

DIMINUENDO

by

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BLACK. Slowly, a golden light begins to illuminate a vast landscape of PIANO KEYS. Mounds of ebony. Ivory planes stretching into eternity.

As the light intensifies, we focus on the distinctive grooves beneath the polished surface of ivory.

Suddenly, an enormous FINGERTIP bears down on us. Its unique fingerprint moving closer, about to make contact.

A trembling shift in the landscape as the gigantic finger compresses a key...

INT. PIANO KEYBOARD

A solitary HAMMER in fantastic SLOW-MO as it strikes a taut STRING -- briefest of contacts, the briefest resonance as we

CUT TO BLACK:

A sudden EXPLOSION SOUND. Devastatingly loud.

EXT. WAR TORN SARAJEVO - DAY

Out of a haze...Chaos. Destruction. A CRUMPLED BUILDING, seconds after a mortar blast. Detritus and smoke fill the air. The din of the mortally injured gives way to another, even more harrowing sound...A BABY CRYING.

And as the smoke clears we see it, the BABY, a boy, alone amongst the rubble. Petrified, he wails until it seems his lungs will burst.

An ear-piercing RINGING SOUND, growing louder, more distressing, drowning out the sounds of his cries as we move closer and closer toward his tiny face. And just when it seems his bleating mouth will engulf us, the ringing reaches its painful crescendo.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRE-DAWN

Silence. Stern, dark features stare down at us. They belong to MATTHEW HEYWARD, 21. Broodingly handsome, tall and thin.

Sat at the top of steps leading to an unremarkable looking red brick building, he's wrapped up warmly against the biting cold. His large, thick gloved hands navigate across the open pages of a musical manuscript laid flat against the step. The notations are extremely complex, far too complicated for mere mortals to understand.

Above him, written across the side of the building in gold lettering is a sign: **ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC.**

The Royal Institute of Music's building is by no means grand. Indeed, it is easy to miss, blending in simply with its surrounding Central London landscape. What it is, however, is one of the leading music conservatoires in the world.

Matthew sits alone in the stillness. Disturbed only occasionally by the chirp of a bird awakening, a distant rubbish truck, and the crisp sound of pages turning within the manuscript.

He checks his watch. It's 5.50am.

Matthew returns to the manuscript. His fingers begin replicating the corresponding musical phrases.

Suddenly, the sound of voices. A GROUP OF STUDENTS approach. Matthew seems unsettled by their arrival. He stands, gathering up the manuscript.

STUDENT #1
...seriously, last night, those
shots. Big mistake.

STUDENT #2
Tried to warn you.

One of the students nods politely towards Matthew. He doesn't know how to react. Clearly uncomfortable with such interaction. He turns away, coldly.

Unfazed, the students line-up on the steps below Matthew.

STUDENT #1
Look, I got the shakes.

STUDENT #3
What you get for tryna be a
heavyweight.

Matthew stares intently at the locked doors to the building. Almost willing them to open that very moment.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

A long queue has now formed behind Matthew. The air is alive with the bustle of voices chatting, laughing...

Matthew cuts very much an isolated figure. He checks his watch again. 6.20am. Growing impatient.

In his periphery, he notices someone rushing along the street, a WOMAN, late and out of breath. Matthew shakes his head dismissively as he watches the woman join the back of the line.

Her name is ODETTE BARDON, 20, a Parisian of dual-heritage, strong understated beauty, kind eyes plagued by self-doubt.

As she sucks air into her red cheeks, the doors to the building begin to open and a SECURITY GUARD steps out.

There's a sudden surge in the line.

SECURITY GUARD
Take. Your. Ti -- ah Jesus!

Matthew is already past him --

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

First in, Matthew grabs a ticket from a dispenser on the wall and scribbles his name on the fresh sheet of paper designating the various practice rooms on offer. He bombs off along the hallway, out of sight, as a melee of students struggle to get through the doors.

We hear the sudden burst of notes on a piano...

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOMS - DAY

Immensely talented piano students practice alone in cramped private rooms. Just them and their upright pianos. Going at it. A wide range of styles and characters. From those that hammer the keys, to those that caress. An extensive range of facial expressions, from sheer joy to utter agony.

A few of these faces we'll come to know later:

- DANIEL YASHIN, 20, Russian, mischievous, baby-faced bohemian type.

- MADELINE CHUNG, 21, Chinese, small, voluptuous; partial to extravagant accessories.

- REYNOLD TAN, 21, Chinese, huge head, terrible taste in clothes.

Each and every one of these students is united by a single goal -- to reach the coveted position of concert pianist. And they're giving it all they've got.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

None more so than Matthew, who's noticeably sat not at an upright but at a STEINWAY GRAND instead, meticulously practicing the same musical passage from **Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto**. Over and over. His hands moving at a mesmerising rate. It's effortless for him. Almost machine-like. Yet, he looks discontented -- the look of someone desperately seeking perfection.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Next door, in the most cramped room we've seen yet, at an old upright piano sits Odette. She's trying her best to memorise a **Chopin prelude**. It's not going well. She's growing frustrated. Keeps having to refer back to the music.

She stops playing. Closes her eyes. Tries to compose herself. But all she can hear, pounding through the wall, is Matthew's continual repetitive run. Playing over and over again.

Her attention broken, she gets up and approaches the wall. Puts her ear against it. Listening. Her expression changing from one of annoyance to admiration.

The sound of the **First Movement of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto** soaring to its dazzling climax as we move into...

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

Large but cosy. Walls covered with a library of books, moulds of the faces of famous maestros, accolades and pictures...

Framed by a large window, listening attentively to the music, sits PROFESSOR MICHAEL SHAWL, 65. A burly man, a large white beard dominates his face, which he strokes as he follows along with the music in the manuscript open in his lap.

At a grand piano, Matthew performs from memory. His technical dexterity exceptional. He finishes the movement with a flourish. Pauses, mildly content with his performance. Silence. Matthew looks over to Shawl, expectantly. Shawl closes the manuscript, gets to his feet and looks out of the window. A long pause, before --

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Remarkable. Your technique, as always, truly quite remarkable.

Matthew knows this. Still, it's nice to hear.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

Tell me Matthew, have you ever fallen under the spell of a beautiful woman?

Matthew is completely thrown by the question.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

One whose beauty is so great it entices -- seduces everyone she meets, to the point she's never even had to try in her life. Things are just handed to her, wherever she goes.

Shawl pauses. Matthew remains bewildered.

MATTHEW

Assuming there's a point to this, professor?

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Invariably. You see, the problem with such a woman, Matthew, is, after a short while, you happen to twig that they operate only on one plane. One level. The dazzling effect of her beauty quickly fades and you realise that what you really want -- what really matters is something much deeper. Something far more meaningful. A connection. Essentially, *conversation*, Matthew. Something her and her superficiality cannot offer you.
(turns to look at Matthew)
Do you understand?

Matthew does and he isn't altogether pleased.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

Learn from the Chopin competition. Take on board the criticism. Can you recall what Teller labelled you?

MATTHEW

(lying)

No.

PROFESSOR SHAWL

"Emotionally moribund!"
"Monochrome...!"

This stings Matthew.

MATTHEW

(incredulous)

I was the best. I deserved to win.

PROFESSOR SHAWL

And what is "the best", in your opinion? Technical prowess? Note-perfect performance?

MATTHEW

Yes!

PROFESSOR SHAWL

(slamming down the manuscript)

No! You must go beyond the score, Matthew!

(MORE)

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

The score tells us everything we need to know about the music *except* the essential. Such literal interpretation kills the life -- the primal requisite of music to the soul...

(soft and sincerely)

And it won't win you Tchaikovsky. Believe me. Talented as you are.

Matthew absorbs this but doesn't altogether agree. We sense they've been through this argument many times before.

Shawl strides over to him.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

I know who Rachmaninov is -- was...Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Liszt...

(puts his hands on Matthew's shoulders)

Who is Matthew Heyward?

(shakes Matthew vigorously)

Show me -- the world -- who **you** are!

INT. CHANGING ROOM - HIGH-END STORE - DAY

Matthew's face stares blankly at us. After a moment we realise he's studying his reflection in the large mirror of a sleek changing room. Dressed in a sharp black tuxedo, arms outstretched by his side, he looks lost. As if he doesn't recognise the person before him.

In one hand he holds two black bow ties. Slowly, one by one, he holds them up to his shirt collar. Unable to decide which one he prefers.

VOICE (O.S.)

How's everything going in there?

Matthew pulls back the curtain and steps cautiously out of the changing room. A gracious SALES ASSISTANT smiles at him.

SALES ASSISTANT

I don't know about you, but I think this may be the one.

Matthew is clearly unsure, but the Sales Assistant's assured demeanour starts to persuade him.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

Oh no!

Matthew and the Sales Assistant turn to face the tall, elegant woman striding towards them, clutching a bow tie.

This is Matthew's mother, CYNTHIA HEYWARD, 56, intelligent, austere, radiates confidence. She looks Matthew up and down.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

It's all wrong.

SALES ASSISTANT

I don't know --

CYNTHIA

Well I do. It's wrong.

The Sales Assistant looks at Matthew.

SALES ASSISTANT

What do you think?

Matthew hesitates. Looks at his reflection. Then Cynthia.

CYNTHIA

I think it says, "I'm here, happy just to participate." I think it says, "third place is satisfactory".

Matthew reacts involuntary to these words. Cynthia hands Matthew the bow tie she holds, takes down a jacket hanging next to three others Matthew's clearly already tried.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

This is the one.

Matthew begins to take off the jacket he's wearing. Cynthia removes the other jacket from the hanger and hands it to him. Sheepishly, he puts it on.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

This says "I'm serious."

Cynthia ties the bow tie around Matthew's neck. Then, adjusts his hair ever so slightly. Dusts off his jacket.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

This says, "I'm here to win".

Cynthia wraps her arm tightly around Matthew as they both gaze intently at his reflection in the mirror.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

This is the one.

The Sales Assistant, amused, nods as Matthew silently fumes.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black. We hear the now familiar sound of a musical passage from **Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto** being repeated over and over.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - NIGHT

It's late. The Security Guard, on his rounds, makes his way along the deserted hallway. Something suddenly grabs his attention -- the distant sound of a piano being played. He quickens his pace in the direction of the music.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

Still pitch black. Until, the door opens and a hand flicks on the light.

At the Steinway Grand sits Matthew. Dripping with sweat. Annoyed, he stops playing and glares at the Security Guard standing in the doorway.

SECURITY GUARD

Come on man. You know the rules.

Without a word, Matthew reaches into his pocket, retrieves his wallet and takes out a £10 note. Extends it toward the Security Guard. Insulted, the Security Guard frowns.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

Seriously?

Matthew delves into his wallet once more. Retrieves a £20 note. Offers it to the Security Guard, along with the £10. This wasn't at all what the Security Guard meant. Still, he shakes his head and takes the money.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

I'll be back in an hour.

He's just about to leave when --

MATTHEW

Light!

Matthew indicates the light switch. Baffled, the Security Guard flicks it off and closes the door, plunging the room back into darkness. Matthew resumes playing.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - NIGHT

It's very late. Matthew exits the deserted building.

INT. STREET - NIGHT

Matthew walks slowly along the street. He's passed in the opposite direction by a GROUP OF HAPPY STUDENTS on a night out. A DRUNKEN FEMALE blows him a kiss. But Matthew ignores her and continues on, alone.

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sparse of character and furniture, save for a sofa, desk and chair, surrounded by numerous piles of neatly stacked musical books and scores. An antique mirror hangs on a wall.

At the desk, Matthew studies his Rachmaninov manuscript. An empty pot noodle tub close by. He checks his watch: 2am.

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

An alarm clock sounds. It's 5am. A hand shuts it off. Matthew's eyes open. Focus. Ready for the day.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Matthew is practicing furiously a section of the **Second Movement of Rachmaninov's Third.**

As we play along with him, we hear the ultra crisp and intricate shifts in tone and dynamic range that his ears detect. An auditory prowess of the highest order.

Suddenly, a DULL RINGING SENSATION sounds in his ears. He stops playing immediately. Touches his ears. A sense of panic sweeps across his face. This is clearly something that's new and of grave concern. After a moment, the RINGING STOPS. Matthew's heart races. Unsure of what just happened. He sits motionless. Silently praying it doesn't re-occur.

But it does.

Matthew bolts out of the room.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - TOILETS - DAY

Water gushes from a tap. At the sink, Matthew desperately rinses out his ears with a wet rag. The RINGING SENSATION STOPS. He quickly turns off the tap. Listens carefully as he stares at his reflection in the mirror. Pleading once more that it doesn't return.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - TOILETS - MINUTES LATER

Matthew, still staring at his reflection, is now noticeably calmer. The ringing sound hasn't returned. Relieved, he turns the tap back on and splashes water onto his face.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CRIT ROOM - DAY

REYNOLD TAN, his face contorting with emotion, performs an energetic piece at a grand piano as DANIEL YASHIN sits adjacently, following his progress in the score.

We circle the room, concentrating on the individual faces of the fellow students; each one respectfully listening with an active engagement and appreciation. That's until we come to Matthew's face -- a picture of sheer discontent.

He fidgets. Unable to tolerate the performance. Odette shoots him a look to desist. But Matthew cannot -- his exasperation progressing into audible sighs. As engaged in the music as Tan is, he can't help but glance over his shoulder at Matthew.

PROFESSOR MARIE STOLTZ, 52, a plump woman with bright red hair, motions for Matthew to be silent. Tan executes what to us may sound like a deeply evocative run of notes, yet causes a groan to erupt out of Matthew. Tan stops abruptly, turning to confront him.

TAN

What the fuck, man? That's not right.

MATTHEW

Right. It's not.

Stoltz intervenes, trying her best to placate the situation.

STOLTZ

We have rules Matthew, you know this. The main being when a student performs, we listen. Respectfully.

MATTHEW

With respect, professor --

STOLTZ

What we certainly don't do is interrupt that performance with sighs and groans.

Matthew shrugs and holds up his hands nonchalantly.

MATTHEW

Fine.

He nods for Tan to continue, who just glares at him.

TAN

What's your problem man?

MATTHEW

My problem?

TAN

Yeah. You clearly got one with my playing so come on...?

MATTHEW

Really?

(checks his watch)

We could be here a while.

STOLTZ

Okay, that's enough. Matthew sit back and be quiet. You'll have your chance to feedback at the end. Reynold pick it up from the beginning of bar 60.

Tan swings back around and starts playing. Yashin looks at Matthew. Covertly mouths the word "wanker". Matthew doesn't convey any reaction. Odette looks at him for a moment -- trying her best to figure him out. Defeated, she returns her focus to Tan. Suddenly, Matthew stands up. Everyone looks at him. Tan stops playing.

MATTHEW

Okay, my problem is --

STOLTZ

Right Matthew, out!

MATTHEW

-- That! Exactly that what you did there.

STOLTZ

I said out.

MATTHEW

I mean, have you even looked at the score or are you making it up as you go along?

STOLTZ

I'll speak to you after.

MATTHEW

Bar 61. Crescendo, sforzando, diminuendo, trill! All written for a reason.

STOLTZ

Inappropriate behaviour for my class. I don't care who you are.

Stoltz opens the door.

MATTHEW

"Emotional interpretation", the
last refuge for the technically
inept.

And with that Matthew exits. Stoltz closes the door. Odette
gently shakes her head.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Matthew rests against the door. Takes a deep breath. And for
a second, he lets his public mask of derision slip, revealing
a look of uncertainty underneath.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CANTEEN - DAY

The lunchtime rush is on. The small canteen buzzing with
students. However, Matthew sits alone at a corner table. A
half-eaten sandwich rests next to his open Rachmaninov
manuscript, which he studies fastidiously.

Across the canteen, Odette sits with Yashin, Tan and MADELINE
CHUNG. Picking at a healthy, if unsubstantial salad. Tan
glares at Matthew, clearly still stewing from earlier.

TAN

(re: Matthew)
Just looking at him, makes me
fucking furious.

CHUNG

(wry smile)
"Technically inept!"

TAN

Can you believe that shit?

YASHIN

Well...

TAN

Funny.

Yashin makes a silly face at Tan.

ODETTE

Don't worry. I don't think the
criticism was laid solely at you.

YASHIN

(mock incredulous)
Who else was it for? Me?

Odette shrugs -- maybe.

TAN

Who's he to criticise anyway?

YASHIN

Ah, you do not know, he's the "maestro".

They all laugh apart from Odette.

