

**Testament of Youth**

by  
Juliette Towhidi

Based on the autobiography of Vera Brittain

WHITE SHOOTING SCRIPT 03.03.14

CLOSE ON -

The face of VERA (24); her expression is watchful, uncertain. Around her, the muffled, distorted sounds of street celebrations. She has striking features, expressive of great intelligence, yet tired by experiences beyond her years.

Suddenly, SOUND comes CRASHING IN -

- Vera is on a London street thronging with merrymakers. A swell of revellers push past, sweeping her away with them.

A caption: **London, 11th November 1918.**

1 EXT. LONDON STREET - EVENING (WINTER)

1

In the enfolding gloom of evening, Vera is BUFFETED in the crowd; people wave flags, swig from bottles, sit astride each other's shoulders.

Vera mingles in the crowd but seems isolated, as though in a separate bubble. The sound cuts in and out, as though she's having trouble connecting.

\*

2 EXT. LONDON STREET - EVENING

2

Vera is moving through the throng, having to elbow her way, overwhelmed by the densely packed bodies -

The noise still CUTS in and out - as a sudden loud ROAR crashes in on her -

She gasps, turns - to see a MOTOR CAR, spilling over with revellers. A WOMAN sits on top swigging from a champagne bottle. A YOUNG SOLDIER, his leg in plaster, sees Vera, and leaps out.

He grabs her hands, pulling her into a hectic dance, as others around them dance too. Vera SPINS!...dizzy, as faces fly past her -

She's trapped, the panic rises - she BREAKS FREE -

- Pushes through the crowd, desperate to escape, elbowing, annoying people -

She sees some church steps ahead of her, and stumbles up them.

3 INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

3

Vera hurries inside, her footsteps echoing on marble. Above her, a high-vaulted dome, ahead of her, rows of pews. It's another world in here, silent, dark, seemingly empty.

Vera walks down a side aisle, and sees a rich oil painting looming - Francis Danby's "The Deluge". Dark waves tower menacingly in a STORM-RIPPED SEA, people are tossed around in it like flotsam -

Helpless -

Vera is pulled in, mesmerised, towards the image of apocalyptic destruction -

And SUDDENLY -

CUT TO:

4 SHE'S UNDERWATER -

4

in a murky gloom, struggling against the water's force, trapped, DROWNING! Her hands claw at the fabric of her heavy Edwardian skirts -

CUT BACK TO:

5 INT. CHURCH -

5

Shapes take form around her in the gloom - figures, kneeling in prayer in the pews, women all of them, some on their knees, others staring into space -

As the air fills with their whispers -

VERA takes in the sight, her eyes flickering with panic, the whispering sound magnifying in her mind -

We CUT back and forth between this and VERA DROWNING -

- And she realises the church is full of them - woman after woman after woman, like an ocean of grief separated from the world outside - as WE -

CUT BACK TO:

6 VERA IN THE WATER -

6

Floating now, not struggling, as though she's given up -

Then she sees - ABOVE HER in the gloom -

A source of LIGHT.

She SURGES up towards it, higher, higher! -

And BREAKS through the water -

7 EXT. LAKE, BUXTON - DAY, 1914 (SPRING)

7

Vera surfaces in a beautiful lake, shimmering in a spring heatwave. It's five years earlier, and another world.

She's younger, fresher. Her face clear of the experiences that have so marked her.

Vera swims, keeping herself concealed behind lakeside greenery, spying on two YOUNG MEN getting undressed near a rickety wooden pier - her brother EDWARD - 18, private, artistic, elegant - and his close school friend VICTOR - kind, soft-natured.

EDWARD

We used to swim here when we were children...

She catches Edward's eye, ducks out of sight. He smiles to himself.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Where is Vera? I hope she hasn't gone in yet, I completely forgot about the rats -

VICTOR

(disgusted)

Rats?!

EDWARD

A big nest of them apparently, we'll be alright in the shallows, but we definitely shouldn't go over there -

He gestures to the water - where Vera swims out, happily smiling.

EDWARD

Oh no! Vera!

On VICTOR, down to shirt and trunks - his alarm!

VICTOR

Get out of the water! RATS!

Vera waves serenely back, seemingly unable to hear.

VERA

Come on in!

As she dives under, Victor RUNS down the pier, DIVES in and swims towards her.

He surfaces to see her grinning face - turns, to see Edward now fully undressed, who grins at him and dives in.

Victor realises he's been had.

VICTOR  
BASTARD!

He SWIMS back towards Edward - who feigns panic.

EDWARD  
Oh no! Help! They've got me!

Victor DUCKS him - Vera watches, laughing.

8 EXT. EDGE OF LAKE - LATER

8

Vera is finishing getting dressed behind a towel held up by Edward. Victor can be seen further away, ringing out his soaking shirt.

EDWARD  
So what about you and Victor?

VERA  
What about us?

EDWARD  
Come on Vera, you know he's got it bad for you....

VERA  
(non-committal)  
He's sweet.

EDWARD  
Sweet! All the attention's making you arrogant!

He sees she's finished, flicks her with the towel, they play fight, as Victor comes over.

VICTOR  
I'm a block of ice!

Vera laughs, hands the towel to him, holding it out like a cover for his bare torso. He takes it, grinning.

VERA  
There you go.

Edward quickly pulls on a shirt.

EDWARD  
Come on, we should be getting back.

As the men dress, Vera turns away to give them some privacy -

VERA  
We only just got here!

