Perhaps.

IRINA

Then we better be prepared.

JADE

I hope we will be.

Jade reaches behind the bonsai and hands a folder to Irina.

JADE

Well, here is what my little birds
gathered for you.

IRINA

Thank you.

Irina opens the folder. On the left are multiple pictures of Ethan. He is sitting with Diana in the dining hall near Helen. Below that he is in the library studying with Helen. On the bottom is a picture of him fencing with Diana. On the right are multiple pictures of Helen. She is in the dining hall studying. She is in the library studying with Ethan. And lastly she is in the courtyard studying.

JADE

Everything they did since the day you called them in. They were bugged. So you can take your time listening.

IRINA

I did not expect you to be this thorough.

JADE

I wasn't. You have my minions to thank.

IRINA

I hope they were rewarded well then.

JADE

Oh they have been.

IRINA

Thank you for backing me up. If you need anything in the future-

JADE

I know where to find you.

Irina leaves the zen garden and Jade begins to rake the gravel in perfect strokes.

INT. OLD AUDITORIUM - DAY

Ethan opens the creaking door to the school's auditorium and squints as his eyes adjust to the dim surroundings. Yellow light pours onto Helen through the tainted windows of the balcony as she turns around to Ethan's footsteps.

HELEN

Hey.

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

Hi again.

Ethan is halfway down the aisle.

HELEN

How did the rest of your studying go?

ETHAN

It went fine. Yourself?

HELEN

Fine.

They both sit on the edge of the stage.

ETHAN

Are you ready?

HELEN

Kinda. I still feel like I'm forgetting something.

ETHAN

Yeah me too...

Ethan swings his legs back and forth hitting the stage. Helen looks at Ethan.

HELEN

About the last time we studied together I didn't mean to offend you-

ETHAN

Oh no. I was not offended at all. I thought I offended you.

HELEN

Oh no. You were fine. I didn't mean to get so personal-

ETHAN

It's alright. I shouldn't have been so blunt with my beliefs.

HELEN

It's okay. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions. I just thought that when we didn't study together again that-

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

I was mad at you?

HELEN

Yeah...

ETHAN

Don't be silly. You didn't do anything wrong. I just assumed that you wanted some space.

HELEN

There you go again.

ETHAN

I know. "I'm an ass; though it be not written down. Yet forget not that I am an ass."

HELEN

(laughing)

You read it?

ETHAN

No. I cheated and watched the 1993 Kenneth Branagh version with Michael Keaton as Dogberry.

HELEN

The book's are always better.

ETHAN

I'm sure.

HELEN

Well, I'm glad that we're okay.

ETHAN

Yeah.

The auditorium door swings wide open and Irina's heels click on the cold floor as she makes her way down to them.

IRINA

Thank you for being early.

Ethan and Helen stand as Irina meets them.

IRINA

I know both of you are wondering what you will be doing for the mock examination, but I regret to inform you that there will be no test.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

What?

ETHAN

But we're prepared.

IRINA

This has nothing to do with your ability. An issue came up which unfortunately prevents me from giving the exam.

HELEN

Does this have to do with Brian Everstone?

Irina narrows her eyes at Helen.

IRINA

Sadly, yes...

HELEN

May I ask what happened? I tried to visit him yesterday, but I was refused and no one could tell me why.

IRINA

The council was going to announce it tomorrow, but Brian has died.

HELEN

What?

ETHAN

Oh my god.

IRINA

I'm sorry if he was your friend, but it is important to keep this quiet until tomorrow.

HELEN

I... understand.

Helen straightens her back and focuses her attention back to Irina.

HELEN

Now what's going to happen since there will be no exam?

Ethan stares at Helen for a moment then turns back to Irina.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

Since my hands have been tied I did a much more thorough examination on the both of you and I have made my decision. Congratulations-

CUT TO: INT. VINCENT'S HIDEOUT

"Defeated music" plays as "Defeated" appears in huge red letters over the virtual chessboard on Vincent's computer. Vincent sighs and reclines back in his seat. Everything in the black and white office is spotless. A computerized voice entitled "KRONOS" speaks as it's words appear on the screen.