YASHIN (CONT'D)

The great performer. Yet he cannot caress the piano like I. Make love to it. Because he's a machine.

CHUNG

Emotionally inept.

Yashin hi-fives Chung.

ODETTE

(to Yashin)

You make love to your piano?

YASHIN

Most certainly. Don't you?

Odette gives him a look.

TAN

Maybe you should try it Odette?
Might help with the old recall.

This comment jars Odette, but she hides it well.

YASHIN

You think Heyward's ever...
(motions the universal
gesture for sex)

Tan shakes his head. Chung shrugs. Odette, remaining silent, appears to ponder the question more deeply than the others.

TAN

Only gets off on his own
conceitedness, I bet.

Yashin and Chung nod.

TAN (CONT'D)

Or thinking about winning
Tchaikovsky. Right Yashin?

YASHIN

Fucking Tchaikovsky. How many
times? I haven't been invited.

TAN/CHUNG

Yeah yeah.

Yashin picks up on Odette's silence.

YASHIN
Think we've upset Ms. Bardon.

TAN
Well, you know how much she
"admires" him.

ODETTE
I never said I "admire" him.

CHUNG
You did.

ODETTE
I did not. He's just very...

CHUNG
Annoying?

ODETTE
Oui, but talented too.

TAN
And we're what exactly?

ODETTE
Annoying.

Despite the humour in Odette's voice, Yashin seems jealous.

YASHIN
Perhaps you should invite him to
Madeline's recital on Friday?

CHUNG
No way. Invite him to Yashin's gig
tomorrow instead.

YASHIN
No fucking way.

Odette packs up her salad and gets up.

YASHIN (CONT'D)
Wait where you going? I was joking.

CHUNG
I wasn't.

ODETTE
Someone's got to make the effort.

And with that she makes her way to Matthew's table leaving
the others to watch on in amazement.

TAN

Blatantly wants to fuck him.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CANTEEN - MATTHEW'S TABLE

Matthew, sensing someone approaching, looks up from the manuscript. His body tenses at the sight of Odette. Moves straight into attack mode.

MATTHEW

Here we go. Listen, if you're about to have a go at me for --

ODETTE

Go at you?

MATTHEW

For earlier. Because you think I was out of order, then --

ODETTE

No! Well, yes you were...but you may have had a point too, perhaps.

Odette shrugs in a very nonchalant, very Parisian way.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

(re: taking a seat)

Can I?

Blasé, Matthew shrugs. Goes back to studying his manuscript. Odette sits opposite him. Starts to pick at her salad. An awkward pause before he looks up at her.

MATTHEW

So what is this?

ODETTE

(momentarily thrown)

This? Well, uh...Yashin has -- I don't know if you've heard -- a performance tomorrow night and --

MATTHEW

You're asking me on a date?

ODETTE

(blushing)

No no no no. Not at all. Not at all. It's actually where I -- well, a group of us are going so I just thought I'd --

MATTHEW

See if I'd like to go...?

ODETTE
Exactly...yes.

A very awkward beat. Matthew checks his watch. Starts to pack up his belongings.

MATTHEW
In that case, you obviously read people as well as you do music.

And with that he leaves Odette alone, trying her best not to take in the laughing faces on the opposite side of the room.

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Cynthia sits next to Matthew on the sofa. She has hold of his hands and is carefully examining them.

CYNTHIA
You're not using the cream I gave you.

MATTHEW
I am.

Cynthia gives him a look.

CYNTHIA
It's important. Trust me, I should know.

Matthew, irked by this comment, frees his hands from hers.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
After Tchaikovsky, we should really think about getting your hands insured. I'll get your father to look into it.
(beat)
He misses you, you know? Have you thought about moving back --

MATTHEW
Mum, please.

CYNTHIA
You said you'd consider it at least.

MATTHEW
The journey would be too much. Everyday.

CYNTHIA
I'd drive you. You know that. That way I could help you --

MATTHEW

You already help me enough.

CYNTHIA

Yes but --

MATTHEW

Mum, really, I was just on my way out, so...

Displeased, Cynthia stands, collects her jacket and handbag and heads for the door.

CYNTHIA

Don't stay out too late. That Second Movement won't perfect itself.

She exits, leaving Matthew contemplative.

EXT. THE HOT SPOT - NIGHT

Matthew approaches a seedy looking jazz bar: THE HOT SPOT. The BOUNCER on the door looks him up and down, curiously.

INT. THE HOT SPOT - NIGHT

Matthew descends a dark set of stairs into a sprawling basement bar. Tables and booths surround a main stage on which Matthew spots Yashin at a piano, jamming with a JAZZ BAND, performing a high-tempo **Thelonious Monk** number. He's really letting loose and the crowd are lapping it up.

Matthew quickly and covertly makes his way to a free booth. He sits for a while, taking in Yashin's brilliant display. The resentment in his eyes, undeniable.

Suddenly, a familiar voice with a French accent --

VOICE (O.S.)

Would you like something to drink?

Matthew turns to see Odette smiling at him, dressed in a dark bar uniform (crop top and leggings), hair tied back, holding a small cloth. Rumbled, he searches for a response.

MATTHEW

Uh, what d'you recommend?

ODETTE

Hmm. The 007, perhaps. A martini. Shaken, not stirred.

Odette grins. Matthew stares at her for a second, embarrassed.

MATTHEW

Is that an attempt at humour?

ODETTE

Humour? No no, I just thought that's what you English spies drink.

MATTHEW

So it is an attempt at humour.

ODETTE

Perhaps. You seem angry. Did I blow your cover?

MATTHEW

That's not why I'm here.

ODETTE

Of course not.

MATTHEW

It's not. You invited me.

ODETTE

An invitation I remember you so politely declined. Now what could've changed your mind? Certainly couldn't be the rumour about Yashin going to the Tchaikovsky competition...

Odette winks at Matthew as she nonchalantly wipes down the table, then takes a moment to admire Yashin's performance.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

He's brilliant, isn't he?

Matthew, silently simmering, watches Yashin.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

So, about that drink?

MATTHEW

What?

ODETTE

Are you ready to order?

MATTHEW

Um, I'll have a bottle.

ODETTE

Okay. Of...?

MATTHEW

Surprise me.

ODETTE

Absolument.

(goes to leave; then)

Talking of surprises, imagine mine today, opening the post to find my own invite to Tchaikovsky.

She smiles and walks off toward the bar. Matthew watches her in stunned silence.

INT. THE HOT SPOT - MINUTES LATER

Odette returns to Matthew's booth with his beer only to find he's hightailed, having left a crisp £10 note under the drinks menu. She pockets it and takes a swig of the beer.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - COMPOSITION CLASS - DAY

The small classroom is full of students including Odette, Yashin, Tan and Chung.

The tutor, MARY ROMAIN, 40's, black, big bosomed, is about to start, before noticing an empty seat. She does a quick scan of the faces -- a sudden realisation.

ROMAIN

Anyone know if Mr. Heyward will finally grace us with an appearance today?

Murmurs and shrugs ripple out. Odette looks at a single empty chair. A resigned look from Romain.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Matthew intensely practicing the **Second Movement of Rachmaninov's Third**. He suddenly stops. Ponders a moment, then attempts a little **Thelonious Monk** a la Yashin. It's horrible. Makes a complete mess of it. He smashes his hands down on the keys in frustration, before returning to the safety of Rachmaninov.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CRIT ROOM - DAY

Class is over. Only a furious Matthew and a weary Professor Stoltz remain, in the midst of an argument.

MATTHEW

This is unacceptable.

STOLTZ

I'm sorry you feel that way, but I'll remind you Matthew that nobody is forcing you to be here.

(MORE)

STOLTZ (CONT'D)

This is part of the curriculum and, despite what you may have come to believe, you don't get to pick and choose.

MATTHEW

At least change my partner!

STOLTZ

No.

Matthew, scowling, heads for the door.

STOLTZ (CONT'D)

Who knows, Matthew, you might actually learn something from it.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CRIT ROOM - LATER

Matthew and Odette sit awkwardly at a single piano together. Matthew tries to maintain as much distance as possible.

ODETTE

Listen, I'm more pissed off about this than you are.

MATTHEW

I doubt it.

ODETTE

Yeah? It's not some sort of honour for me to be paired with the great Matthew Heyward.

Matthew looks dubiously at her.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

Whatever. As we're stuck together, how about we just get on with it?

Matthew looks at the sheet music before them, studying it.

MATTHEW

Fine. Only try and keep up.

Odette flicks her head defiantly. Begins to limber up her fingers. Attempts to shake the building nerves. After a few moments she's ready. Nods at Matthew, his look of displeasure unwavering.

A silent head count and they begin **Poulenc's Sonata for piano four-hands**. It's a lively piece, requiring much dexterity on the part of the performers for their hands not to clatter into one another. Odette is really concentrating, but she's doing well. A slight smile beginning to form. Even Matthew is impressed, although he does his best to conceal it.

We concentrate on the two sets of hands, performing perfectly in unison together. Suddenly, one of Odette's hands brushes ever so gently against one of Matthew's. It's the lightest of contacts for the shortest of moments. However, we see a flicker of emotion sweep across his face. A spark of attraction. For a moment, he's completely thrown.

He stands, abruptly.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ!

Odette instantly stops playing.

ODETTE
What?

MATTHEW
This -- this whole thing is fucked.

ODETTE
Fucked? Why?

MATTHEW
A duet? I'm a soloist. Not a fucking collaborator.

ODETTE
Mon dieu.

MATTHEW
(packing up his belongings)
You just try and learn your part, okay? Think you can manage that?

ODETTE
Piss off, Matthew! I'm not your rival here.

MATTHEW
(stops packing)
Yes you are. What don't you get? All of us here. We're all rivals.

They glare at one another. Odette, knowing this to be true, concedes.

ODETTE
What about the performance?

Matthew slings his bag onto his back.

MATTHEW
It's an informal concert, who gives a shit.

She clearly does.

ODETTE

Tell me you'll turn up, at least?

Matthew heads for the door.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

Matthew...?

Without a response, he exits. Odette fumes.

We HEAR the sound of **POULENC'S SONATA FOR PIANO FOUR-HANDS...**

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PURCELL ROOM - NIGHT

Intimate with a strong Baroque feel. At a GRAND PIANO, Matthew and Odette perform together. Tense. Hostile expressions. Odette works hard to keep up. Matthew deliberately pushing and testing her.

Eight packed rows of attentive faces, watching. We pick out Cynthia, exuding pride. Next to her sits a man in a sharp suit with a gentle face -- Matthew's father, HENRY HEYWARD, 58. A powerful yet reserved man, he's usually more than happy to let his wife take centre stage.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PURCELL ROOM - LATER

Rapt applause. Matthew and Odette, having just finished their performance, take a bow. Strained smiles on both their faces.

INT. FRENCH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Classy. Scintillating views of central London.

Around a table by the window sits Matthew, Cynthia, Henry and, most surprisingly, Odette, who is looking a little anxious. She takes a sip of wine.

ODETTE

Thanks again for inviting me Mr. Heyward. This place is lovely.

HENRY

Henry please. And you're very welcome, Odette. It's always nice to meet Matthew's friends. You were both brilliant tonight.

Matthew and Odette share an awkward look.

CYNTHIA

(raising her glass)
Here, here.

ODETTE

Thank you.

CYNTHIA

(taking a sip)

A shame your parents couldn't make it.

Odette nods. Matthew, who is clearly not happy at Odette's presence, fills a glass with a jug of water.

MATTHEW

It was an informal concert.

CYNTHIA

Still a performance, Matthew.

(to Odette)

Do they get to see you play much?

ODETTE

Not really. It's tricky, them being in Paris. They work a lot too. To help support me.

CYNTHIA

Yes, quite. The Institute is by no means cheap. This was your first performance in a while too, wasn't it Henry?

HENRY

It was.

(rather taken with Odette)

How are you finding your studies?

ODETTE

Great. It's tough but great.

CYNTHIA

What's your goal, for when you graduate?

Matthew rolls his eyes.

MATTHEW

What do you think her goal is?

Cynthia gives him a stern look.

CYNTHIA

Just making conversation Matthew. Don't be afraid to try it sometime.

Cynthia turns her focus back to Odette.

ODETTE

Um, concert pianist.

CYNTHIA

Fantastic. It's a brutal but
fantastic world being a soloist.

HENRY

(to Odette)

Cynthia use to be a cellist.

Matthew tries to hide a look of cynicism. Suddenly, a DULL RINGING twinges through his left ear. Instinctively, he pokes at it, but it's gone as quickly as it came -- much to his visible relief.

ODETTE (O.S.)

Really?

CYNTHIA

A long time ago.

ODETTE

Must be where Matthew gets his
talent from.

Cynthia takes an uneasy sip of wine.

HENRY

(attempting a joke)

Certainly wasn't from me.

An awkward silence.

MATTHEW

Here's a conversation starter,
Odette's also been invited to
Tchaikovsky.

Cynthia's demeanour changes ever so slightly.

CYNTHIA

Really?

ODETTE

Yes. I got confirmation the other
day.

HENRY

Congratulations.

ODETTE

Thank you.

CYNTHIA

Yes, congratulations. It's strange
because Matthew's had his for
several weeks now.

(to Matthew)

Haven't you?

(MORE)

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
 (he nods; then to Odette)
 What will you be playing?

ODETTE
 Um, I haven't decided yet.

CYNTHIA
 Matthew's playing Rachmaninov's
 Third.

ODETTE
 (sincerely)
 Impressive. To be able to memorise
 all that.

CYNTHIA
 Speaking of which, I couldn't help
 but notice the sheet music tonight?

Matthew looks at Odette.

ODETTE
 Uh, yes, that was me. I've, uh...
 been having some problems recently.

Pause. Cynthia looks fixedly at Odette to elaborate further,
 even though she clearly doesn't want to.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 With my recall.

CYNTHIA
 Oh no, really?

ODETTE
 Nothing serious. I'll get over it.

Odette catches Matthew's eye for a moment before quickly
 looking away -- red faced.

A WAITER appears with a tray of starters. Odette welcomes the
 silence as the starters are set out before them by the
 waiter, who smiles and then departs.

CYNTHIA
 (to Odette)
 I'm glad to hear it. Because, quite
 frankly, a pianist with a memory
 problem is a pianist with a *huge*
 problem.
 (re: the starters)
 This looks amazing.

Henry shoots Cynthia a look, who casually commences eating.
 He looks apologetically at Odette. She smiles back at him and
 takes a sip of wine, attempting to mask her humiliation.

Matthew pokes at his food. His appetite lost, he steals glances at Odette. Somehow, his mother's demolition job on her confidence not feeling as good as it should. He frowns. A strange, new feeling starting to build...Empathy.

INT. ODETTE'S ROOM - NIGHT

A cramped en-suite room resembling a cheap ski-cabin.

Odette, not long returned from the meal, lays on a single camper style bed. Her phone pressed against her ear.

ODETTE
 (into the phone in French)
 I'm alright mamma. Just wanted to hear your voice...no no. I'm fine. Honestly. Just a stressful night.

There's a KNOCKING SOUND at her door.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 (into the phone in French)
 One moment mamma.

She rises, moves to the door and opens it to find Matthew's pensive face staring at her. Odette is shocked.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 (into the phone in French)
 Mamma, I'll call you back in a second...okay. Bye.

She hangs up the call.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 What you doing here?

She waits for Matthew to respond. He doesn't -- seems nervous, almost. Finally --

MATTHEW
 I play in the dark...

ODETTE
 Pardon?

MATTHEW
 It's what I do. Shut out all the light, so I can't see the keyboard, music...anything. And I play...in darkness. To boost my recall.

Odette is absolutely stunned.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 Thought it might help.

He turns and begins to walk off. Odette doesn't know how to react. After a second or two she follows after him.

ODETTE
What happened to us being rivals?

MATTHEW
(turning)
We still are.

ODETTE
So why, why tell me that?

Matthew shrugs. Unsure himself. Then, very matter of fact --

MATTHEW
Why not? I'm going to win
Tchaikovsky anyway.

He turns and walks off down the corridor. Odette watches after him, uncertain of what's just happened.

EXT. STRANGE LANDSCAPE - DAY

We float through a thick, golden haze, reminiscent to that we witnessed at the beginning. A STRONG WIND is all that can be heard until, ever so gently, sporadic NOTES ON A PIANO sound. Too intermittent to be called a melody -- yet there's something undeniably beguiling about them. Just as the volume of the notes begin to increase --

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matthew's eyes snap open. An alarm sounds. It's 5am. He shuts it off. Wipes his face, shakes his head, jolting the memory of the dream he's just had from his mind.