EDWARD  
Mother and father are expecting us.

Victor pointedly takes Edward's jacket and puts it on.

VERA  
They're always expecting us! \*

VICTOR  
I rather like your parents.

Vera looks round as he's pulling his trousers up, quickly looks away again.

VERA  
That's because you don't have to  
live with them. \*

EDWARD  
And Roland'll be here soon.

VERA  
(sighing)  
Oh yes, how could I forget...the  
unbearably perfect one. \*

The two boys smile, as they gather their things together. \*

VICTOR  
He is good at everything. \*

VERA  
Including being modest, I hope? \*

EDWARD  
Of course.

VERA  
Brilliant and modest, I hate him  
already!

They start to walk away. \*

EDWARD  
(light)  
Give him a chance, Vera, alright? I  
mean it!

As they enter the trees Vera lingers behind. She spots something on the ground - stoops to pick up a small, perfect little bird's egg, with a single crack in it.

She pauses, turns back to the lake for a moment -

Breathes it in one last time -

- The breeze across the water, glittering in the sunlight, the swaying rustle of the leaves - the tranquil, mysterious beauty of the place -

8A EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, DERBYSHIRE - MINUTES LATER 8A \*

Vera, Edward and Victor walk home across a beautiful stretch of countryside. \*

9 EXT. MELROSE - MINUTES LATER 9 \*

The three of them walk towards the garden gates of MELROSE, the family house, a grand, grey Victorian building. Vera suddenly remembers her wet hair, and hurriedly tucks it up, out of sight. Then she sees - \*

Parked outside the gates - a delivery van, with "Somerson's Pianos" written on the side. \*

Vera stops, dismayed - immediately looks at Edward, who looks sheepish. Fearing the worst, she hurries to the gates, opens them and strides up the garden path, Edward and Victor right behind her.

VERA  
(furious, thrown back at  
Edward)

You knew about this!

EDWARD

I knew Father wanted you to have  
one -

VERA

You colluded with them!

EDWARD

No -!

Vera goes through the open doorway, into the house -

10 INT. HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - CONTINUOUS 10

Vera sweeps along the hallway, towards the living room -

The sounds of a heavy object being moved into place, the CLANG of piano keys -

VERA enters the living room, to see delivery men manoeuvering a GRAND PIANO, overseen by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. BRITTAIRN, and family friend Mrs. ELLINGER, with a teen daughter in tow.

Mr. Brittain is a self-made businessman, extrovert, kind, but prone to outbursts of temper and depressions.

His wife is both more delicate and more level-headed - once less conventional than her husband, now the subservient wife, she flaps on the surface, but underneath exerts complete domestic control.

MR. BRITTAIN  
(seeing her)  
Vera! Come and see your surprise!

Her mother comes over and takes her arm.

MRS. BRITTAIN  
I've been dying to tell you, but I just couldn't. Mrs. Ellinger's been in on the secret, she wants to hear you play!

Mr. Brittain opens the piano lid with a flourish. Vera holds back, her expression is tight and sullen.

MR. BRITTAIN  
She's an absolute beauty - so I'm told. Come on darling, give us a taste of what we can look forward to!

As the delivery men finish and leave, Mrs. Brittain takes a seat next to a very proper Mrs. Ellinger and her daughter. Victor sits too.

An expectant silence. Edward gives Vera a pained look - he understands her feelings. She goes and sits at the piano -

- Stares at the keys for a long beat -

Hands raised -

Then brings them CRASHING down, BANGING out a CACOPHONY!

She stops - stark silence. Her mother and Mrs. Ellinger look shocked. Vera leaps up and heads for the door, her father immediately on her trail -

11

INT. LIVING ROOM DOOR/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

11

Mr. Brittain calls out to Vera before she can go any further. \*

MR. BRITTAIN  
Vera! Come back and apologise now!

Vera's expression is defiant. Mrs. Brittain hovers anxiously in the background with the others.

MR. BRITTAIN (CONT'D)  
If you can't show me the respect I deserve, then at least show some for our guests!

Their faces are close, Vera's pent-up anger and hurt almost bursting out. \*

VERA

I don't want a piano. You knew I didn't want one and still you bought it! I won't be bullied by you!

Mr. Brittain turns to his wife, looking incredulous.

MR. BRITTAINE

I buy her the most expensive gift of her life, but no, I'm bullying her!

MRS. BRITTAINE

Your father hoped you'd be happy, dear -

VERA

That piano could pay for a whole year at Oxford!

MR. BRITTAINE

Ah, here we go!

VERA

(bursting)

All this time you said you couldn't afford for me to go!

MR. BRITTAINE

I can't afford to waste money, no!

Vera glowers at him in speechless fury - turns and STOMPS upstairs. \*

He glances at his wife, who gives him an admonishing look - \*

MR. BRITTAINE

Vera - I didn't mean - VERA! Come back here! \*

MRS. BRITTAINE

Oh dear. (to Mrs Ellinger) I do apologise... \*

11A INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, BUXTON - A SECOND LATER 11A \*

Vera is in her room, looking round for an outlet for her fury and frustration - \*

She sees a pile of papers on her desk, covered in her scrawled hand writing, and a small pile of books - she gathers up the whole lot, marches over to the window, chuckles it all out - \*

11B INT. HALLWAY - SAME TIME

11B \*

Edward is starting up the stairs after Vera, when they hear the thud of objects falling -- they turn to see, through the open doorway behind them, a shower of papers floating down to the ground.