KRONOS

Don't be so disheartened. Strategy is not for everyone.

VINCENT

I've had my fair share of strategic winnings.

As Vincent speaks his words appear in the chatbox below Kronos.

KRONOS

Anyone can attain a few victories, but to win a war is something else.

VINCENT

Well, it seems that our war is starting in our favor.

KRONOS

Only if mistakes are not being made. Have you amended them?

Vincent jumps up and heads over to the center table where a black body bag is lying. He turns the computer to face the table.

VINCENT

See for yourself.

Vincent unzips the bag revealing the nurse assassin and his driver in pieces.

KRONOS

And their trail?

(CONTINUED)

VINCENT

Wiped clean. Killed them in one of our other safe houses. Had to torch the place since they were so sloppy.

KRONOS

Then the trail is not clean.

VINCENT

It'll be a dead end even if Equilibrium finds it. Nothing was left unturned.

KRONOS

They should not have been given that opportunity in the first place.

VINCENT

Hey, I wasn't the one who hired them.

KRONOS

Careful now, Vincent. Being my right hand does not grant you familiarity.

Vincent straightens his spine.

VINCENT

I apologize, sir.

KRONOS

Stand down.

Vincent relaxes.

KRONOS

I have disciplined the idiots who hired those guns and we will not have anymore loose ends.

VINCENT

Yes, sir.

KRONOS

Now, what about our little seed?

CUT TO: INT. OLD AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

IRINA

-Helen. You're my new shadow.

HELEN

Oh! Thank you! Thank you so much!

Helen shakes Irina's hand viciously. Ethan turns his head away.

HELEN

Ethan, I...

ETHAN

It's alright. Congratulations
Helen.

Ethan begins to walk out.

IRINA

Ethan.

Ethan turns back.

IRINA

I would still like to have a word
with you.

CUT TO: INT. VINCENT'S HIDEOUT - CONTINUOUS

VINCENT

I've managed to guide Irina into
accepting her.

KRONOS

Excellent. Then manipulating her
would be no issue I hope?

VINCENT

Helen is a very simple girl. She
will not be a problem.

KRONOS

Never underestimate anyone. Even
simple girls.

VINCENT

Understood...

(CONTINUED)

KRONOS

Good. We will gather more seeds to plant and-

VINCENT

Sir? If I may make a suggestion?

KRONOS

Yes?

VINCENT

I understand using the shadows as moles, but if we could somehow convince another council member to join our cause then-

KRONOS

Don't play the pied piper at me!

VINCENT

Sorry sir I was merely-

KRONOS

Guiding me to take in Irina.

Vincent bows in head.

KRONOS

Do you think me a fool? That I have not studied every facet of the society I've built?

VINCENT

No sir.

KRONOS

I know of you and Irina's past. You think she would come back to you for love, but you are wrong.

Vincent clenches his fists and tightens his jaw.

KRONOS

That woman has something more than love. She has a need for order. Thus she fights constantly to attain it, which makes her deadly, but also unpredictable.

CUT TO: INT. IRINA'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Irina is standing in front of her class of freshman. Helen is standing next to her.

IRINA

...Besides seeing Helen from time to time I have recently hired a personal work study to help manage my accounts for the year.

Irina signals Ethan and he enters the classroom.

IRINA

This is Ethan. You will mostly see him in front of my office, but sometimes he may be here.

Ethan smiles, nods to the class and steps back next to Helen.

IRINA

All of you must be wondering why a stratagem class. Well...

Irina's monologue fades. As Kronos' voice continues.

KRONOS

I need people who will follow orders.

IRINA

There will be people who will try to disrupt order.

CUT TO: Vincent looking down.

KRONOS

People who can be led into a new society.

IRINA

And there will be people who will blindly follow.

CUT TO: Helen smiling at the class.

KRONOS

And people to build that new world.

IRINA

That is why we need people to protect that order.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO: Ethan smiling at the class.

KRONOS
The board is set.

IRINA
Learning to play the game is
necessary.

KRONOS
The pieces are moving.

IRINA
And that is why we're here.

KRONOS AND IRINA
Let us begin.

Irina smiles.

CUT TO BLACK