INT. MAYFAIR HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

A swanky joint. Cynthia, efficacious as ever, bounds in followed by a cautious Matthew, wearing a shirt and jacket. She scans about. Catches the eye of JOURNALIST, SELINA RAYES, 28 -- sharply dressed and dripping with ambition. Selina jumps to her feet.

SELINA RAYES
Cynthia Heyward?
(Cynthia nods)
And Matthew. Selina Rayes. Pianist
Monthly.

They shake hands.

INT. MAYFAIR HOTEL - BAR - DAY

The threesome are about to take a seat at a table. Selina looks at Cynthia.

SELINA RAYES
If you wouldn't mind, I'd very much like this to be a one on one.

Cynthia does mind. She takes a seat.

CYNTHIA
Oh don't mind me. I'm his publicist.

SELINA RAYES
Excellent. Promise to shout if we need you.

Cynthia glares at Selina, then counterfeits her best smile. She pats Matthew on the hand and rises.

INT. MAYFAIR HOTEL - BAR - MINUTES LATER

The interview is underway. Selina very much in charge, taking notes. Uncomfortable, Matthew fidgets in his chair. Across the bar sits Cynthia, keeping a close eye on proceedings. Matthew occasionally throws her furtive glances.

INT. MAYFAIR HOTEL - BAR - LATER

Matthew has clearly had enough, yet Selina is going strong.

SELINA RAYES
...putting piano aside for a moment, what do you do to unwind?

MATTHEW
Unwind?

SELINA RAYES
Yes. To alleviate the stress of preparing for Tchaikovsky say.

MATTHEW
I play the piano.

SELINA RAYES
But hobbies-wise, anything?

Matthew stares at her blankly.

SELINA RAYES (CONT'D)
No, okay.
(she checks her notes)
(MORE)

SELINA RAYES (CONT'D)

Such absolute dedication to your music, are you not afraid of burn out? Or is what happened to your mother a source of motivation?

MATTHEW

What do you mean "what happened to my mother?"

SELINA RAYES

Well, you know...her walking away from the life.

This is clearly news to Matthew. His brow furrows.

MATTHEW

She didn't "walk away", she had me.

Sceptical, Selina checks her notes. Goes to retort --

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Look, let's just skip to the performance, shall we?

INT. MAYFAIR HOTEL - PIANO ROOM - DAY

Plush. Matthew performs at a GRAND PIANO. Selina listens close by, taking notes.

Matthew's hands move in a blur. He's putting on a good show -- exhibiting just how supremely gifted he is, when, suddenly, the DULL RINGING in his EARS returns, dampening the sound of the notes. It completely throws him. He stops, panicked.

Selina looks over at him in surprise.

SELINA RAYES

Everything okay?

Matthew doesn't answer. Suddenly, the ringing stops.

MATTHEW

Huh?

SELINA RAYES

Are you okay?

Far from it. He tries his best to control his alarm.

MATTHEW

Let me -- I'll start over.

And he begins to play again.

INT. OTOLARYNGOLOGIST - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Clinical. Bathed in artificial light. Matthew sits, nervous. Tries his hardest to ignore the incessant wails of the YOUNG KID opposite, clawing at a HEARING AID protruding from one ear. His cries intensify until it seems his lungs will burst.

DR HAYDEN (O.S.)
Mr. Heyward?

Matthew quickly looks up to see a tall otolaryngologist, DR HAYDEN, smiling down at him.

INT. OTOLARYNGOLOGIST - EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

Matthew, pensive, lays in an ENT chair, slowly reclining automatically.

Dr Hayden pulls on a fresh pair of LATEX GLOVES. The GLARE of an OVERHEAD LAMP, switched on. An OTOSCOPE being pushed deep into Matthew's EAR. Dr Hayden carries out a thorough investigation of the inner ear. Matthew's eyes, fearful.

INT. DR HAYDEN'S - OFFICE - DAY

Matthew staring directly at us with sheer consternation.

DR HAYDEN (O.S.)
Mr. Heyward?

Matthew continues to stare silently ahead.

DR HAYDEN (CONT'D)
Mr. Heyward, did you hear what I said?

Matthew's shock morphs quickly into rage.

MATTHEW
Is that supposed to be funny?

Dr Hayden is taken by surprise.

DR HAYDEN
No -- I-- I know this must be difficult to --

MATTHEW
Difficult?

DR HAYDEN
Yes, to process and --

MATTHEW

Shut up -- just shut up. Okay? I don't want to hear anymore from you.

Matthew springs to his feet.

DR HAYDEN

Mr. Heyward --

MATTHEW

You clearly don't know what the fuck you're talking about. I'll find someone that does.

He storms out, slamming the door.

INT. DR LEE'S OFFICE - DAY

Matthew sits opposite a different otolaryngologist, DR LEE. A pained expression covers his face.

Dr Lee speaks frankly, but with a compassionate tone.

DR LEE

Your ears have suffered a serious trauma. Most likely during the early stages of formation. Honestly, it's amazing you've been able to...

On the word "formation", we've already begun to zone out along with Matthew until the sound of Dr Lee's words dissipate completely altogether.

After a moment, Matthew speaks.

MATTHEW

How long?

DR LEE

The rate of deterioration is expediting. Four, six months, if you're lucky. With intermittent loss before then. I'm very sorry.

Matthew, despite his world collapsing, simply nods.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Matthew, a leaflet in one hand, walks aimlessly in a daze along busy streets, as the swarm of people around him carry on with their hectic lives.

He releases his grip on the leaflet, which floats to the ground. We see, written on the leaflet, in big capital letters: **LEARNING TO LIVE WITH YOUR DEAFNESS.**

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Odette, sat at a piano, takes a few deep breaths, steadying herself, before she pushes the LIGHT SWITCH off, plunging the room into DARKNESS.

We HEAR a loud and abrupt CLASH of CHORDS.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - DAY

Matthew pushes through a group of students, and enters...

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - DAY

Matthew continues to walk as if on autopilot. A cacophony of MUSICAL SOUNDS radiates out from around him, horns; bass; flutes; drums etc and of course PIANO.

Odette emerges from around a corner, her face beaming with a sense of accomplishment.

ODETTE

Hey, Matthew! That advice of yours
really --

Matthew doesn't even register her as he walks on past. Bemusement befalls Odette -- back to square one it seems.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Matthew enters, disturbing the practice of a YOUNG UNDERGRADUATE seated at the Steinway. He looks up at Matthew in bewilderment.

MATTHEW

Get the fuck out.

UNDERGRADUATE

What? No!

MATTHEW

Now!

Noticing Matthew's state of unhone, he quickly packs up his music and makes a hasty exit. Matthew closes the door, sits at the piano and just stares at the keys for a long moment.

Then, he calmly retrieves a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes slowly along the surface of the keys.

He pockets the handkerchief and instantly explodes into an incredibly fast technical exercise to warm up his fingers.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CANTEEN - DAY

Lunchtime. Matthew again sits alone at a corner table. He scrolls fastidiously through sheets of internet research he's printed off regarding hearing loss.

On the opposite side of the canteen, Odette's face contorts with laughter. She's sat at a table accompanied by Yashin and Chung, who are also in a fit of hysterics as they stare at something or someone in amazement. After a moment, we see...

It's Tan, who's not smiling, but is instead now sporting a massive MOHAWK HAIRSTYLE.

YASHIN

What were you thinking?

TAN

I'm telling you, it's all about creating an image. An identity.

The others just continue to laugh.

TAN (CONT'D)

Laugh all you want. I'm distinctive.

ODETTE

Distinctive's one word for it.

TAN

Think about it. There's thousands of great pianists out there. All competing for a tiny number of opportunities. The difference between the lot of us in terms of ability is minute.

Yashin coughs vigorously, indicating his objection.

TAN (CONT'D)

(dismissing Yashin)

Dick!

(back to it)

What you need is marketability. Lang Lang has his faces --

CHUNG

Kissin has autism.

TAN

Exactly.

CHUNG
MacGregor, those nasty braids.

Tan nods, gratified.

TAN
See.

Odette is far from convinced.

ODETTE
(re: Tan's hair)
So what does this make you exactly?

Tan takes a moment, then proudly declares --

TAN
Classical piano's bad boy.

This sets the others off again.

TAN (CONT'D)
Laugh all you want. But take my
advice. Especially you Odette.
Wouldn't hurt for you to sex
yourself up a bit. Give those
judges at Tchaikovsky something
else to assess. Huh?

He winks at Odette, who stops laughing and gives Tan the
finger. Yashin examines Odette closely.

YASHIN
That's actually not a bad idea.

TAN
It's a fucking great idea. You'd be
the sexy exotic ebony. The
forbidden fruit to the ivory
judges.

Chung rolls her eyes and groans.

TAN (CONT'D)
What? Just because you're a lost
cause.

Chung hits Tan. At that moment, Matthew hurries past their
table. They all stop -- unnaturally quiet as they throw
surreptitious glances toward him.

Odette deliberates whether to call out to Matthew, but by the
time she's made up her mind, he's already exited the canteen.

TAN (CONT'D)
See that? No hello,
acknowledgement, nothing!

YASHIN

(re: Matthew)

Come on. He didn't see us. He walks
a higher path, for he is --

ALL

(except Odette)

"The maestro".

TAN

(suddenly realising)

"Maestro", you see...image!

(off their looks)

He's definitely getting worse.

CHUNG

Yeah, I heard he dragged a first
year out of a practice room by
their hair.

Tan turns to Odette. Sincerely --

TAN

If wearing some mascara and
flashing your tits means beating
that prick at Tchaikovsky, well
then, I'm sorry but, it's your duty
to flaunt that beauty.

EXT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - DAY

Matthew makes his way inside the banal building through a
small set of doors.

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - CONSULTATION ROOM - DAY

A RESEARCH DOCTOR, DR JENKINS, is in the process of
explaining something to Matthew.

DR JENKINS

...latest trial found a
significantly high level of results
in the reversal of inner ear cell
damage. That being said, I must
stress that this would be an
experimental procedure. We make no
guarantees. Understand?

Matthew nods.

DR JENKINS (CONT'D)

Well then...

Dr Jenkins retrieves a pile of legal and consensual forms
from a folder on the desk. Slides them across to Matthew.

DR JENKINS (CONT'D)
 Read through those, sign them. Then
 we can get started.

Matthew picks up the papers with a sense of hopeful urgency.

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Matthew lays apprehensively on a treatment bed as Dr Jenkins finishes placing a small METALLIC CONE over his left ear. It is joined to an identical cone, already covering his right ear, by a thick insulating tube -- it looks as if he's wearing a very large and very expensive set of headphones.

DR JENKINS
 Now, it's important you remain
 absolutely still.

A set of wires connect the 'headphones' to an ultra sleek looking, hi-tech machine attached to the bed's headboard.

Dr Jenkins flicks a few switches and the machine comes to life with flashing lights and a low humming sound.

DR JENKINS (CONT'D)
 This laser is the most powerful
 we've used yet.

As the machine warms up, we focus in on Matthew's face. His anxiety building.

DR JENKINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Just try to relax now Matthew.

Matthew tries his best. Closes his eyes.

DR JENKINS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 That's it. Good.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Candle light. A grand table covered with delectable food dishes and wine glasses brimming. A dinner party very much in progress. Soft classical music plays in the background.

At the top of the table is Cynthia, refined as always in an evening dress. At the opposite end, suited, sits Henry. They are joined at the table by two wealthy couples, THE FREDERICKSONS and THE CRAXTONS, renowned conductor PETER ROSE, and most importantly Matthew, dressed in suit and tie, trying his best, and failing miserably to appear sociable.

PETER ROSE

I tell you, the problem I find with most young pianists these days is, many don't know how to take instruction.

MRS FREDERICKSON

Really?

PETER ROSE

Indeed.

MR CRAXTON

The hours of solitude I suppose.

PETER ROSE

Of all the soloists, they're by far the worst.

MR FREDERICKSON

Yes, to hear another voice must be a shock to the system, huh, Matthew?

Polite laughter. Matthew nods gently. Cynthia gives him a reassuring smile.

PETER ROSE

My advice to you Matthew -- as a conductor of some note -- learn how to take instruction. Really *listen*, eh...!

CYNTHIA

I think resistance to instruction is a component of youth generally. Thankfully, Matthew is maturer than that, aren't you darling?

MATTHEW

I have my moments.

PETER ROSE

That Stoichkov. Terrific pianist, terrible listener.

(abruptly to Matthew)

So for Tchaikovsky, what will you play, huh?

Matthew hasn't even time to open his mouth --

CYNTHIA

Matthew's playing Rachmaminov's third.

MRS CRAXTON

Wonderful!

PETER ROSE

In that case really listen to the conductor. It's -- who is it this time? Stelling, I think?

Cynthia's eyes gleam.

CYNTHIA

Yes, Stelling. You know him well don't you Peter?

PETER ROSE

Yes. Yes, I do.

(moments contemplation)

I'll mention Matthew to him.

(to Matthew)

It's amazing what a good relationship between performer and conductor can lead to. Especially in a competition.

Having taken the bait, Peter nods at Cynthia who smiles.

CYNTHIA

Marvellous. Always knew there was a reason why I kept you as a friend, Peter.

Everyone laughs apart from Matthew and Henry who share a quiet look.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The party has retired to the living room, listening earnestly to Matthew perform the technically challenging **Prokofiev Sonata No.6, 4th movement**.

MRS CRAXTON

(to Peter)

Isn't he wonderful.

Peter nods. Cynthia, bursting with pride, observes it all.

EXT. HEYWARD HOME - TERRACE - NIGHT

Matthew stands looking out into the dark landscape before him. The sound of laughter and music wafts from inside. After a moment the door opens and a burst of CELLO AND MEDIOCRE PIANO sounds as Henry steps out onto the terrace. He closes the door and produces a cigar.

HENRY

So this is where you're hiding.
Can't say I blame you.

He lights his cigar.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 (re: the music inside)
 Cynthia and your mother.

Matthew shakes his head despairingly. Henry puffs on his cigar for a moment.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Everything okay, son?

MATTHEW
 Yeah. Fine.

HENRY
 You sure? The whole Tchaikovsky
 competition isn't --

MATTHEW
 I'm fine dad.

Henry nods. A quiet pause. We hear the sound of a CELLO solo.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 You think she ever misses it?

HENRY
 What? No. Well, maybe, sometimes.

Henry rests a hand on the back of Matthew's head gently.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 But everything she always wanted is
 right here.

Matthew comes close to a smile. Nods. Henry lets go and they continue to stare out into the night.

MATTHEW
 Was there a reason, a particular
 reason though why she decided to
 stop? After I was born. I mean, she
 could have gone back to it,
 couldn't she?

HENRY
 What can I say, your mother simply
 wanted to be with you.

MATTHEW
 I wasn't sick or ill then? As a
 baby?

HENRY
 Ill? No. Why do you ask?

MATTHEW
 No reason. It was just a big
 decision.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

To walk away from your passion. I
couldn't. Thought there was
something else maybe I didn't know
about.

Henry looks cagily at Matthew for a moment, then smiles.

HENRY

You wait until you have kids. Then
you'll understand.

(changing the subject)

Speaking of which, how is
everything on the female front?

MATTHEW

Female front?

HENRY

Yes. How's that lovely Odette?

Matthew, vexed by the very suggestion, waves Henry off.
Nothing could be further from his mind. Henry is clearly
disappointed.

HENRY (CONT'D)

It's great to have a passion, son.
Just so long as it doesn't become
an obsession.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ultra sleek and clinical. Furnished to the highest order.

The party is over. The guests and Matthew long since gone.
Cynthia, unsettled, struggles to uncork a wine bottle.

CYNTHIA

No, Henry. I'm sorry. No. There's
no way.

Henry stands behind her by the table, ruffled.

HENRY

I just think maybe --

CYNTHIA

No!

HENRY

He's starting to ask questions.
It's only going to get harder and
harder the longer we --

Cynthia swings around, infuriated.

CYNTHIA

FOR GOD'S SAKE HENRY I SAID NO!

The WINE BOTTLE drops from her hands and SMASHES on the hard tiles. She stares calmly at the broken mess. A quiet pause.

Henry approaches his wife and tenderly touches her arm.

HENRY

Maybe it's time we told him the truth.

She moves away from him. Retrieves a dustpan and brush from a cupboard.