Mr. Brittain groans in exasperation. Vera charges back down the stairs.

VERA

I've thrown my work out, you can take it to your paper factory and pulp it for all I care!

MR BRITTAINE

Now stop it! I'm simply concerned you're turning yourself into a bluestocking, because they don't find husbands, you know!

VERA

I don't want a husband!

On VICTOR - a little crestfallen at this.

VERA

How many times do I have to spell it out?! I'm sorry you didn't have a daughter whose sole purpose in life is to hitch herself to a man, but there it is! I'm not getting married, not now, not ever!

A sound makes them all turn. ROLAND stands there, holding his luggage; well-built, with an intense gaze and a self-assurance beyond his 19 years, he's a physical, sensual person.

Everyone is caught by the moment. After a pause -

ROLAND

(small smile)

Well. That's clear, then.

Vera glares at him for a moment, then turns and stomps upstairs. Edward and Victor descend on him, shaking hands.

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

12

A maid lights an oil lamp as Edward sits at the piano, his musician's hands running along the keys, playing a gentle melody. He hears a sound, looks up, sees Vera watching him, as the maid slips out.

\*  
\*  
\*

EDWARD

I've lost track of how long I  
wanted one of these.

Vera comes and sits next to him at the piano.

VERA

(contrite)

Oh Edward, I was so caught up in  
myself - I didn't think what this  
must be like for you.

EDWARD

(the piano)

She certainly didn't deserve the  
treatment you gave her.

VERA

Well - I got you your piano, that's  
something to be happy about at  
least.

He plays a few bars, smiles at her.

VERA (CONT'D)

We'll escape marriage and the paper  
factory yet!

He carries on playing - a beautiful melody. Vera is lost in  
the music for a moment, gazing at her brother with love and  
awe at his talent.

A sound makes them look up. Roland and Victor come in. Edward  
keeps playing. They come over and listen to the music, Roland  
watching Vera.

Something in his gaze makes her feel self-conscious. She gets  
up, walks to the other side of the room.

Victor joins Edward at the piano and they switch into a  
jaunty duet. Then Roland joins them - they all play together,  
a fun routine that's obviously familiar.

Vera watches them, chuckling - seeing how united they are.

Vera is outside in the dark, searching in the shrubbery for  
her books and papers. From inside, we can hear the piano  
still being played. A sound makes her start - she turns to  
see Roland, smoking a cigarette, quietly watching her.

VERA

You frightened me!

ROLAND

Can I help?

VERA

No thanks.

But he stubs his cigarette out, starts searching anyway.

VERA (CONT'D)

Please, I'd rather be by myself.

ROLAND

(playful)

It's the books I'm worried about,  
I've never seen anyone beat them up  
that way!

Roland finds a few battered books. Then picks up a piece of paper, glowing white in the dusk. He sees it's a hand-written poem, and makes the snap decision to pocket it. \*

ROLAND

(looking at the books)

Wordsworth, Shelley. Poor Byron.  
All these romantics aren't good for  
you, you know.

She snatches them from him, examines them for damage, then leafs through the pages, as though looking for something.

VERA

Don't worry, they have very little  
influence.

ROLAND

(a smile)

So I saw earlier.

She flashes him a look. His self-confidence both riles and attracts her.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(more sincere)

I'm sorry about the badly timed  
arrival, by the way.

VERA

(defensive)

Why should I care?

She starts to head back inside, then stops, turns to him -

VERA (CONT'D)

I can see this is all highly  
amusing for you -

ROLAND

No -

VERA

Yes, you're polishing up the anecdote already, for your friends back at school! (Raw) But it's my life -!

\*

Exasperated with herself, and embarrassed, she heads back inside. Roland thinks for a moment - touched by her. Then produces the poem he pocketed. He reads, his expression moved.

\*

14

INT. VERA'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

14

Vera is up with some open text books before her, studying. There's a knock at the door. Startled, she gets up, goes and opens it. Roland stands there.

VERA

(taken aback)

What?

ROLAND

(smiling)

You're studying.

VERA

What of it?

ROLAND

(more vulnerable)

Nothing, I - Look, I've done the Oxford entrance exams, it's all about technique. I could help you. Once you've learnt it, you'll sail through I'm sure.

VERA

Like a masonic secret, passed from teacher to boy.

ROLAND

Actually my teachers weren't that good. I worked it out for myself.

\*

\*

She looks at him - the reaching out to her beneath the smooth, confident surface.

VERA

(softly)

Then so will I.

She closes the door in his face. Taken aback by herself, she leans against the door with a smile.

15	INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE VERA'S ROOM - SAME TIME	15
	Roland is also taken aback. But after a moment, he turns away with a smile.	
15A	EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, BUXTON - DAY	15A *
	The three men and Vera are walking up a beautiful, gently sloping green hill, talking and laughing together.	* *
16	EXT. HILLSIDE OUTSIDE BUXTON - LATER	16 *
	Vera, Edward, Roland and Victor are lying or sitting on the hillside, gazing at the countryside stretched out before them in the green beauty of spring. The atmosphere is relaxed.	* * *
	ROLAND (lightly - the view) The world at our feet!	* * *
	EDWARD (grimace) Except we're nearly back at school.	* * *
	ROLAND We're here now, Ted, come on. Live in the moment a little.	* * *
	VICTOR One more term and it'll all be over. It's sort of daunting, seeing your whole life stretched out in front of you. I mean, wonderful too, obviously...	* * * * * *
	ROLAND I'll stick with wonderful.	* *
	VERA At least you won't be buried alive in Buxton, with days filled with nothing but petty gossip.	* * * *
	ROLAND (a smile) Have we got a suffragette on our hands?	* * * *
	VERA I would be, given the chance, I suppose that shocks you?	* * *
	EDWARD You're talking to the wrong man, Vera. Roland's a supporter.	*

Vera assumes he's joking. \*

ROLAND

Well, my mother does admire them. \*

EDWARD

She's a novelist, and she writes for the papers, she supports the whole family in fact. (To Roland) I hope you don't mind me saying...? \*

ROLAND

(smiling)

Not now I've seen Vera's face!

