The Institution
"A New Shadow"
By
Ian DePriest
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... predatory.

DIANA
And what’s wrong with being predatory? 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)
I am by no means "hatin'" on you. I’m simply stating that you sound like Hannibal when you call freshman fresh meat.

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.

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

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

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

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

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.

You’re still fixating on that?

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.
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.
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.
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.
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)
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.
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.
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.
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.
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!
Treacheroius 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.

(CONTINUED)
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?
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)
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 its 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.

(CONTINUED)
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 tigger 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.
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.

(CONTINUED)
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.
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.
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 its 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.

(CONTINUED)
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 of 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.
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’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.
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)
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.
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.

(CONTINUED)
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)
I was mad at you?

Yeah...

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

There you go again.

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

( laughing)

You read it?

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

The book’s are always better.

I’m sure.

Well, I’m glad that we’re okay.

Yeah.

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

Thank you for being early.

Ethan and Helen stand as Irina meets them.

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.
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