CYNTHIA

(calmly)

I'm sorry Henry, no.

And starts to sweep up the glass.

EXT. STRANGE LANDSCAPE - DAY

Again we float through a golden haze, hanging like a vast, thick blanket. The sound of a strong wind blowing against fabric builds. A flash of red and white cloth. Gone just as quickly as it appeared.

The wind subsides. The haze slowly begins to dissipate, revealing vague silhouettes of buildings and distant mountains. Once more, the sound of remote piano notes starts to become increasingly audible. Only this time, a FAINT, yet DISTINCTIVE MELODY is recognisable -- visceral, yet hauntingly beautiful. But before the melody has a chance to really take shape --

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matthews eyes snap open.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRE-DAWN

Matthew, a long queue of students behind him, is first in line. He looks at his watch. Eager to get inside.

Odette, late as usual, comes rushing along the road. Her appearance is visibly different, with make-up and a new hairstyle accentuating her natural beauty.

Matthew can't help but notice her. As Odette passes, the two share an awkward glance.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Matthew is at the Steinway practicing with a feverish intensity the **Finale: Alla breve to Rachmaninov's Third.**

His fingers fly back and forth across the keys, trying their best to conquer the behemoth.

The **Finale: Alla breve to Rachmaninov's Third** continues over...

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Matthew, 'headphones' on, lying perfectly still as the laser machine gently hums.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

Matthew playing. Shawl stands at the window listening. A surprised expression suddenly breaks across his face. He turns to face Matthew --

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Pianissimo! Colour! More, colour
Matthew!

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - CONSULTATION ROOM - DAY

The music continues...

A colour X-RAY of an EAR.

Matthew sits opposite an optimistic Dr Jenkins, pointing at various parts of the X-ray.

DR JENKINS
...It's early days, but here we can
see there's been what we would term
'significant' reduction in cell
damage. It's a positive step.

Buoyed, Matthew nods, but daren't let himself break into a smile.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

Matthew playing. Shawl at the window, pacing animatedly.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
You're hiding still. Release
yourself from the score. For fuck
sake, reveal yourself!

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

The music continues...

Matthew, dripping with sweat, putting in a punishing practice session. His fingers moving in a blur. Without stopping he stands and with one hand pulls his stool closer to the piano. He sits and recommences playing with both hands as he gently lowers his head ever so slightly toward the Steinway's cabinet.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

The music continues...

Shawl notices Matthew's head is closer to the piano. This change in style seems odd to him, but Matthew's face is more expressive than it's ever been.

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Good. Finally a bit of emotion. But don't let it dictate. Balance, Matthew.

But Matthew's concentrating solely on the keys.

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The music continues...

Matthew studies his Rachmaninov manuscript at the desk whilst rubbing a thick cream substance into his hands.

The sound of the **Finale: Alla breve** finishing...

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

Matthew lifts his hands from the piano. Exhausted. Retrieves a handkerchief. Wipes beads of sweat from his forehead.

Shawl is at the window, gazing out. Silence. Then --

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Something is different. You play almost as if it's the last piece you'll ever play.

(he smiles)

Such obsessiveness is good. The judges will swallow that up.

(he turns to face Matthew)

But don't let it turn erratic.

Remember, balance. Three-way.

This...

(he picks up the score)

This...

(he taps his head)

And this.

(MORE)

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
 (he holds his hand to his
 heart)
 Balance. Always. Okay?

Matthew looks up at Shawl.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
 Nervous?

Matthew shakes his head "no"... But his eyes betray him.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
 It's okay to be nervous. Good even.
 Win, and your life will never be
 the same again. You understand
 that, don't you?

The significance of winning is certainly not lost on Matthew.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
 In the end, it'll be up to you to
 determine whether that's for the
 better or worse.

EXT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - DAY

Bright sunshine beams against the magnificently grand building of the Moscow Conservatory.

Outside the entrance, a middle-aged ITALIAN WOMAN waits apprehensively, deliberating over whether or not to enter. Finally, she decides against it and walks off. Her name, we'll come to learn later, is JULIANA MONDI.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - DAY

The face of the great maestro himself, Tchaikovsky, staring directly at us. Earnest. Imposing.

Moving back, we see that his image dominates a gigantic poster, hanging as a backdrop in a resplendent concert hall.

XV International Tchaikovsky Competition. Moscow, Russia.

On the stage, co-chair of the organising committee, VLADIMIR SOKOLOV, an imperious middle-aged man in an expensive suit, soaks up a warm round of applause.

VLADIMIR
 Thank you. Thank you. And now, we
 invite the first participant to
 draw.

IRINA URIN, a sour-faced woman next to Vladimir, reads from a clipboard she holds.

IRINA
Daniella Adams.

In the stalls, a group of thirty CONTESTANTS wait anxiously, eyes fixed on DANIELLA ADAMS, a plump American, as she stands and awkwardly makes her way onto the stage.

Matthew watches her diligently as she picks out a piece of paper from a ballot box and opens it. She smiles with relief, showing the paper to Vladimir and Irina.

VLADIMIR
(reading the number
written on the paper)
Number 12.

Matthew looks over to the opposite side of the hall to where Odette sits looking immensely attractive in a satin outfit.

IRINA (O.S.)
Olga Aliyev.

Odette turns and catches his gaze. Smiles nervously. Matthew doesn't reciprocate. Turns his attention back to the stage. His game face very much on.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - FOYER - DAY

A pair of grand doors burst open, and Matthew comes storming from the Great Hall into the plush foyer.

Cynthia and Henry, accompanied in the foyer by a splattering of fellow parents, look up at him in surprise.

CYNTHIA
Well?

MATTHEW
Number 1.

Cynthia looks annoyed.

OLIVIA
Number 1?

Henry taps his son on the shoulder, consolingly.

HENRY
A number befitting your talent, at
least.

Cynthia and Matthew throw Henry a look.

CYNTHIA
We'll just have to make it work.
Simply means we have less time.

She looks sternly at Matthew to see if he understands. He most certainly does and nods.

INT. MOSCOW PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Matthew frantically practicing. Sweating profusely. Giving it absolutely everything.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - BACKROOM - DAY

Female hands finish adjusting a bow tie.

CYNTHIA

There. Now you look the part.

Cynthia nods her approval at the sight of Matthew dressed smartly in the black tuxedo she selected for him previously.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Ready?

Matthew nods. Cynthia wets a finger with saliva. Fixes in place a stray hair on his head.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Everything we've been working towards -- all the hard work we've put in. It all comes down to this moment.

She removes a piece of lint from his sleeve. Smiles and kisses him on the cheek.

OLIVIA

Make me proud.

She exits.

Matthew paces. Mentally rehearses his music. Intermittently wipes his hands on his jacket. Checks his watch. He stops at a tiny mirror. Stares at his reflection, quietly psyching himself up. His attention is drawn to his ears. Visually examines them. Then, closes his eyes, as if to pray.

Suddenly, there's a knock at the door, and a young COMPETITION COORDINATOR sticks her head inside.

COORDINATOR

Five minutes Mr. Heyward.

Matthew nods. Takes a deep breath.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - BACKSTAGE - DAY

Dark and narrow. The coordinator leads Matthew past an array of security personnel and competition assistants toward the stage.

The hum of the crowd filling up within the auditorium builds.

Suddenly, a hand reaches out to Matthew. He turns, surprised to see Odette.

ODETTE

I--I just wanted to say, bon chance.

She smiles, warmly. Matthew stares at her. Examines her new sexy look. Unimpressed, he shakes his head.

MATTHEW

You're better than that.

Turns and continues on toward the wings.

Odette watches him for a moment before decisively wiping the red lipstick from her mouth.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)

Ladies and gentleman, please welcome our first contestant, Mr. Matthew Heyward.

A rapture of applause.

Matthew takes a deep breath, and walks out into the bright light engulfing the stage.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - DAY

Matthew sits at the grand piano on stage. Behind him, a CONDUCTOR and his ORCHESTRA wait patiently.

It's deathly silent.

Matthew retrieves a handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wipes along the length of the keyboard and back again. He pockets the handkerchief and takes a deep breath.

In the auditorium, we pick out the faces of Henry and Cynthia, watching on with great hope and expectation.

Several rows further back, sits the Italian woman, Juliana Mondì, looking just as, if not slightly more proud than Cynthia. She clasps her hands tightly together in anticipation.

Matthew glances toward the conductor, who winks warmly at him. Matthew nods. The conductor raises his baton. Matthew raises his hands...Begins.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - LATER

Matthew is coming to the end of the **First movement of Rachmaninov's Third**. Everything is going well.

Cynthia beams in the audience. Grasping at Henry's arm.

Odette sits not too far away, watching on transfixed.

As does, Juliana, completely enraptured. Eyes damp with joy.

We play along with Matthew, inside his head; concentrating hard, our hands moving, listening intently, every sound detected and processed, our breathing controlled as we finish the **First movement**. The sound of our heart pounding during the brief pause. Then we're off again.

The **Second movement**. Really going at it. Suddenly, the DULL RINGING SOUNDS and everything else becomes muffled -- our playing, the orchestra...everything.

We continue playing on regardless. Desperate. But the dull ringing grows. We increase our hand speed as a result. Faster and faster.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - LATER

The **Finale: Alla breve**. Matthew, dripping with sweat, battles to perform. Way out of time with the orchestra, the performance sounds truly terrible.

The Conductor throws a bewildered look his way. The LEAD VIOLINIST stares at the conductor, equally perplexed.

But Matthew plays on, his hands moving in a blur, barely hearing a note.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - LATER

Matthew finishes the **Finale: Alla breve** with gusto. Drenched with perspiration. Exhausted, he closes his eyes for a second. Manages a smile. Opens his eyes and stands.

The Conductor's expression of miffed bemusement mirrors that of the whole orchestra and the majority of the audience.

Cynthia and Henry sit in a stupefied silence. Henry begins to clap. But Cynthia doesn't move. Juliana joins in. So does Odette, and a hesitant ripple of polite applause follows.

Matthew focuses on Cynthia's horrified expression. Then, Odette's. A sudden realisation hits him.

Without taking a bow, he walks off stage.

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - FOYER - DAY

Cynthia and Henry wait anxiously in the foyer. Matthew strides in, ripping off his bow tie. Cynthia rushes to him.

CYNTHIA
What happened?

MATTHEW
Nothing!

CYNTHIA
Nothing? What was that? Nerves? You don't get nervous...

MATTHEW
Just drop it.

CYNTHIA
Drop it? How can I drop it? You just --

MATTHEW
What? Embarrassed myself, you, dad. You think I don't know?

HENRY
That's not true, Matthew. Nobody's embarrassed.

Cynthia is.

CYNTHIA
Matthew, what happened up there?

Matthew doesn't answer.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
Matthew...!

MATTHEW
Jesus mum, I just -- I just felt unwell, okay.

Henry looks unsure. Cynthia feels Matthew's forehead.

CYNTHIA
Unwell? Then why didn't you say so?! For god's sake. We'll notify the judges immediately. Henry, find the chairman, what's his name...Vladimir something.

HENRY

Cynthia --

CYNTHIA

There must be something in the rules about sickness...mitigating circumstances --

At that moment, the foyer doors open and in walks Juliana, looking greatly concerned. Cynthia stops. Motionless. As if she's just seen a ghost. Henry's face turns ashen. Panic setting in.

JULIANA

I...I just wanted to check everything's alright.

Juliana stares at Matthew with a warm empathy incongruous to that of a stranger. It unsettles him slightly. Cynthia's face clouds.

CYNTHIA

Henry, take Matthew out for some air.

Henry hesitates for the minutest of seconds.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Now, Henry!

HENRY

Come on son.

Matthew follows reluctantly. He looks back at Juliana staring at him. Something intriguing and familiar about her.

MATTHEW

Who's that?

Henry shrugs, unconvincingly. They exit. Cynthia moves swiftly to Juliana. A savage intensity in her eyes.

CYNTHIA

Stay away from my son. Or so help me God...!

No other words need be spoken. Juliana gets the message -- holds up her hands in submission. Cynthia gives her one last glare, then walks off in pursuit of Matthew and Henry.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CANTEEN - DAY

Late afternoon. The canteen is quiet, save for Yashin, Tan and Chung, crowded around Tan's laptop, rapturous.

CHUNG

First round?

TAN
First round knockout.

YASHIN
Read that line again.

TAN
(reading)
The shock of the day came in the very first performance of the very first round where strong favourite Matt--

YASHIN
No, that line.

TAN
Oh...
(reading)
It was, in all honesty, the most ham-fisted and erratic performance of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto I have ever had the misfortune of hearing.

Yashin roars with laughter.

CHUNG
Harsh.

TAN
Brilliantly harsh. Salina Rayes I love you. Whoever you are.

YASHIN
That's it. The Maestro's finished.

EXT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY

Matthew sits silently in the back of a black Mercedes as Henry finishes loading a final suitcase into the boot.

INT. MERCEDES - DAY

Henry drives. Cynthia beside him. Sitting in complete silence. In the back, Matthew gazes out of the window. The world flashing by.

A THUNDER OF APPLAUSE.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
And now, Ladies and Gentleman, the bronze medal in the fifteenth International Tchaikovsky piano competition is awarded to...

INT. THE MOSCOW CONSERVATORY - GREAT HALL - DAY

The finals. The stage is awash with dignitaries and fancy decorations.

Odette stands on stage alongside five other finalists, all waiting anxiously. Hearts in their mouths. She is dressed smartly but in a refined way. A stark contrast to the other two female finalists who have gone for a sexier, more revealing look.

Vladimir pauses a long time for dramatic effect. Finally --

VLADIMIR
Ms. Odette Bardon!

Odette's mouth opens in shock. Applause sounds. Her fellow contestants follow suit, politely clapping as she makes her way over to collect her award. Vladimir kisses her. Hands her a bronze medal. She smiles. Deliriously happy.

INT. MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE - CONSULTATION ROOM - DAY

Distraught, Matthew slumps in a chair opposite Dr Jenkins.

MATTHEW
You said it looked positive.
Significantly positive.

DR JENKINS
I also said as an experimental
procedure, we could make no
guarantees.

Matthew slams his hand down hard on the table in despair.

MATTHEW
FUCK!

DR JENKINS
I'm sorry Matthew, I really am.

Matthew puts his head in his hands.

MATTHEW
Why? Why's this happening to me?

A silent pause. Dr Jenkins picks up Matthew's file from the table. Flicks through.

DR JENKINS
Have you tried asking your parents?

MATTHEW
No. Yes. They can't recall
anything. I was a healthy baby,
apparently.

DR JENKINS

What about your biological parents?

Matthew, slowly raises his head to look at Dr Jenkins.

MATTHEW

What?

Dr Jenkins glances at a copy of a CERTIFICATE OF ADOPTION.

DR JENKINS

(oblivious)

Your biological parents. Can you ask them?

Matthew's face, as if he's just been hit with a sledgehammer.

Dr Jenkin's stops still. A sudden comprehension, as the enormity of his clanger hits home.

DR JENKINS (CONT'D)

Matthew I'm...

(sighs)

Shit. I thought you knew!

EXT. HEYWARD HOME - DAY

Richmond upon Thames. An exclusive private residential street. Matthew quickly makes his way through the electric security gates guarding the lavish, detached home.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

The front door is unlocked and opened. Matthew enters the quiet hallway.

MATTHEW

(calling out)

Hello?

INT. HEYWARD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Matthew roots desperately through cupboards and side tables, sifting through family photo albums and papers.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - CYNTHIA AND HENRY'S ROOM - DAY

Matthew enters the meticulously tidy ensuite room. Immediately continues his frantic search, checking the top shelves of the wardrobes, under the bed, the inside of an oak bureau, bedside cabinets etc. But all searches come up futile.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - ATTIC - DAY

Matthew's quest continues in the attic. There's not much stored up here. A few carefully wrapped paintings. A cello case. An old trunk full of airtight packaged dresses. Matthew closes the trunk. It's useless. Then, in a corner, he sees an old, wooden toy sailing boat. He picks it up. It's large. Designed to navigate ponds. He dusts it off. On the side of the bow is painted an Italian flag. Matthew's curiosity is spiked.

On closer inspection, he notices a latch on the inside. He pulls it, lifting it to reveal an inside compartment. He freezes. Barely able to comprehend what he sees. Pulls out a PHOTOGRAPH of a young Cynthia at what is clearly an orphanage, holding a baby. Smiling. Next to her, stands Juliana.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The cupboards and side tables have been carefully repacked, so there's no trace of Matthew's earlier search.