Vera is thrown.

VERA

I had no idea....

ROLAND

Perhaps you've jumped to conclusions about me.

VERA

I think that's mutual.

ROLAND

No, I've researched you quite thoroughly. I found a poem in the garden, in fact, and took the liberty - (of reading it)

As he takes the piece of paper from his pocket - \*

EDWARD

(interrupting)

Poems! You've kept that very quiet!  
Let's have a look!

He takes it off Roland - Vera snatches it off him -

VERA

Give it back! It's nothing - it's just a - stupid thing!

She pockets the poem, upset and humiliated. Roland realises his mistake.

ROLAND

I'm sorry, I thought...you two...

He gestures to her and Edward. \*

VERA

It's fine... \*

They sit there in awkward silence. \*

VICTOR  
 (trying to lighten the atmosphere)  
 I don't know about anyone else, but I could do with a drink of something.

\*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*

17 EXT. GREEN GLADE, OUTSIDE BUXTON - A LITTLE LATER

17 \*

On the way back - Vera has deliberately slowed her pace to fall behind the others, needing a moment alone. Roland carefully approaches her. We can hear Edward and Victor talking and laughing off-screen.

\*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*

ROLAND  
 I didn't know you kept it secret -

VERA

Really. That's why you stole it from me and stored it to use like - like ammunition!

ROLAND

No -

\*

VERA

Stop pretending!

ROLAND

I kept quiet because - I was moved by it, I thought it beautiful, and - you seem an impossible person to say that to.

This silences her. She plays with a stick she's picked up.

\*

A long moment.

VERA

I'm not.

ROLAND

No.

VERA

(hesitant, more open)  
 You really - don't think me ridiculous?

\*

He smiles, shakes his head.

VERA

What if I told you I want to be a writer - and - I even dream of earning a living by it?

Roland smiles his gentle, confident smile.

\*

ROLAND

Don't you need some experience  
first?

VERA

Of course!

A beat.

ROLAND

I want to write too, as it happens -  
I'm a little in my mother's shadow.

She looks at him -

VERA

Is she good?

He nods.

VERA

How's she done it..?

ROLAND

Sheer pig-headedness. You should  
meet her, you'd get on.

They both laugh gently.

ROLAND

(sincere)

You must write. Really.

VERA

No one's ever said that to me  
before.

They smile.

18

OMMITTED.

18 \*

19

EXT. WHITE ROAD, BUXTON - LATER

19

They're on the way home. Vera, holding some flowers she's  
gathered, walks ahead of the three men, down a long, winding  
white road across the gentle sloping hills. \*

She can hear them chatting and laughing behind her, she turns  
to look back at them - \*

And her eyes directly meet Roland's. He's been concentrating  
on her. She looks away again, in sudden shyness.... \*

20

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

20

Vera is putting some of the flowers she collected into frames. She snaps a frame shut, takes it across to the wall to hang there, when she catches a glimpse of herself in a long mirror -

- she looks again at her reflection, suddenly thinking about herself in a different way, as a woman -

She runs her hands over her waist, her hips, turning to look at herself, trying to assess her appeal.

She puts a finger to her lips - imagining his kiss -

She starts at a sound at the door; goes over. Someone is on the other side, she can feel the presence; she knows it's him. Quietly, she presses her body against the door -

Roland, on the other side, is very still too -

A rustling noise - she looks down. He's pushing a piece of paper under the door - a poem. She picks it up and reads: "Untitled" by Roland Leighton.

Vera waits, listening - to his presence retreating down the corridor.

21

INT. HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - MORNING

21

It's morning. A freshly dressed Vera is walking down the hall when she hears voices in the living room. She stops to listen.

EDWARD O.S.

You know women don't even get degrees at Oxford? It's just three years of study, father.

Vera peeps through the crack in the door, sees Edward pacing in front of her father.

MR.BRITTAINE

Three years of extra expense!

EDWARD

I'd share my allowance with her, that would help.

MR.BRITTAINE

What if she doesn't get in? Don't you need tuition for such a thing?

EDWARD

You could let her have a shot at it.

(MORE)

EDWARD (cont'd)

I wouldn't feel right about going myself if she didn't have the chance. She's always been so bright.

Vera watches Edward, feeling grateful, as her father ponders. He looks up, catches sight of her. She ducks quickly out of sight.

MR. BRITTAIN'S VOICE

Vera!

She winces - turns and enters the living room. Comes and stands before her father.

MR. BRITTAIN

Very well. You can sit the wretched thing if you want to.

Vera is overjoyed - she hugs her father.

VERA

Thank you Daddy!

MR. BRITTAIN

You're just sitting it, mind! Then we'll see. Now play me some of that piano!

Vera laughs. Edward watches, smiling.