Matthew sits motionless on the sofa, staring absently at the television. The sound is turned up high. In one hand he holds the photograph he found in the attic. In the other, the remote. He flicks through various stations. Decides upon a daytime talk show where A TRANSGENDER MALE breaks down, apologetically pouring his soul out to his miffed wife.

Matthew shuts the TV off. Sits still for a long moment. The sound of the front door opening. Cynthia appears. Surprised to find Matthew at home.

CYNTHIA

Oh. What are you doing here? You should be practicing. We haven't got long until Liszt.

Matthew doesn't answer.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Matthew?

Matthew finally looks up at her. Surreptitiously slides the photograph into his trouser pocket and stands. Half smiles.

MATTHEW

Whatever you say, *mother*.

He plants a sloppy kiss on her cheek, catching her by surprise and walks out.

INT. TUBE TRAIN - DAY

Matthew brazenly opens a bottle of vodka on the half-full carriage and takes a swig.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE - DAY

Shawl, at his customary spot by the window, sporting a bemused look on his face. Listening to someone performing badly at the piano.

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Stop. Stop. Jesus please, would you just, stop.

Shawl waves his hands. Matthew, sat in a dishevelled state at the piano, stops playing and looks up.

MATTHEW

What?

PROFESSOR SHAWL

What? You play like that and ask me "what"?

Matthew groans.

MATTHEW

Fuck sake.

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Are you drunk?

Matthew waves him off.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

You have the audacity to turn up here, drunk?

Matthew sniggers.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)

Get out.

MATTHEW

What?

PROFESSOR SHAWL

Get out.

MATTHEW

Out? Why? I'm trying to show you who I am. Isn't that what you want?

PROFESSOR SHAWL
And who are you? A drunk who's
forgotten how to play?

MATTHEW
(laughs)
Close professor. Close.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Piss off out, Matthew. I haven't
the time for games.

MATTHEW
That makes two of us.

Matthew proceeds to slam his hands down onto the keys. Shawl,
incensed, begins to lift Matthew up.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Out!

MATTHEW
Whoa! Watch it! Assaulting the
physically impaired now are we?

Shawl maintains a tight grip on Matthew.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Whatever's gotten into you?

MATTHEW
Not very befitting of a man of your
stature professor.

Shawl, perplexed, lets go of Matthew.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
What are you talking about? You're
not disabled.

Matthew cups one ear.

MATTHEW
Come again?

PROFESSOR SHAWL
You're not dis--

Shawl stops. Slowly, the pieces of the jigsaw begin to
assemble. Suddenly, he's taken aback by a realisation.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
Your change in technique...
Tchaikovsky!

MATTHEW
More like Ludwig Van fucking
Beethoven!

PROFESSOR SHAWL
You mean you're --?

Matthew nods. Looks almost relieved. To let it out, finally.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
How long have you known?

MATTHEW
A while. It comes and goes. Comes
and goes. Until...

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Is there anything --?

MATTHEW
No.

The impact of this hits Shawl hard. He takes a moment. Allows the enormity of the news to wash over him.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
My god, Matthew, I don't, I really
don't know what to say...
(a long beat)
I've always been honest with you,
with all my students. It's my duty
to be.

MATTHEW
Professor, please.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
I'm sorry. You know I'll do all I
can to help you graduate, Matthew.
That's if you choose to continue.
Beyond that -- well...The
inescapable truth is, you cannot be
a concert pianist if you're deaf.

Shawl shrugs, powerless. Matthew of course knows this. Still it's like a knife to the heart. He nods, reluctantly.

MATTHEW
Promise me one thing.
(Shawl nods)
Don't tell anyone.

EXT. THE KINGS ARMS - DAY

A roar of laughter. A quaint pub bustling with music students. At one bench, Odette sits holding a drink aloft with Yashin, Tan and Chung.

ALL
Cheers.

YASHIN
To Odette, Tchaikovsky bronze
medallist --

CHUNG
Whoop.

YASHIN
The new "Queen of the Institute".

CHUNG
Whoop whoop.

YASHIN
But far far far more
importantly...the "Maestro Slayer"

TAN
The "Maestro Slayer".

CHUNG
Bravo.

Odette smiles. But we cannot help but sense it's bittersweet.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

Inside a small waist bin, lies a flier with a crumpled picture of Odette smiling as she holds her bronze medal from the Tchaikovsky tournament.

Suddenly, an empty bottle of whiskey crashes into the bin obscuring the flier. A sudden explosion of chords.

We find Matthew at the Steinway, practicing. It's late and it looks as if he hasn't slept properly for days. No matter how hard he tries, he can't seem to get this particular passage right. He slaps himself hard across the face. Growls.

MATTHEW
Bastard. Worthless, bastard. Come
on.

He tries again. Can't get it.

He springs to his feet, knocking over the piano stool and lashes at the waist bin with his foot, scattering the whisky bottle and flier across the floor.

Matthew slowly picks up the flier and carefully straightens out the creases. He stares at the image of Odette smiling. His eyes pained and vengeful.

Chopin's Nocturne No.20 begins to sound...

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The music continues as Matthew stumbles along the deserted hallway. Whiskey bottle in hand.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Odette is on stage, sublimely performing **Chopin's Nocturne No. 20** to a beguiled audience of her peers and tutors including Yashin, Chung, Tan and Professor Shawl.

Suddenly the doors to the hall fly open and Matthew storms in. Everyone turns to face him. Odette stops playing.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
(standing)
Matthew!

Matthew determinedly makes his way toward the stage as Shawl and other tutors move to intercept him.

Immediately, Matthew launches the whiskey bottle toward the stage. It shoots high and above Odette's head, splintering against the back wall. Odette stares at Matthew, confused and alarmed. He peers back at her, smiling strangely as Shawl and others drag him from the auditorium.

EXT. GOLDEN SQUARE - DAY

It's quiet. Despite bright sunlight, there's a notable chill in the air.

Matthew sits alone on a bench, wearing the same clothes from the night before. His bloodshot eyes stare at the EXCLUSION LETTER he holds in one hand. In the other is a bottle of vodka. He raises the bottle high, takes a deep, long hit -- well on his way.

In his pocket, his mobile begins to vibrate. He slams down the letter and retrieves the phone to find 'mum' calling. The very sight of the word rocks him. He dismisses the call. The display showing it's the latest of 8 calls from Cynthia.

From his trouser pocket, Matthew retrieves the photograph from the attic. Stares at it. His eyes start to well up.

The phone begins to vibrate again. The word 'mum' again flashing. He cuts the call and throws his phone off into a bunch of bushes.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - DAY

Cynthia, mobile pressed up to her ear, bounds furiously toward the entrance as Matthew's voicemail kicks in.

CYNTHIA
 (into phone)
 Matthew, it's mum. Call me back!

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

The glum face of the PRINCIPAL of the Institute, PROFESSOR SUZANNE HINES.

PROFESSOR HINES
 ...serious breach of the school's
 code of conduct left us with no
 choice but to terminate Matthew's --

On the opposite side of Professor Hines' desk sits Cynthia,
 baying for blood --

CYNTHIA
 Don't give me that. Of course you
 had a choice. You could have phoned
 me first. As a patron of this
 school, not to mention his mother,
 isn't that my right?

PROFESSOR HINES
 Cynthia --

CYNTHIA
 Need I remind you, Suzanne, how
 significantly the school has
 benefitted from our contributions?

PROFESSOR HINES
 No, I'm well aware of --

CYNTHIA
 I'd therefore suggest you seriously
 reconsider your decision.

Professor Hines seeks support from Shawl seated just off from
 the side of her. Shawl clears his throat.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
 Mrs. Heyward --

CYNTHIA
 Throwing out your best pupil.
 Lunacy. Henry will be here any
 minute.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
 Mrs. Heyward --

CYNTHIA
 We'll pull all of it. Every penny.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Mrs. Heyward, there's something
else you need to know --

PROFESSOR HINES
Perhaps, perhaps it's best we wait
for Henry.

Cynthia, suddenly gaging the seriousness of her tone --

CYNTHIA
No. Speak to me. What is it?

Shawl looks at Professor Hines, who nods approval.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
I'm sorry to have to be the one to
break this to you. Matthew had
wanted it kept confidential but...

CYNTHIA
God's sake man, spit it out.

PROFESSOR HINES
Cynthia, Matthew's losing his
hearing.

Cynthia pauses, disbelieving. Almost chortles.

CYNTHIA
Fuck off.

PROFESSOR HINES
We're truly sorry.

CYNTHIA
What do you mean he's losing his
hearing?

PROFESSOR SHAWL
I understand, in a few months, he
won't be able to hear at all.

CYNTHIA
Deaf?

PROFESSOR HINES
We thought you should know.

CYNTHIA
You're joking. That's what this is.
Some kind of a sick lark?

PROFESSOR SHAWL
There's nothing funny about this to
us at all Mrs. Heyward, believe me.

PROFESSOR HINES

So you see, we can't help Matthew.
Even if we could take him back. The
school won't be pressing charges,
nor will Ms. Bardon I believe.

Professor Hines seeks clarification from Shawl, who nods.
Silence. Cynthia, for the first time, seems completely
overwhelmed.

There's a knock at the door.

PROFESSOR HINES (CONT'D)

Come in.

The door opens to reveal Henry.

HENRY

Apologies.

He closes the door and takes a seat by Cynthia. She looks up
at him, forlornly. Grasps his hand.

HENRY (CONT'D)

What is it? What's the matter?

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A bomb site. Furniture, clothes, music manuscripts strewn
across the floor.

The door bursts open. A pair of feet stumble into the room as
a voice wildly shouts out Beethoven's famous Ode to Joy.

We follow the feet across the room, stomping and stumbling
over the musical manuscripts. The singing grows louder,
wilder, the tune less comprehensible.

The feet suddenly slip. A hand loses its grasp of a wine
bottle. It falls. Smashes. Wine trickles onto the Rachmaninov
manuscript.

Matthew, completely inebriated, crawls slowly towards the
smashed bottle. Growls. Picks up the spoiled manuscript,
dusts off any glass, begins to lick off the remnants of wine.

He stops for a moment, examining the music closely. Begins to
mimic the corresponding piano finger action. Sings the
melody. Growing louder, his finger actions faster, becoming
lost in the music until he can take it no more.

He jumps to his feet and roars wildly at his reflection in
the mirror, only...it's severely subdued as his reflection
tamely roars back at him. It's devastating. His eyes, raw. A
broken man as he slowly tears up the manuscript.

He goes to take a step, but due to the unsteady surface and his level of intoxication, his foot slips sending him crashing backwards. With great force, his head slams against the broken glass on the floor.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT. STRANGE LANDSCAPE - DAY

We return to the thick golden haze masking silhouettes of buildings and distant mountains. A strong wind blowing against fabric. The sound intensifies until we see white cloth with a RED CROSS flapping as if in a gale. Then it's gone. Blown off into the haze.

The wind subsides. The haze slowly begins to dissipate. The FAINT MELODY sounds once more. Beautiful. Melancholic. More formed and detailed now. The lightest essence of accompanying chords creating an ENCHANTING HARMONY.

Slowly, the haze begins to reveal the landscape beneath -- wrecked buildings. In the distance, green mountains. Just when it seems we are in danger of falling under the music's spell --

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - DAY

Curtains are ripped open spilling muted daylight into the room. Matthew's eyes open. Take in the room. It's neat and tidy with an array of shelves crammed full with musical books, manuscripts and accolades.

Cynthia, carrying a note book and pen, moves away from the window towards the bed. Matthew closes his eyes, pretending to be asleep. The top part of his head, wrapped with a thick dressing. She shakes Matthew, abruptly.

CYNTHIA

Come on, time to get up.

Cynthia shakes him again. He reluctantly opens his eyes. Cynthia opens the note book and shows it to him. *Time to get up!* is scrawled on the page.

MATTHEW

I heard you.

CYNTHIA

Well, who knows with this selective hearing of yours. Up, it's late.

He remains lying down. Adjusts the covers. As Cynthia begins to speak, we watch from Matthew's perspective -- her words dampened at points and loud at others. The only constant, a low humming sound.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Time to stop feeling sorry for yourself. It's not how I raised you. To wallow. No. We stay positive. We fight.

MATTHEW

We?

CYNTHIA

You're my son.

(beat)

Frankly, I'm disappointed you didn't come to me straight away. Concealing it like that.

MATTHEW

Because it's not like you keep anything secret is it, mum?

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

Cynthia looks at Matthew. Despite his anger, he's unable to break years of submissiveness toward her.

MATTHEW

Nothing.

CYNTHIA

Right. So get up. It's time to practice.

MATTHEW

Practice?

CYNTHIA

If the doctor's diagnosis is correct, you'll need to learn how to lip read. I won't be forever writing everything down for you. I'll see you downstairs.

She picks up a dirty bowl and cup and heads out of the room. But through her veneer of calm indifference we glimpse a speck of her heartbreak.

Matthew stays where he is. Reaches a hand under a pillow and retrieves the photograph of Cynthia at the orphanage. His face conflicted and unsure of what to do.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

The dirty bowl and cup land with a CLUNK in the sink. Henry looks up from the coffee machine at his agitated wife. On his way out, he wears a suit and an overcoat. She turns on the taps. Water gushes. Splatters violently against the crockery.

HENRY

Why don't you use the dish washer?

Ignoring him, she finishes putting on latex gloves and proceeds to scrub the crockery, intensely.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Cynthia?

Pause.

CYNTHIA

I'm quite capable, thank you.

The crockery is by now clean, but Cynthia continues to scrub.

HENRY

Spraying water suggests otherwise.

Cynthia stops scrubbing. Turns off the taps. Glares at Henry.

CYNTHIA

Are you mocking me?

HENRY

No. I --

CYNTHIA

Feel such a trivial task is beyond me, is that it?

HENRY

Of course not. Look, I'm --

CYNTHIA

No, it's okay. Tell me Henry, what else am I incapable of managing?

HENRY

Cynthia...

CYNTHIA

Washing up. Clearly. Matthew?

Henry moves to his wife.

HENRY

You're being ridiculous.

Cynthia flicks off the gloves. Shakes off Henry.

CYNTHIA

Am I? So you don't blame me for him not coming to us sooner?

A hesitation. Part of Henry does.

HENRY

No.

CYNTHIA

You're a terrible fucking liar.
 "Things happen for a reason", isn't
 that what you use to say? So when
 we couldn't -- rephrase, when I
 couldn't...

She indicates "conceive" by gesturing a baby bump.

HENRY

Don't you dare!

CYNTHIA

This was the reason? Because I'd
 mess them up?

HENRY

Don't put these words on me,
 Cynthia. They're your words.

CYNTHIA

They're your thoughts.

HENRY

No! What happened to Matthew was an
 accident. Nothing more.

Suddenly, the front doorbell rings. Cynthia glares at Henry.
 Relenting, he kisses her softly on the cheek.

HENRY (CONT'D)

See you later.

She nods, coldly. He exits the kitchen.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

Henry checks the monitor by the security phone and is
 surprised to see Odette waiting anxiously outside the front
 gate, holding a small PARCEL. He allows a faint smile to form
 as he picks up the phone and activates the security gate.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matthew is still in bed. There's a light knock at his door.
 He doesn't react. A heavier knock is followed by Odette
 cautiously opening the door and entering with the parcel.

She tentatively makes her way over to the bed. Matthew
 doesn't register her presence until she's practically by his
 side. Shocked, he quickly sits up, pulling the covers around
 him.

MATTHEW

What are you doing here?

ODETTE

Pardon, your father said --

MATTHEW

I'm not dressed. Why are you here?

ODETTE

I wanted to give you this.

Embarrassed, Odette offers him the parcel. He looks sceptically at it, without taking it.

MATTHEW

What is it?

ODETTE

Something I thought -- perhaps, might help you.

MATTHEW

I don't need your help. Or was the whiskey bottle to the head unclear?

ODETTE

Of course.

Matthew lays back down and rolls over onto his side, facing away from her. She makes for the door. Stops. Turns back and places the parcel on the side table before leaving.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - HALLWAY - DAY

At the end of the hallway, Cynthia emerges from the kitchen just in time to see Odette exiting through the front door.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - STAIRCASE - DAY

Cynthia strides upstairs carrying an A4 folder full of information she's collated on learning how to lip read.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matthew, dressed in pyjamas, stands at the window looking out. Cynthia enters with the folder. He turns to face her.

CYNTHIA

What did she want?

Matthew looks over at the parcel on his side table. Then, merely shakes his head -- nothing important.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I've booked another appointment with Dr Roux. We won't give up hope until all avenues are exhausted.

Downcast, Matthew bows his head.

MATTHEW

Forget the avenues. I'm exhausted.

Cynthia crosses to him.

CYNTHIA

Matthew --

MATTHEW

Stop. Please. Time to face the truth.

CYNTHIA

Give up is what you mean.

MATTHEW

No. Truth. Something you seem to struggle with.

CYNTHIA

Excuse me?

Matthew hesitates a moment. Then retrieves from his pocket the photograph of Cynthia at the orphanage. Hands it to her. She looks at it in disbelief. Her face, ashen.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Where did you get this?

MATTHEW

Who are you?

CYNTHIA

Where did you get it?

MATTHEW

Who are you?

Cynthia looks at him, crestfallen.

CYNTHIA

How can you even ask me that? I'm your mother.

MATTHEW

Then who is that?

He points at the photograph, at Juliana smiling next to Cynthia. She hardens.

CYNTHIA
 Nobody. A nurse. At the hospital
 where you were born.

She starts for the door.

MATTHEW
 That's not a hospital.
 (louder)
 You don't seem to realise. I know!

Cynthia turns back to face him. Freezes momentarily --
 utterly stumped. Unsure even of what to do with her hands.

CYNTHIA
 Whatever you think you know, you're
 mistaken.

MATTHEW
 Really? I know I'm adopted.

Cynthia shakes her head.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 I know you've lied to me, my whole
 life.

Cynthia can't bear to hear it.

CYNTHIA
 No!

MATTHEW
 She was there, wasn't she? In
 Russia? At Tchaikovsky? It was her.

Cynthia doesn't respond.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 Who is she?

No response.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)
 My mother?

THWACK. She slaps him hard across the face.

CYNTHIA
 I'M YOUR MOTHER!

Instantly, she regrets her action. She reaches for his hand
 but he shoves it away. His ears hum as he rubs his face.

An incredibly tense pause as the two just stare at one
 another. Finally, Cynthia, ashamed, slowly begins to exit --
 still holding the photograph. As she does, Matthew calls
 after her.

MATTHEW

You can either tell me the truth or watch me leave. For good. It'd be a shame if the last words I ever hear of yours were more lies.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S ROOM - LATER

Matthew sorts through his shelves, clearing away anything that reminds him of his former life as a pianist. He dumps his arrangement of books, manuscripts, accolades, pictures etc into large cardboard boxes. Duct tapes them closed. It all seems so meaningless now. He removes his head dressing. Winces with discomfort. On the side table, the parcel from Odette remains unopened.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Conflicted, Cynthia sits alone at the table, nursing a bottle of wine. Closed shut on the table rests her note book. Next to it, the photograph. She picks it up. Studies it carefully. Seems an eternity ago. She looks so happy. Can't quite remember how that feels. After a gulp of wine, she makes a decision, picks up the pen and begins to write.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S ROOM - DAY

Matthew, having almost finished his clearing, stops for a moment as he picks up a small trophy. The inscription: **1st place: Junior Competition**. He struggles to box this particular accolade.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

You blew us all away that day.

Matthew looks up to see Cynthia in the doorway.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

You were only five. Beating children twice your age. Showed everyone else just how special we already knew you were.

A pause as they stare at one another.

MATTHEW

Why didn't you tell me?

CYNTHIA

I was scared. Of losing you.

He doesn't say anything. His eyes, unforgiving. Her greatest fear realised. Finally, with a quiet anguish, she retrieves her note book, tears out a page and hands it to Matthew.

He looks at what's written. A name: **Juliana Mondì**, and a London address.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
She'll be able to tell you more
than I can.

She turns to leave. Hesitates.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
I'll always be your mother,
Matthew.

And with that, she walks out.

EXT. HEYWARD HOME - DAY

Matthew exits through the electric gates. From an upstairs window, Cynthia watches him leave.

EXT. JULIANA'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew makes his way cautiously to the front door of a modest terraced house in need of some immediate TLC.

He checks the number of the address written on the scrap of paper he holds. Yep, this is it. He steadies himself. Takes a deep breath. Goes to knock on the door. Hesitates. A big moment. Shakes it off. Knocks. A bit timid. Waits. Nothing. Knocks a second time with greater authority...Nothing.

He realises no one's home. A mixture of immense disappointment and relief. Stands for a while. Unsure of what to do or where to go. Decides to leave, but as he does he sees a woman turning into the gate. It's Juliana.

Her mouth falls open. Suddenly besieged by emotion.

JULIANA
Mio Dio!

She breaks into a smile, wipes away a few stray tears. Matthew stands frozen. She reaches out a hand to him.

JULIANA (CONT'D)
Emir...!

INT. JULIANA'S HOUSE - DAY

Juliana leads Matthew into her small living room.

JULIANA
Please, have a seat.

She directs Matthew to a sofa covered with a large home-made throw consisting of segments bearing an array of countries flags and colours. He sits, having still not said a word.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

Can I get you a drink or anything?

Juliana motions having a drink. Matthew shakes his head. She stares at him a moment. Shaking slightly.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

I heard about -- well read about your...

(she touches her ear)

Are you still able to...

He nods gently. She smiles, pleased.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

I'll be right back.

She pops out of the room. Matthew quietly scans his surroundings. An amass of photographs covering walls and shelves. All of Juliana in various different countries posing with the smiling faces of poverty and war stricken children. In one particular picture, Juliana wears the uniform of THE RED CROSS. For some reason, it strikes a chord within him.

She reenters carrying a small box under her arm. She joins Matthew on the sofa, placing the box down gently onto the coffee table in front of them.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

I kept this, all these years, in case one day you came.

She taps the box lightly. Her hand shakes.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

Look at me. Lord knows why I'm so nervous.

(re: the box)

Open it, if you want.

Matthew looks at the box, then up at Juliana.

MATTHEW

I've come here because I want to know two things. Why...

He motions toward his ears. Then, hesitates...

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

And are you my mother?

Juliana looks at him with loving eyes and slowly shakes her head. Matthew looks disappointed.

She opens the box and carefully takes out a pile of pictures and documents, spreading them out on the coffee table. She picks up one photograph. Worn and charred. Hands it to him.

He gazes at the picture of a pretty young BOSNIAN GIRL, no more than fifteen, wearing a colourful hijab, in the middle of executing a pirouette. She looks extremely happy.

JULIANA

This is your mother.

Matthew seems unable to take his eyes from the photograph.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

Pretty, no?

Matthew nods.

MATTHEW

What was her name?

JULIANA

Alita.

MATTHEW

(unable to hear)

What?

JULIANA

(louder)

Alita. Alita Basic.

MATTHEW

Where was she from?

Juliana finds a map amongst the documents. It's a MAP OF BOSNIA, with particular regions circled and annotated in Italian. She points to Gorazde -- a city east of Sarajevo.

JULIANA

Here.

She picks up another photograph by the map. Hands it to him. There's something very familiar about it. The golden landscape. The outline of a city and mountains barely visible in the distance.

INSERT FLASH IMAGE:

The strange landscape from Matthew's dreams.

Matthew jolts involuntarily.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. This must be --

MATTHEW

I'm fine. My father...Do you know anything of him?

Juliana hesitates. Her expression changes. This is where it starts to get difficult. Matthew gives her a pressing stare.

JULIANA

You know of the Bosnian War? The civil war back in 90's?

Matthew looks unsure but nods his head gently.

JULIANA (CONT'D)

You're father was a soldier in the Bosnian Serb Army.

We focus on a photograph of Gorazde, moving in closer and closer until --

EXT. GORAZDE - BOSNIA - DAY

We're there. In Gorazde. Something undeniably familiar about it. The light, oppressive atmosphere, smoke and chaos reminds us of the scene at the start, as BOSNIAN SERB SOLDIERS brutally and systematically round up screaming and terrified BOSNIAK WOMEN and GIRLS.

Scattered about, bloodied dead bodies of MEN and YOUNG BOYS.

The soldiers herd the women and girls onto the back of a TRUCK like cattle. ALITA, petrified, is hoisted onto the back by a YOUNG, HANDSOME SOLDIER. He gropes her bottom as he lifts her. She tries to bat his hand away, which only serves to amuse him. He leers at her for a good long time as if mentally storing her face.

JULIANA (V.O.)

This war, like all wars, exhibited the baseness of men.

EXT. COMPOUND - DAY

The TRUCK comes to a stop outside a battered former SCHOOL GYM now being used as a MILITARY COMPOUND. The women and girls are ushered off of the truck and escorted inside.

Alita, watched every step of the way by the HANDSOME SOLDIER.

INT. COMPOUND - DORMITORY - NIGHT

Dark, cramped, filthy. The conditions, unimaginably bad. The women and girls, shivering and beyond scared, huddle up to one another for comfort and warmth.

The SOUND of a DOOR being UNLOCKED. A beam of light sluices the darkness, scanning about. It lands eventually on the scared face of Alita. She sits up in fright. A large hand reaches down and yanks her to her feet. She desperately tries to keep hold of the hand of the OLDER WOMAN next to her. But to no avail. She's frogmarched out of the dormitory by the handsome soldier, disappearing into the darkness.

The SOUND of the door being SLAMMED SHUT. Followed by the faint, distressing screams of Alita.

JULIANA (V.O.)
Systematic rape. Murder. All in the
pursuit of ethnic cleansing.

INT. COMPOUND - DORMITORY - DAY

In a corner huddles Alita, desperately trying to conceal her pregnancy bump.

JULIANA (V.O.)
When they discovered your mother
was pregnant, she was spared death.

EXT. SARAJEVO - DAY

Heavily pregnant, Alita rides in the back of the truck with a few other girls in the same condition.

JULIANA (V.O.)
And sent to Sarajevo.

INT. SARAJEVO HOSPITAL - DAY

The hospital is taking a severe battering from mortar blasts. Doctors and nurses scatter to take cover.

Alita, doesn't seem to notice, too engulfed by the agony of childbirth.

JULIANA (V.O.)
Where the shame of bearing a half
Serbian baby was considered a far
harsher sentence.

INT. SARAJEVO HOSPITAL - WARD - DAY

A younger looking Juliana, dressed in her RED CROSS UNIFORM, sits holding baby Matthew.

JULIANA (V.O.)
That's where I met her. A few hours
after you were born.

She hands him to an exhausted Alita. She beams at her son.

ALITA
(in Bosnian)
Hello Emir.

INT. JULIANA'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew sits silently. Shell-shocked. Juliana rests her hand on his.

MATTHEW
She named me Emir?

JULIANA
Yes.

MATTHEW
What happened to her?

EXT. WAR TORN SARAJEVO - DAY

We revisit the image from the beginning: A CRUMPLED BUILDING, seconds after a mortar blast. Detritus and smoke filling the air. The SOUND of a baby crying...

JULIANA (V.O.)
The hospital was hit only hours later.

As the smoke clears we see it, BABY MATTHEW, alone amongst the rubble. EARS RINGING. Petrified, he wails until it almost seems his lungs will burst.

JULIANA (V.O.)
When I found you, you were one of the fortunate. A miracle baby. I knew then I had to take you out of Bosnia.

EXT. JULIANA'S HOUSE - DAY

Matthew stands. Overwhelmed. He turns away from Juliana. Touches his ears softly. Finally understands why -- but it's still not any easier to accept.

MATTHEW
What about her? Alita?

A pregnant pause.

Matthew slowly turns. Looks at Juliana, detecting a notion of guilt in her expression. A secret concealed.

JULIANA

I thought she was dead.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The kitchen table is neatly laid for three.

Cynthia, at the stove, is attempting to make a stir fry whilst taking big, regular sips from a large glass of wine.

CYNTHIA

...what was I supposed to do,
Henry? Confess? Apologise?

Having only just returned from work, Henry is clearly ruffled as he paces back and forth by the table.

HENRY

Yes. Any of those would have been better. Jesus fucking Christ, Cynthia. It was our responsibility, to tell him. Yours and mine. Not hers. Say he doesn't return?

CYNTHIA

He will.

HENRY

Yeah?

CYNTHIA

(nods, then)
He was right.

HENRY

About what?

Cynthia stops cooking and turns to face Henry.

CYNTHIA

He needed to hear the truth. While he still could. I wasn't capable of that.

Henry glares at Cynthia.

The sound of the front door slamming shut. Cynthia and Henry turn anxiously toward the kitchen doorway. After a moment, Matthew calmly enters. Takes in the table setting for three.

MATTHEW

What's this? Nice family meal?

CYNTHIA

(removing the pan from the
stove)
Take a seat Matthew and I'll --

Matthew holds up a hand, cutting her off.

MATTHEW

You knew she was still alive?!

This is precisely what Henry had been dreading. Trying to take control of the situation --

HENRY

Son I --

MATTHEW

Don't call me that! You knew she was still alive?!

HENRY

Yes.

No!

CYNTHIA

CYNTHIA

Not at first.

MATTHEW

Were you ever going to tell me?

Cynthia shakes her head "no". Matthew absorbs this.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I guess it's hard to tell someone they were stolen.

Cynthia puts the pan down and moves to Matthew. He backs off.

CYNTHIA

We did not steal you. We had no idea who she was or even that she was alive until --

Matthew, his blood boiling, suddenly picks up a chair and launches it against the wall, taking Cynthia and Henry by surprise. Henry quickly moves to restrain Matthew from reaching Cynthia.

HENRY

Why don't we --

MATTHEW

Did you really want a baby of your own that much? To take him and change his name. Make him your project. How happy you must have been when, fuck me, he has musical ability. What a find. And at such a bargain. Is that why you banned her from seeing me? My mother!

Cynthia holds back her tears.

CYNTHIA
I'm your mother.

After a little struggle, Matthew calms. Henry loosens his grip somewhat.

MATTHEW
She wanted to take me away from you. Didn't she?!

Cynthia shakes her head solemnly.

HENRY
Matthew please!

MATTHEW
Wanted to take me home.

CYNTHIA
No, Matthew. That's not true. All she wanted was money.

HENRY
Cynthia, don't!

MATTHEW
What?

CYNTHIA
A pay off. She took money, Matthew.

MATTHEW
You're a fucking liar.

CYNTHIA
It's the truth.

Matthew scoffs, unbelieving.

MATTHEW
You want to hear the truth? Deep down, I've always known. Somehow. That you weren't my real mother. Now I know, got to say it's a fucking relief.

Cynthia's heart breaks.

CYNTHIA
Stop it.

MATTHEW
Don't look so sad. Resilience. That's what you've always taught me. Soon I'll be deaf. So it'll be easy for you to let me go.

CYNTHIA

Go?

MATTHEW

Bye-bye "Mr. Virtuoso." On to the next project.

Matthew's glare penetrates Cynthia's soul one last time before he exits. She's unable to bear it --

CYNTHIA

Come back here!

She goes to follow him, but Henry halts her.

HENRY

Give him sometime, to calm down.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Matthew grabs a suitcase from on top of the wardrobe, rests it on the bed and hastily begins to load it with clothes. After a few seconds he stops, his attention caught by the unopened PARCEL on the side table.

He picks it up. Deliberates for a few seconds about opening it. Decides against it, tossing it back onto the side table and continues to pack.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - LATER

Matthew has finished packing. The suitcase, at the foot of the bed. Matthew lays on top, staring up at the ceiling. His bedroom door opens and Henry enters, holding a letter. He notices the suitcase, goes to say something, but decides against it as Matthew closes his eyes.

Henry perches on the side of the bed. Looks at Matthew, refusing to open his eyes.

HENRY

I'm sorry. For the way this all unfolded. For everything. Your mother...Cynthia wanted to come and talk to you. But you know, she's never found it easy to express...well you know how she is. She's written you a letter though.

Henry places the letter gently onto the pillow next to Matthew's head. Pause.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You're right. We did want a child so very badly.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

And maybe, along the way, we did things that some may consider wrong. But everything we did, we did for you and would do again in a heartbeat. You're our world. A gift from God. That's what Matthew means. And that's precisely what you are to us. To your mother. With or without the music.

He pats Matthew on the shoulder.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I hope one day you'll understand.

He stands and quietly exits.

Matthew opens his eyes and begins to tear up the letter.

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew enters with his suitcase. Places it on the floor. Looks around the bare room. Once again clean and ordered. Characterless. He takes a seat on the edge of the sofa. His eyes gazing absently ahead. Lost.