22

INT. STAIRCASE, MELROSE - DAY (SPRING)

22

Vera is pinned to the staircase wall, making way for Edward and Victor as they clatter past with suitcases and boxes - on \* their way back to school.

Vera follows them downstairs as Mr. Brittain, dressed to drive his car, strides into the hallway.

MR. BRITTAIN

Come on, you'll miss the train!

Vera pursues Edward into the hall, glancing up the stairs every now and then, wondering where Roland is. Outside, Mr. Brittain and Victor are loading up the car.

VERA

I don't want you to go. \*

He gives her a smile and a quick hug. \*

EDWARD

Not long now. \*

Victor comes back in and shakes her hand, as Mrs. Brittain appears. \*

VERA  
Victor...

He acts cheerful - but she sees the hurt in his eyes.

EDWARD  
We'd better be off...

Victor turns to say goodbye to Mrs. Brittain, as Vera sees Roland finally coming down the stairs. She hurries over to him.

VERA  
I wish you weren't going so soon!

ROLAND  
Did you read the poem?

VERA  
(slightly caught out)  
Of course.

ROLAND  
And?

VERA  
(hesitant)  
It's well crafted.

ROLAND  
But -?

VERA  
It was a little - dry. As though  
you were holding back.

ROLAND  
(stung)  
Really.

VERA  
I couldn't find you in it.

ROLAND  
Well I can assure you it's mine!

VERA  
Of course, I didn't mean -

EDWARD  
(calling)  
Roland, Come on! We're already  
late!

Vera watches in dismay as Roland throws her a final, tight smile, and heads out. She joins her mother at the doorway as Roland runs to leap aboard the car, already creeping along the drive. The atmosphere is jovial -

\*

But Vera is worried, upset with herself - \*

VERA'S VOICE

Edward, send me news of Roland  
Leighton. Tell him - how much I  
enjoyed meeting him, will you? You  
know I can be my own worst enemy - \*

23 INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, MELROSE - DAY

23

A happy Vera falls back onto her bed, holding an envelope; she opens it, takes out a letter and starts to read. \*

ROLAND'S VOICE

Edward assures me you won't mind me  
writing direct. You set me a  
challenge, you see, and I've done  
my best to rise to it.

A piece of paper floats out - she sees it's a poem.

ROLAND'S VOICE

I hope you find more feeling in  
this one.

Vera reads the poem, emotions flitting across her face.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Down the long white road we walked  
together  
Down between the grey hills and the  
heather,  
You seemed all brown and soft, just  
like a linnet..*

24 INT. VERA'S BEDROOM - LATER

24

Vera sits at her desk, eagerly writing a letter back to Roland.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Your errant hair had shadowed  
sunbeams in it...  
And there shone all April  
In your eyes.*

25 OMMITTED

25

26 INT./EXT. TRAIN/OXFORD - DAY

26

A smartly-dressed Vera, accompanied by her chaperone AUNT BELLE - a small, round, warm but flustered woman - is sitting in a train compartment looking out of the window;

on the horizon, the beautiful, sunlit spires of Oxford shimmer into view, redolent with promise....

27 EXT. BROAD STREET, OXFORD - DAY

27

Vera is walking down Broad Street as Aunt Belle hurries to keep up with her, chattering away like background noise.

Vera drinks in the sights - students cycling around on bikes, or engaged in animated conversation, the Radcliffe Camera - it all looks wonderful.

28 EXT. SOMERVILLE COLLEGE, OXFORD - DAY

28

Vera steps inside Somerville college, gazes around in awe at the emerald lawns and elegant buildings, female undergraduates passing by, as Aunt Belle witters on.

AUNT BELLE

I know you're only here for two nights but Oxford can get chilly you know, it's in a basin. I bought you an extra nightie just in case -

VERA

No Aunt.

Vera has noticed two plainly-dressed female dons standing nearby, gazing at her in puzzlement. One of them, Miss LORIMER - glasses, youngish, clever, dry - approaches.

AUNT BELLE

I promised your mother to keep a proper eye on you, she does worry-

VERA

Aunt, please!

AUNT BELLE

Bedsocks! (Seeing Vera's face) My final word!

Miss Lorimer is looking Vera up and down, taking in her attire.

MISS LORIMER

I'm sorry, are you lost?

VERA

I'm here for the exam.

MISS LORIMER

(clearly surprised)

Oh. Well, the porter's lodge is that way, they'll direct you.

VERA  
(flustered)  
Thank you.

Aunt Belle smiles at Miss Lorimer.

AUNT BELLE  
I'm her Aunt Belle, I'll be  
staying nearby!

Miss Lorimer manages a patronising smile. As Vera and her aunt turn to walk away, the other don approaches.

MISS LORIMER  
Is it an entrance exam we're  
holding or a debutante's ball?

Vera hears - and winces inwardly.

29 INT. DINING HALL, SOMERVILLE - EVENING

29

Dinner-time. We move along a row of women, all dressed in serious black or grey, all scoffing heartily and talking. We reach Vera, who stands out in a blaze of coloured silk, like a provincial fashionista. She stares glumly at her plate of rather grey food, half-listening to an animated conversation.

CANDIDATE 1  
It's the Latin essay I'm  
dreading.

Vera is instantly startled.

CANDIDATE 1 (CONT'D)  
My tutor's convinced Virgil will  
come up. I hope he's right.

\*

VERA  
Essay...?

The others carry on their conversation. On Vera - she didn't know.

30 INT. DINING HALL/EXAM HALL - MORNING

30

Vera is sitting in a silent exam hall full of young women, as Miss Lorimer moves between the desks, placing exam papers face down. She puts one down before a nervous Vera, who stares at it.

MISS LORIMER  
You may begin.

Vera turns the exam paper over, together with everyone else. As she reads, her face fills with dismay. Around her, girls start eagerly scribbling.

Miss Lorimer, walking through the rows, catches her eye for the briefest moment.

Vera picks up her pen, takes a deep breath - and starts.

31 EXT. QUAD, SOMERVILLE - LATER

31

The candidates file out into the fresh air, chattering, seemingly in high spirits. Vera emerges last, her shoulders slumped, on the verge of tears. That didn't go well.

As the crowd dissipates, she stands there, alone. Then she sees Miss Lorimer, striding purposefully along some cloisters. She follows.

VERA  
Excuse me!

Miss Lorimer keeps walking.

VERA (CONT'D)  
About the Latin paper...

Miss Lorimer glances at her impatiently.

MISS LORIMER  
What is it?

VERA  
It's - I didn't realise an essay  
was required.

MISS LORIMER  
It's stated quite plainly.

VERA  
I must've missed it. I didn't have  
a tutor, I've prepared for this by  
myself.

Miss Lorimer stops, takes her in.

MISS LORIMER  
You seemed to be busy writing,  
Miss....

VERA  
(wincing)  
Brittain. I wrote it in German  
instead.

MISS LORIMER

German! Perhaps where you come from  
Latin and German can be equated,  
but not here, I'm afraid.

She starts walking again, dismissing her.

VERA

You've judged me already!

Miss Lorimer turns, surprised, a little affronted.

VERA (CONT'D)

(nothing to lose)

You think I'm frivolous, a  
provincial upstart, but I'm not!

A beat.

MISS LORIMER

I think you're clearly keen to  
stand out.

Vera's face - proud, but wanting it so much....

VERA

Yes!

MISS LORIMER

(an ambiguous half-smile)

Good day, Miss Brittain.

She turns and walks away - Vera slumps - sure she's blown it.

32

INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - DAY

32

Vera is sitting with her mother, Mrs. Ellinger and several other local ladies, talking and drinking tea. Vera fidgets, bored.

VERA'S VOICE

It's over, Edward. A disaster. I'll  
never escape Buxton now!

33

EXT. PLAYING FIELD, UPPINGHAM - DAY

33

Roland and Edward are playing rugby on a school playing field, mud-splattered, running with the ball.

VERA'S VOICE

Roland Leighton hasn't written back  
to me. Although, now I won't be  
joining you both at Oxford, perhaps  
that's for the best.

34

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, MELROSE - DAY (SUMMER)

34

It's roughly six weeks later. Mrs. Brittain stands in the hallway holding some hats, looking up the stairs.

MRS. BRITTAINE

VERA!

A flushed Vera comes thudding down the stairs. She's wearing a lovely dress.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Hurry hurry, strict instructions  
from Edward, we can't be late for  
his parade -!

\*  
\*  
\*

She takes in Vera's very smart outfit.

\*

MRS. BRITTAINE (CONT'D)

Goodness it's only a school speech  
day! (The hats) I don't know if  
these are going to be nice enough.

\*

VERA

(impatient)

Of course they are.

Vera takes one and puts it on her head before the mirror. Her mother looks at her.

MRS. BRITTAINE

No.

Vera takes it off - as some letters are pushed through the letter box. She leaps on them immediately, rifling through - sees the Oxford post stamp on one, and quickly pockets it.

MRS. BRITTAINE

What was that?

Vera fights not to show her tension -

VERA

Nothing.

She hands her mother the rest of the letters. Mrs. Brittain purses her lips, but hands her another hat. They both look at her reflection in the mirror.

VERA/MRS. BRITTAINE

No.

Her mother puts the final one on her.

MRS. BRITTAINE

That's the one!

Vera pulls it off.

VERA  
Awful!

Mrs. Brittain sighs with irritation.

MRS. BRITTAIN  
What's in the letter, dear?

Vera keeps stubbornly silent.

MRS. BRITTAIN (CONT'D)  
You can't go hiding things in this  
way, Vera, now tell me!

VERA  
(tense)  
It's from Oxford.

MRS. BRITTAIN  
(disappointed)  
Oh! I thought it might be from a  
boy. Why don't you open it?

Vera hears her father approaching.

VERA  
Don't tell father!

Mrs. Brittain sighs - her daughter perplexes her. She puts the last hat back on Vera, as Mr. Brittain appears, absorbed in reading a newspaper. We glimpse the headline: "Archduke Shot, Austria in Turmoil".

MRS. BRITTAIN  
That one really is perfect. (To Mr.  
Brittain) What do you think, dear?

Mr. Brittain is lost in his reading, a frown on his face.

VERA  
Daddy!

MR. BRITTAIN  
What? Oh. Perfect, yes.

Vera sighs, looks at her reflection.

MR. BRITTAIN (CONT'D)  
Was that the right answer?

Mother and daughter share a smile.

35

EXT. SCHOOL APPROACH, UPPINGHAM - DAY

35 \*

The glint of gun metal in the sun - we see rows of schoolboy officer cadets, in gleaming uniforms, formed into neat rows and stiffly marching, under orders of "Left, right.." from an officer teacher.