EXT. STRANGE LANDSCAPE - DAY

The thick golden haze. The strong wind blowing. In the distance, through the fog, a DARK FIGURE approaching. We cannot make out their face, but can tell it's a WOMAN. Her body covered by dark cloth, bellowing in the wind.

The MELODY returns, accompanied by its ENCHANTING HARMONY, distinctly more detailed now. The haze begins to dissipate, revealing the woman more clearly. She holds the soft material of a hijab across her face, shielding it. Her eyes, penetrating. Behind the hijab she softly whispers --

WOMAN

Emir!

INT. MATTHEW'S FLAT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew's eyes flick open.

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - DAY

A busy terminal. But Matthew sits by himself, cutting one lonely, isolated figure.

EXT. RUNWAY - DAY

Airplane wheels touching down on hot tarmac.

EXT. SARAJEVO AIRPORT - DAY

A TAXI DRIVER loads Matthew's bag into the boot, as Matthew climbs into the back seat.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Dusk. Matthew watches the buildings and streets of Sarajevo sweep by -- vibrant and beautiful, yet still exhibiting the scars of war.

His hearing has deteriorated, considerably. A constant dull ringing sound renders the buzz of the city and even the music the taxi driver plays up-front, muted.

But Matthew bears it. Captivated by the sights of this strange and frightening place.

EXT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - DAY

The taxi driver hoists Matthew's bag from the boot, slamming it shut. He hands the case to Matthew, who aloofly passes him a wad of cash. The taxi driver smiles gratefully, says something in Bosnian before getting in his taxi and driving off. Matthew heads into the hotel.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew, dressed in pyjamas, sits quietly on the bed of a small, no-frills hotel room. He appears to be on-edge. His mind solely on what he is here to do.

He gets into bed and turns off the light. Yet his eyes remain open. Sleep a long way off it seems.

EXT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - DAY

Early morning. Outside the hotel ADNAN, a portly middle-age man, dressed in a beige linen suit, with much vim and vigour, paces whilst smoking a cigarette, which he extinguishes underfoot at the sight of Matthew exiting the hotel.

ADNAN

Matthew? Matthew Heyward?

Matthew looks surprised as Adnan smiles warmly at him, extending his hand -- the third and fourth fingers noticeably reduced to stubs.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
I'm Adnan Mesic.

Matthew cautiously shakes hands with Adnan.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Juliana message me. Say you might
be in need of a guide. Translator.

MATTHEW
What?

ADNAN
Guide. Translator.

He holds up a finger apologetically whilst retrieving a business card from his inside suit pocket. He hands it to Matthew, who reads it. Looks doubtful. Adnan smiles.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Something tell me you probably need
me. What with you no speaking the
language and being almost deaf and
all.

Matthew hands Adnan his card back.

MATTHEW
I'll be okay.

Matthew starts to walk off. Adnan calls out after him.

ADNAN
Okay. I guess you do this before.
Find people? No? I guess you have a
name, address -- transportation to
get you there. So you will be okay.

Matthew stops. Turns back to Adnan.

MATTHEW
I have a name...Alita Basic.

ADNAN
Good. I'm sure it's still - how'd
you say? Current.

He smiles suggestively. Matthew takes a moment then walks back over to Adnan.

MATTHEW
Fine.

Adnan pats him on the shoulder and begins to lead him to an old and battered car parked across the street.

ADNAN
 (best Del Boy impression)
 Lovely jubbly.

Adnan opens the door and gets in. Matthew hesitates a second. Adnan sticks his head out.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 She might not be pretty to look at
 but trust me, she go like dream.

He taps impatiently on the roof for Matthew to get in.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan rips along at a ridiculous speed. One hand on the wheel. The other pressing a mobile phone to his ear. He talks frantically to someone on the other end in Bosnian. Matthew is anxious for his safety. Adnan hangs up. Looks at Matthew and smiles.

ADNAN
 You alright? Seem tense.

MATTHEW
 Where are we going?

ADNAN
 Headquarters.

He taps Matthew twice on the leg.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 Look.

He points out the impressively grand building of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Matthew tries to take it in. But his mind is elsewhere.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 So you are a musician?

MATTHEW
 What?

ADNAN
 A musician.

MATTHEW
 Pianist. Well, I was.

Adnan looks at him, compassionately.

ADNAN
 You still are, my friend.

Matthew, irked by this apparent glib remark, returns his attention to out of the window.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Small. Open air seating.

Adnan's car pulls up outside. Parks badly at an angle.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Matthew looks confused.

MATTHEW
What is this?

ADNAN
Headquarters!

He honks his horn, startling some patrons drinking coffee outside.

EXT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Adnan and Matthew disembark from the vehicle. A tall, heavy-set man, DASIM, wearing an apron and huge smile, exits the cafe. His arms outstretched.

DASIM
(in Bosnian)
Adnan, my friend. Good to see you.

Adnan and Dasim embrace.

ADNAN
Dasim, this is Matthew.

DASIM
Welcome Matthew. Adnan has told me about you. You seek someone, yes?

Matthew nods.

DASIM (CONT'D)
Well, take a seat. I'll bring coffee. You try.

Dasim motions enthusiastically for Matthew to take a seat. He does, reluctantly.

ADNAN
(to Matthew)
Back in a minute.

Adnan disappears into the cafe with Dasim, leaving Matthew disgruntled.

EXT. CAFE - LATER

Matthew sits alone. An empty coffee cup in front of him. Annoyed, he checks his watch.

Adnan exits the cafe with a tray of Bosnian delicacies. Places it on the table in front of Matthew.

ADNAN

Ta-da!

MATTHEW

Where have you been? Back in a minute, you said.

ADNAN

(sitting)

Chasing leads takes time. Here, you must try.

Matthew looks at the food.

MATTHEW

I'm fine.

ADNAN

We have Cevapi, popara, burek...

MATTHEW

I'm fine!

ADNAN

You're in Bosnia now. Why not try?

MATTHEW

I'm in Bosnia for one reason only. And it isn't to try the cuisine.

Adnan gives Matthew an empathetic look.

ADNAN

Haven't you missed out on enough already? Here. Try.

He extends a plate to Matthew, who glares at him.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Adnan pulls the car to a stop outside a row of newly-built townhouses that stand incongruous to the relatively dilapidated surroundings.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan kills the ignition.

ADNAN
This is it.

He points to a freshly painted lilac home. Matthew stares at it for a long moment. His heart beginning to race.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Ready?

Matthew doesn't respond. Adnan taps Matthew's shoulder.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Ready?

Matthew nods.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Let's go.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

The walk toward the front door is agonising for Matthew. With each step his anxiety intensifies ten-fold to the point he can't go any further, stopping a few feet from the door. Adnan, recognising Matthew's unease, also stops and waits patiently for a few seconds.

ADNAN
You want me to...?

Adnan motions for him to knock on the door. Matthew nods. Adnan confidently approaches the front door and knocks firmly. They wait a few seconds. Adnan knocks again louder. Nothing. Adnan takes a closer look at the windows. The curtains are drawn. Knocks again. He looks doubtfully back at Matthew.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - LATER

Matthew and Adnan sit in the stationary car, waiting. Adnan is bored and hungry. Suddenly, he notices a woman walking along the road in the direction of the apartment.

ADNAN
Heads up.

The pair watch as the woman heads for the lilac apartment's front door. Adnan quickly disembarks. But again Matthew stays rooted to the spot. He watches Adnan call out to the woman and engage in conversation. Each second that passes is excruciating for him. After what seems like eternity, the woman enters the apartment and Adnan returns to the vehicle.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
On to the next.

Matthew looks at him, confused.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Not her.

Adnan takes out a sheet of addresses. Crosses off the first one on the list.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Adnan pulls the car to a stop outside the Sarajevo Hotel. Turns to face Matthew, who looks tired and extremely fed-up.

ADNAN
Get some rest. We start bright and early in the morrow.

Without a word, Matthew wearily exits.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Bleary eyed, Matthew's head rests against the window. Several days worth of stubble sprouting out of his despondent face.

He watches as the driver's side door opens and Adnan jumps in, crossing another address off from the now exhausted list.

MATTHEW
That's it. I give up.

ADNAN
No, we don't give up. We find her. You'll see.

MATTHEW
No. I'm done.

ADNAN
Done? No. A setback, is all.

Adnan starts the engine. Matthew slams his hand against the glove compartment.

MATTHEW
Don't talk to me about setbacks Adnan, okay?

Adnan takes a long hard look at Matthew.

ADNAN
So what? That's it? What you do?

MATTHEW

What are you talking about? I never fucking understand what you're saying.

ADNAN

You. When something happens -- a bump in the road. You give up.

MATTHEW

Don't do that. Don't presume to know me. You have no idea.

Adnan shuts off the engine.

ADNAN

So tell me.

MATTHEW

Drive me back to the hotel.

ADNAN

I want to understand.

MATTHEW

Drive me back.

ADNAN

I want to understand you.

MATTHEW

Fucksake! How can you understand me when I don't even understand myself? Why do you think I'm here?

(beat)

I thought if I...

(beat)

Forget it.

Adnan shakes his head in disagreement.

ADNAN

That's why you must keep on. With everything. Your search...music. Everything.

Silent pause.

MATTHEW

(goes to open the door)

Fuck it. I'll walk back.

ADNAN

Okay fine. You want me drive. I'll drive.

Matthew sits back in his seat as Adnan ignites the engine.

EXT. SARAJEVO NATIONAL THEATRE - DAY

Matthew and Adnan stand at the bottom of stone steps leading up to the iconic white building of the Sarajevo National Theatre. Adnan gestures emphatically at it.

ADNAN

Eh...?

MATTHEW

This isn't the hotel.

Hot and annoyed, this is the last thing Matthew wants to be seeing right now.

ADNAN

Right. But d'you know what it is?

MATTHEW

(wiping his brow)

It's a building. A building no different to any other I've seen.

Adnan doesn't let this comment ruffle him. He chuckles. Gazes up at the building with great affinity.

ADNAN

It is a place of hope, my friend.

He pauses, allowing his statement time to sink in.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

In 1991, I was a young-man. About your age. A musician. Not great. But okay. I love to play.

He mimics playing the piano -- a happy reverie.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

Then the war came.

He holds up his right hand, indicates his two missing fingers. Matthew stares at them.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

The least of my problems, eh. The siege. You understand? Here in Sarajevo.

Matthew nods.

ADNAN (CONT'D)

Destruction. Death. I lose my brother. My sister. My mother's sick. What do I do? Give up? No. I try to survive. But why? For what? For this.

He gestures warmly toward the National Theatre as if it were the oldest and dearest of friends.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
For the music. The most beautiful kind. The purest expression of human dignity amidst depravity.

He taps his heart. Matthew watches Adnan closely, taking in his impassioned address.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
They play, they play even when the shelling, it so close it shake the building. They play.

He reaches into his suit pocket and takes out a business card and pen. On the back of the card he scribbles something and hands it to Matthew. Matthew takes in the words: **Art is a primal need. Especially under siege!**

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Understand? My hero Haris Pasovic say this. "Art is a primal need. *Especially* under siege."

Something in the words strike a deep chord within Matthew. An echo of something he's heard before -- from Shawl.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Never forget this.

Staring at the words, Matthew's quietly reflective for a long moment. Finally, he looks up at Adnan and nods.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

It's late afternoon. The sun, low in the sky, bathes the car in an orange glow. Adnan and Matthew drive along in silence. Matthew still holds the business card in his hands.

MATTHEW
Can you take me to the hospital?

ADNAN
What's the matter? You sick?

Matthew shakes his head.

MATTHEW
I'd like to see where I was born.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Adnan's car comes to a stop outside a busy hospital.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

A loud car horn sounds.

ADNAN
(re the horn)
Okay. Okay.
(to Matthew)
I can't park here.

MATTHEW
(starting to open the
door)
It's okay.

ADNAN
I circle. Meet you back here in
fifteen.

Matthew doesn't respond -- closes the door.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
(calling out the window)
You hear me? Fifteen!

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Matthew walks through the automatic doors into what looks like any other modern hospital. Bright. Clinical and littered with sick people and medical workers. But for Matthew, it holds a great amount of significance. He scans his surroundings, as if wandering through the Sistine Chapel.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Matthew sits, taking in the hectic scenes. His stunted hearing only serves to intensify the images of the afflicted around him.

One sight really grabs his attention: PARAMEDICS bursting through the doors, pushing a young baby on a gurney. It wails. The distraught mother rushes along beside, crying.

INT. HOSPITAL - CHILDREN'S WARD - DAY

Matthew comes to a stop outside the doors of a children's ward. The soft sound of music wafting from within. He peers through the door's glass pane. Sick children gather around a mat, as a DOCTOR plays a guitar badly. But the children don't seem to care. Huge smiles etched upon their gaunt faces.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Adnan sits alone in the vehicle. Receiving a barrage of abuse and honks from drivers behind. Finally, the door opens and Matthew climbs in.

ADNAN
I said fifteen.

EXT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - NIGHT

Matthew climbs out of the car. Adnan pokes his head out of the window.

ADNAN
So tomorrow, we start again?

Matthew ponders for a moment.

MATTHEW
Okay.

ADNAN
Good. You know it make sense.

He waves at Matthew, who heads inside.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Adnan, in buoyant mood, enters and walks over to the main desk.

ADNAN
(in Bosnian)
Morning. Matthew Heyward's room please.

The RECEPTIONIST, checks the computer, goes to pick up the phone, then remembers something.

RECEPTIONIST
(in Bosnian)
I'm afraid he's already left.

ADNAN
(in Bosnian)
Left?

RECEPTIONIST
(in Bosnian)
Ordered a cab an hour ago.

ADNAN
Where to?

RECEPTIONIST
The hospital.

Adnan is miffed.

INT. HOSPITAL - CHILDREN'S WARD - DAY

The sound of children singing nursery rhymes accompanied by a keyboard. In the communal area, smiling, young faces. Mouths open in song, staring at the slightly nervous looking stranger playing keyboard. It's Matthew. Flanked by two female nurses conducting proceedings.

Matthew looks up to find an astonished Adnan standing in the doorway. Adnan gives a thumbs up sign. Matthew's heart begins to pound. Looks at Adnan, sceptical. Is he serious? Adnan nods, affirmingly.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan drives. Matthew beside him. Nervous.

ADNAN
Where the keyboard come from?

MATTHEW
Never mind that. Are you sure?

ADNAN
Yes. It's her. 100 percent this time. Okay, 95!

Matthew wipes his clammy hands on his trousers.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Relax. Be fine.

MATTHEW
Yeah?

ADNAN
Yes.

Matthew is unconvinced. Tries to take his mind off it.

MATTHEW
Wanted to make a donation.

ADNAN
What?

MATTHEW
The keyboard. For the kids.

Adnan smiles. Slaps Matthew on the knee in appreciation.

ADNAN
Hvala. You know what this means?

MATTHEW
Huh?

ADNAN
Hvala?

Matthew shakes his head.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
It means, "thank you".

Matthew is unexpectedly fascinated at being taught a Bosnian term and does a very rare thing -- he smiles.

MATTHEW
Hvala.

ADNAN
Very good!

EXT. ALITA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A hand goes to knock on a front door. Hesitates.

ADNAN (O.S.)
You can do it.

Anxious, Matthew stands on the step outside a smart apartment building. Adnan is close by his side. Matthew takes a deep breath and knocks.

After a few moments he's just about to knock again when the door is opened by a SMALL GIRL of five. Matthew stares at her. She looks quizzically at the two strangers at her door.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
(in Bosnian)
Hello little one. Does Alita Basic live here?

The little girl shakes her head.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
(in Bosnian)
Oh. Well is your mummy home?

The little girl nods.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
(in Bosnian)
Can we speak to her please?

LITTLE GIRL
 (calling off)
 Mamma.

Matthew reacts to this word. The little girl continues to look at him with big, curious eyes. Then a WOMAN in her late thirties, wearing a hijab, shuffles into view.

WOMAN
 (in Bosnian)
 What is it?

She looks up and stops suddenly at the sight of Matthew. The pair gaze at one another. An instant recognition. Unaware, Adnan smiles at her, and sets to work.

ADNAN
 (in Bosnian)
 Hello, my name is Adnan and this here is Matthew. Are you Alita?

The woman nods.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 (in Bosnian)
 Alita Basic?

ALITA
 (in Bosnian)
 No. Delic. Mrs.

ADNAN
 (in Bosnian)
 My apologies. But you were formerly Basic?

A long, pregnant pause.