On the sidelines, proud families stand watching the parade. Vera threads between them, towards the front -

HEADMASTER'S VOICE

So as a new crop of Uppingham boys  
step out onto life's stage, we say  
to them, be strong, be loyal, be  
brave!

She picks out Edward, then Victor.... She gives them both a smile, there's a flicker of a smile in return. Her eyes search for Roland - there he is. She makes eye contact, smiles at him -

But he looks through her, his gaze fixed - as though on a distant goal she can't share.

CUT TO:

36

EXT. SCHOOL APPROACH - CONTINUOUS

36 \*

At one end, we FIND - the headmaster, speaking from a podium.

HEADMASTER

Loyal to yourselves, loyal to kith  
and kin - but above all else, loyal  
to your homeland, ready always to  
serve the glory of our empire!

We MOVE OUT - to see the field of officer cadets before him, still now, and listening to his every word. Row upon row of them...

HEADMASTER

...For if a man cannot be useful to  
his country, his life is surely  
worth little at all!

They stand there, obedient. Innocent. Proud.

Ready.

Vera watches as the families break into polite applause.

37

EXT. SCHOOL APPROACH, UPPINGHAM - LATER

37 \*

Groups of people are scattered across the court yard, chit-chatting, Mr. and Mrs. Brittain among them. We find -

Vera and Edward, in his officer cadet uniform.

She pulls the Oxford letter from her pocket and shows him. Edward sees it, and her nervousness. He takes her hand.

EDWARD

Come on.

Edward leads her towards a secluded corner.

38

EXT. SCHOOL APPROACH, UPPINGHAM - CONTINUOUS

38 \*

Edward sees her nerves.

EDWARD

No one'll disturb us here.

Vera holds out the letter in a trembling hand.

VERA

I know what it's going to say!

EDWARD

Shall I...?

He gently takes the letter from her. She nods. He braces himself, nervous too, and opens it.

She watches his face as he scans the contents, his expression neutral.

He looks up at her for a beat - his face blank. She fears the worse. Then he breaks into a gentle smile -

EDWARD

You got in.

Vera's face - total SHOCK. Then she LIGHTS up - with disbelief, with delight. Edward puts his arms round her, LIFTS her up - they laugh and jump like two excited children - \*

Then - as he sets her down -

EDWARD

You better tell Roland.

VERA

(unsure)

Do you think...?

EDWARD

Go on!

She smiles, shy and excited at the thought - then turns and runs off, he watches her go with a smile.

Vera moves through groups of people, until she spots Roland, in his cadet uniform, standing talking to his parents, Mrs. LEIGHTON, a tall, distinctive woman in flamboyant dress, and Mr. LEIGHTON, older, sophisticated, with a walking stick and a limp. Victor is with them. He sees Vera first, gestures her to come forward.

As she approaches -

ROLAND

Mother, father, this is Edward's  
sister Vera.

MRS. LEIGHTON

Oh! I didn't know Edward had a  
sister, how nice to meet you, dear.

Vera flashes a look at Roland, but his expression is unreadable. She shakes hands with his parents, then greets Victor.

VICTOR

You look happy about something.

VERA

I just heard, I got a place at  
Somerville!

VICTOR

Wonderful! Congratulations!

Victor and Mr. And Mrs. Leighton congratulate her and shake hands with her, Roland watches, smiling. Vera interprets his reserve as disinterest.

VERA

Excuse me, I must tell my parents -

She hurries away. Roland immediately excuses himself, and follows after her.

He quickly catches up with Vera as she strides through groups of people, standing chatting.

ROLAND

Vera! Wait!

VERA

What for?!

He knows....

ROLAND

Can we talk alone?

She hesitates, he gestures ahead.

ROLAND

Please?

Vera looks reluctant, but nods her agreement. As they disappear, we see Victor watching them...the disappointment palpable in him. Mrs. Brittain also clocks them.

39A EXT. GARDENS - CONTINUOUS

39A

Roland leads Vera away from the crowd, across grass. \*

ROLAND

It's such good news about Oxford.

VERA

You don't have to say that.

ROLAND

I know -

VERA

(blurting)

Look, if it's friendship you want  
that's fine with me!

Vera winces at herself - was that too much? Roland wants to  
find them a more secluded place, he looks around, then guides  
her round a corner, towards a half-crumbling Greek folly  
covered in richly foaming roses. \*

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

40 EXT. GREEK FOLLY - CONTINUOUS

40

As they enter the folly, Vera turns to him.

VERA

I prefer clarity, that's all!

ROLAND

No, it's been a busy term, exams  
and - ending school is quite a time-  
consuming business, as it turns  
out.

A beat. Awkwardness in the air.

VERA

Your mother didn't even know I  
exist.

ROLAND

No, that - that is self-protection.

He smiles his charming smile - then - sincerely now -

ROLAND (CONT'D)

It was wonderful seeing you at the parade, more than I could've imagined.

VERA

I'm unsure about this too, you know! It's not exactly what I had planned!

Roland reaches into an inside pocket and takes out the letter she sent him.

ROLAND

I've been carrying it around with me.

A beat.

VERA

So why didn't you write back?

ROLAND

Not good with words...?

VERA

(smiling)

For someone who wants to write...?!

A warmer beat -

ROLAND

We'll be able to see each other every day.

VERA

(shaking her head)

I'll be concentrating on my work.

ROLAND

You'll need fresh air, surely. And a chaperone? (Off her look) Lap dog? Humble slave?

He wants to get her to smile - she does. He takes her hand, softly - pulls her towards him.