ALITA
 (in Bosnian)
 A long time ago.

Adnan nods. He gets it. He looks at Matthew.

ADNAN
 (in Bosnian)
 My friend and I have been...uh, well would you mind if we came in? We have something of importance to discuss.

ALITA
 (in Bosnian)
 My husband is not home.

ADNAN
 (in Bosnian)
 I understand. But please.
 (MORE)

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 This is very important. He's
 travelled a long way to talk to
 you.

Alita stares at Matthew, unsure. The little girl tugs at her
 mother's arm.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
 (in Bosnian)
 Mrs. Delic, please?

INT. ALITA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A spacious, cool living room. Pastel green walls.

Matthew and Adnan sit awkwardly on a leather sofa. Alita sits
 in a chair to the side, pouring tea.

Through glass doors, outside on the patio, the small girl
 dances.

Alita picks up two cups. Hands one to Matthew.

MATTHEW
 Hvala.

Alita is caught by surprise -- the first word she's ever
 heard him speak, and it's Bosnian. Her hands shake, causing
 her to drop the second cup onto the floor. It breaks.

ALITA
 (in Bosnian)
 Goodness.

Adnan and Matthew attempt to assist.

ADNAN
 (in Bosnian)
 Here let me.

ALITA
 (in Bosnian)
 No. Please. Don't. Just --

She motions for them to desist and scurries out of the room.

Uncomfortable, Matthew and Adnan share a look. Matthew turns
 his attention to outside on the patio. He watches the little
 girl execute a series of novice pirouettes. She looks so
 happy. Innocent. He's almost resentful.

Alita comes back into the room with a dustpan and brush. She
 begins to sweep up the broken crockery. Suddenly, she is
 beset by emotion. Tears falling.

Matthew looks at Adnan for guidance.

ADNAN

Mrs. Delic --

She waves him off. Trying her best to compose herself. She reaches for Matthew's hand. Surprised, he gingerly allows her to take it. She kisses his palm softly. Looks him in the eye. Then shakes her head, determinedly.

ALITA

(in Bosnian)

No. I'm sorry. I cannot do this. I thought I could...but it's too late.

She lets go of his hand and stands. Matthew sits back, confused. He watches as Adnan stands and begins to implore Alita to reconsider. The dull ringing in his ears seems louder, so much so that he can only hear snippets of words.

ADNAN

(in Bosnian)

Please. He has a lot he would like to say to you.

ALITA

(in Bosnian)

No. I thought I could. But I can't. I'm sorry. Too much time has passed -- for such pain, such sorrow to resurface.

ADNAN

Mrs. Delic if you could --

ALITA

(in Bosnian)

Please leave.

ADNAN

(in Bosnian)

If we could just take a moment --

ALITA

(in Bosnian)

Please leave, now!

Hearing the commotion, the little girl comes running in from the patio and clings to her mother. Matthew stands.

MATTHEW

It's okay. Come on, Adnan.

Adnan looks apologetically at Matthew. They start to head out.

ALITA (O.S.)

Please...

Surprised by her use of English, they turn around. Hopeful of a change of heart. She stares directly at Matthew.

ALITA (CONT'D)
Please. Don't come back.
Understand? Ever.

Matthew nods. His heart laden with anguish.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan and Matthew drive along in silence. Matthew's eyes are moist with sorrow. He looks lost. Uncertain of where to go or what to do from here. Uncertain of who he is.

EXT/INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan pulls up outside Matthew's hotel. Looks compassionately at Matthew. Grown fond of this kid, he puts a consoling hand on his shoulder.

ADNAN
I'm sorry.

Matthew nods and begins to exit.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Hey. Why don't we go drink? Huh?

Matthew shakes his head. Adnan understands.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Some other time. Tomorrow perhaps?

MATTHEW
You've been a great help Adnan. I'm glad to have known you.

Despite English not being Adnan's first language, something about this sentence, and its tone seems slightly off to him.

Matthew extends his hand and they shake. He exits the car, closing the door. Troubled, Adnan watches him disappear into the hotel before driving off.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - ROOM - DAY

Matthew sits on the bed. He looks calm as his eyes pan the room. We see what he sees. Emptiness and soulless surroundings. The mirror of him. We hear what he hears. The dull ringing and nothing else. His future. Bleak. Just like the room.

He looks at the business card, now taped to the headboard:
Art is a primal need. Especially under siege.

He takes it down, and crumples it in his hand. The steely resolve in his eyes tell us he's made a decision of what he must do.

He stands and calmly begins to strip the sheet from the bed.

INT. ADNAN'S CAR - DAY

Adnan drives. His mind still troubled. Tries to convince himself he's worrying over nothing. Turns on the radio. A good song playing. Sings along for a moment before something clicks in his mind. Shit!

Suddenly, Adnan swerves the car around and floors it back in the direction of the hotel.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - ROOM - DAY

A wooden chair has been positioned in the centre of the room. A pair of feet balance atop. Suddenly their weight shifts and the chair gives way from underneath. The feet begin to kick.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

Adnan sprinting in. Shouting frantically at the RECEPTIONIST.

INT. SARAJEVO HOTEL - ROOM - DAY

Matthew hangs from a bedsheet tied to a ceiling fan. His eyes widen as he struggles for air. He grips at the cloth around his throat. Losing consciousness, the last thing he see's --

-- THE DOOR BURSTING OPEN AND ADNAN STORMING IN.

CUT TO BLACK:

Silence. Then, ever so gently, the HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL MELODY we've come to know begins to fade up.

INT. ADNAN'S HOME - DAY

The melody continues. Crisp, sharp piano notes.

A blur of bright light. Eyes adjusting. A room coming into focus. Welcoming, airy, bright -- morning daylight flooding through an open window. Its curtains bellowing in a breeze.

Matthew sits up in a bed. Eyes now fully open. Unsure of where he is or where that enchanting music is coming from. The harmony kicks in. A mixture of despair and hope. Could this be heaven? Matthew rests his head back, transported by the music. Utterly overcome by its beauty.

Then the door to the room starts to open. The music stops, abruptly. The dull ringing retaking its place inside Matthew's ears as he watches Adnan walk in with a breakfast tray.

ADNAN
Finally. You awake.

He puts the breakfast tray down on the bed.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
How's the head? Hungry?

Matthew tentatively shakes his head.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Yes. You must eat.

Adnan moves the tray in front of Matthew, who begins to pick at the food. He's surprised to learn how hungry he actually is, quickly taking bigger mouthfuls. Adnan watches him with an affectionate smile.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
Good, huh?

Matthew nods. Stops eating. Looks sincerely at Adnan.

MATTHEW
I...I...

ADNAN
Made a mistake.

Matthew nods, repentant.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
I know. I see you. You fight. To live.

It chills Matthew to think how close he came to dying.

ADNAN (CONT'D)
It's good. Now eat. I want clean plate.

Matthew recommences eating. Adnan makes his way toward the door. Matthew stops.

MATTHEW
Adnan!
(Adnan stops; turns)
Was that you?

ADNAN
Was what me?

MATTHEW
Playing, just now. The music.

Adnan, confused, shakes his head.

ADNAN
What music?

MATTHEW
The most beautiful. You must have heard it? I mean, if I did...

Matthew gestures for Adnan to be realistic here.

ADNAN
My daughter plays. Chopsticks.

Matthew waves him off.

MATTHEW
A CD then. But who? Come on, tell me.

Adnan smiles, knowingly. Reaches into his pocket and crosses to the bed.

ADNAN
I think maybe only you can answer that.

He takes out the crumpled business card and hands it to Matthew. The words may be distorted, but their impact on him have never been so profound: **Art is a primal need. Especially under siege!**

Adnan heads for the door. Matthew calls after him.

MATTHEW
Adnan...

ADNAN
(turning)
Yes, my friend?

MATTHEW
(hesitates)
Hvala!

The two share a warm smile.

ADNAN
Anytime.

The sound of an airplane landing...

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT - ARRIVALS GATE - NIGHT

Matthew drags his suitcase wearily past the nothing to declare zone and out through the arrivals gate. It's late with only a scattering of people waiting on the other side. Two of those just happen to be Cynthia and Henry.

Their faces, Cynthia's in particular, light up at the sight of Matthew. He shows no real sign of emotion other than supreme fatigue as he approaches. Cynthia longs to throw her arms around her boy, but doesn't. Understands the need for restraint -- to allow Matthew to make the first move. He stands there a second, just staring at them. Finally, he hands Henry the handle of his suitcase. Henry smiles as he takes it. A wave of relief breaks across Cynthia's face.

HENRY

Come on. Let's get you home.

They begin to walk off together. Cynthia tentatively rests her hand on Matthew's back as they head towards the exit.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew, exhausted, enters and collapses onto the bed. As he does, something falls from the side table onto his arm. He sits up and sees the unopened parcel from Odette. He unwraps it to reveal an A4 BOOK of BLANK MUSICAL MANUSCRIPT PAPER. Attached to the book is a note on which is simply written:
Odette x

Matthew stares at the blank manuscript for a second, then smiles.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - MATTHEW'S ROOM - LATER

It's very late. But Matthew, wide eyed, is busy at work, excitedly scrawling notations onto blank staves. Stuck by the side of the bed is the back of Adnan's business card. The words now acting as a constant source of inspiration.

We begin to pull out, leaving Matthew alone. Composing.

FADE TO:

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE

Matthew, seated, takes in the office. It's been a while.

We realise that his hearing is all but gone. Replaced by the strange, low humming. A cautious looking Shawl, sat in his customary armchair, is about to write something down for Matthew when --

MATTHEW
I've, uh, learnt to lip read.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Matthew, I --

Matthew shakes his head, and holds out a hand to halt Shawl.

MATTHEW
I've come to play you something. If
that's okay?

Shawl is caught pleasantly off guard.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Of course.

Matthew gets up and sits at one of the pianos. From the folder, he withdraws the manuscript he received from Odette, now covered with musical notations, places it on the music stand and begins to play.

We hear his beautiful music -- the creation of which we witnessed in his dreams. His inner song. Finally captured. Haunting yet beautiful. Soft yet loud...

Listening intently, Shawl is enraptured. Matthew's playing is by no means perfect. Far from precise. Making it all the more visceral. Human. Shawl is hit by the emotion embodied within. Feels a connection. Finally. He smiles.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
(sotto)
At last. I begin to know you.

INT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - PROFESSOR SHAWL'S OFFICE -
LATER

Matthew is about to depart. He shakes hands with a proud looking Shawl.

PROFESSOR SHAWL
Keep in touch.

Matthew nods.

PROFESSOR SHAWL (CONT'D)
And...
(he picks up a form and
hands it to Matthew)
Who knows...?

Matthew looks at the form. It's an application specifically to study composition at the Royal Institute. Matthew smiles and inserts the application form into his folder. Shawl pats him on his back.

EXT. ROYAL INSTITUTE OF MUSIC - DAY

Late afternoon. Matthew leans against a tree on the opposite side of the road from the Institute, watching as students pour out of the entrance at the end of the day.

He fiddles anxiously with the folder in his hand. Takes out the manuscript of his own composition. On the front page we see clearly the title: **Matthew & Emir: The Two Sides of Me.**

On the bottom, Matthew has written: **To Odette x**

Suddenly, the moment he's been waiting for -- he stands to attention as Odette emerges. She looks beautiful. Happy. Yashin, follows closely behind.

Matthew watches the pair navigate the steps, stop at the bottom and embrace warmly. He's instantly stung by a strong feeling of jealousy. Compounded only further as Yashin moves in for a kiss.

Matthew can't bring himself to watch anymore. He stuffs his manuscript back into the folder and starts to walk off.

He makes it a few feet before a hand taps his shoulder. He turns to see Odette, smiling and slightly out of breath.

ODETTE

Matthew. I thought it was you.

MATTHEW

It's me.

He slides the folder behind his back, attempting to conceal it from view.

ODETTE

You lipread?

Matthew nods. Odette is impressed.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

How are you?

MATTHEW

Me? Fine.

(awkward beat)

About before, what I did...

ODETTE

Is forgotten. Water under the bridge.

Pause. Neither can think of anything to say. Then --

ODETTE (CONT'D)

It's just good to see you.

MATTHEW

You look well.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 Thank you. I feel it. Tomorrow I'm
 off to Paris for two months.

Matthew nods. Struggles to find words.

ODETTE (CONT'D)
 (keeping conversation
 going)
 Yes, I play at the Salle Pleyel.
 Can you believe it?

Matthew is hit by a different form of jealousy now. Envy.
 Behind Odette, in the background, he spots Yashin hovering.
 His expression changes. Frowns.

MATTHEW
 No. Not really.

He turns and walks off. Odette smiles sadly as she watches
 him disappear, before rejoining Yashin.

INT. HEYWARD HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew is sat at the piano. His composition manuscript
 resting on the music stand. He stares quietly at it for a
 long while. Then he starts to play, softly and slowly.

In the background, Cynthia enters the living room. Stands
 quietly, listening.

Matthew stops. Stares long and hard at Odette's name written
 on the bottom of the manuscript. A mixture of emotions
 cursing through him.

Cynthia appears at the side of the piano. She smiles as
 Matthew looks up at her.

CYNTHIA
 (using sign language at
 the same time)
 That was beautiful, Matthew.

Matthew throws her a curious look.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)
 I've started to learn. Thought it
 may help us to have another level
 of communication. That's if you
 want to?

Matthew contemplates hard for a moment.

MATTHEW
 I'd like that.

Cynthia smiles. Matthew goes back to looking at the cover of his manuscript. Cynthia turns her attention to it too, focusing on the dedication at the bottom. She rests her hand on his shoulder. Squeezes it softly to gain his attention.

CYNTHIA

You know, no girl is ever going to be good enough for you because, to me, you're perfect.

Matthew is irked by this and goes to say something in riposte. However, Cynthia doesn't let him.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Still, your father seems to like her. And we all know what good taste he has in women now don't we!

She smiles lovingly at him, turns and exits, leaving Matthew alone with much to consider.

EXT. ST. PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL - DAY

A chain of taxis guarding the entrance.

INT. ST. PANCRAS INTERNATIONAL - DAY

It's midday, and the four lines for the Eurostar check-in are substantial. Towards the front of the second line stands Odette, dressed casually in jeans, T-shirt and blazer, pulling a small holdall. She is happy and more than a little excited to be returning to Paris.

In the background, we pick out Matthew, holding his manuscript, checking along the lines, searching for Odette. Finally he spots her. He hesitates, unsure if he can carry through what he is here to do. Finally, he musters enough courage to approach her.

Odette is extremely surprised to see him.

ODETTE

Matthew! What are you doing here?

Matthew again hesitates. Odette, unsure whether he has understood her, is just about to repeat herself when --

MATTHEW

Wanted to say good luck.

He outstretches his hand. Odette shakes it, surprised.

ODETTE

Thank you.

MATTHEW

No, thank you.

He holds up his manuscript and hands it to her. She flicks through it, stunned and moved by the compositions she finds on the pages.

ODETTE

You composed this?

Matthew nods gently.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

It's beautiful.

She closes the book, examining the cover closely. Notices the dedication to her at the bottom. She looks at him, touched and confused.

MATTHEW

It's saved me.

He produces a small smile. Odette's eyes water.

ODETTE

I knew always, you weren't as big a bastard as you pretend to be.

Matthew laughs. He's not so sure about that.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

Rivals?

MATTHEW

Rivals.

They shake hands again.

Disgruntled groans. Suddenly, Odette realises she's at the front of the line, holding up those behind. In a split second she's made up her mind.

She takes Matthew by the hand and leads him off across the station concourse toward one of the old and battered COMMUNAL PIANOS that lay scattered around the station.

She rests her suitcase at the side of the piano and sits on the right edge of the piano stool. She places Matthew's manuscript on the music stand and opens it. Matthew just watches her. She looks up at him, expectantly.

Slowly, he takes up position next to her on the left.

Odette places her right hand on the piano.

ODETTE

Ready?

Matthew nods and places his left hand on the keyboard.

ODETTE (CONT'D)

Just try to keep up.

After a silent count, Odette nods her head and they start playing together, one hand each, with Odette performing the treble clef and Matthew the bass.

Even on this battered and out of tune piano, they play beautifully.

We play along with Matthew, hearing the music in his mind, mixing with the sound of his heart beating.

Suddenly, Odette's hand accidentally brushes against his. He turns his head to face her, but this time, instead of a scowl there's a smile.

The two play on as we gently start to drift away. A small crowd slowly starting to gather around them.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.