ROLAND

(intimate whisper)

Vera...Let's agree. No more fear.

They look into one another's eyes -

VERA

No more fear...

as Mrs. Brittain's voice CRASHES in -

MRS. BRITTAIN O.S.

VERA!

They turn to see her mother descending on them. \*

MRS. BRITTAIN

What do you think you're doing?!  
This isn't the way to go about it!

\*  
\*

Roland steps forward.

ROLAND

I'm sorry, I'd like permission to  
see Vera again, Mrs. Brittain.  
Fully chaperoned, of course.

\*

Vera and Roland smile at one another.

41 EXT. TRAIN, COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

41

A train chugs through Derbyshire countryside.

VERA'S VOICE

The days feel like weeks, and the  
weeks like years. Mother keeps  
expecting me to drop Oxford, as  
though it's some sort of whim...

41A INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY

41A

Vera sits in the compartment gazing at the view outside, full  
of anticipation.

VERA'S VOICE (CONT'D)

...and Daddy's depressed about the  
Europe situation, he wants to talk  
endlessly about it...

42 EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM, CHARING CROSS - DAY (SUMMER)

42

Vera strides along a train platform, full of eager  
anticipation, followed by a huffing and puffing Aunt Belle.

VERA'S VOICE (CONT'D)

...but terrible as it sounds, as  
long as I get on that train to  
London I just don't care!

Up ahead, she spots Roland waiting, an apricot pink rose in  
his hands. She hurries over, stops before him.

They're both suddenly tongue-tied.

Awkwardly, he hands her the rose. She opens her coat and  
fixes it in the waistband of her blue satin dress.

On Roland's face - his pleasure. As Aunt Belle reaches them, huffing -

AUNT BELLE

I won't get in your way! I know what young love is!

Vera and Roland share a look.

43 EXT. LONDON STREET - LATER

43

Roland and Vera are walking fast down a London street, as Aunt Belle struggles to keep up.

AUNT BELLE

Slow down you two! Your mother was very particular that I -

They round a corner, disappearing from view. She sighs.

ON Roland and Vera, walking fast.

ROLAND

Can we shake her off?

VERA

Mother's expecting a full report back, no details spared.

They smile like conspirators. Roland sees a theatre up ahead, pulls Vera towards it. Aunt Belle appears round the corner, sees them and follows.

44 INT. THEATRE - MINUTES LATER

44

A show is taking place on stage, the theatre is almost empty. Roland pulls Vera along an empty row of seats, they sit next to one another, and he drapes one arm across the back of her seat. Aunt Belle follows, squeezing along the row past Vera, then stops.

AUNT BELLE

(to Roland)

Move along, dear.

Reluctantly, Roland moves up a place. Aunt Belle sits herself firmly down between them with a smug expression. Vera smiles.

Roland carefully reaches an arm behind Aunt Belle, finds Vera's neck, and caresses it gently. Aunt Belle realises and, with an abrupt push of her shoulders, knocks his arm off.

Vera and Roland suppress their laughter.

45	EXT. LONDON STREET - A LITTLE LATER	45	*
	Roland and Vera hurry together, ahead of Aunt Belle.		*
	ROLAND		*
	I know where we can go!		*
45A	INT. ART GALLERY - MINUTES LATER	45A	*
	Roland and Vera are in a silent gallery, gazing at paintings on the walls - Aunt Belle is nearby. Roland's expression - they still haven't lost her.		*
	But he sees she's before a painting, lost in it. He guides Vera carefully towards an exit, right behind Aunt Belle, but she's oblivious...		*
46	INT. STAIRWELL, ART GALLERY - CONTINUOUS	46	*
	They burst like truants into a secluded stairwell.		*
	ROLAND		*
	I think your Aunt Belle was		*
	dreaming of love!		*
	VERA		*
	Oh she had someone once. (Pause) I		*
	remember her coming to stay and		*
	crying for a whole week. No one		*
	would tell me what had happened,		*
	including her, at first.		*
	Roland smiles. They're both aware they're finally alone.		*
	ROLAND		*
	But you insisted.		*
	Vera grimaces, nods.		*
	ROLAND		*
	Poor Aunt.		*
	VERA		*
	Mother's always complaining I'm		*
	tactless.		*
	ROLAND		*
	No, you're like your name, Vera,		*
	the seeker of truth.		*
	Roland is close to her now, looking at her intensely -		*
	wanting to kiss her.		*
	VERA		*
	I think I'm odd - I've never known		*
	where I fit.		*

Roland takes her by the upper arms, pulls her a little closer to him - \*

ROLAND

Does it need to be a place? \*

He leans in to kiss her, he's just about to - when Aunt Belle appears on the very periphery of their vision. \*

AUNT BELLE

Well! \*

They're both frustrated. Roland keeps looking at Vera, squeezes her arms harder - Vera winces with the pain, but she also wants it - as Aunt Belle hurries towards them - \*

AUNT BELLE

I don't know what to say to the pair of you, really I don't! \*

47 EXT. TRAIN STATION - LATER

47 \*

The three of them are walking inside the station, Aunt Belle between them now. \*

AUNT BELLE

My feet are hurting, we better call it a day. \*

She sees a newspaper stand. \*

AUNT BELLE

A newspaper, and a cup of tea. I'll be back in a minute. \*

She hurries off towards the newspaper stand, which is surrounded by a small crowd. Vera turns to Roland with a smile. \*

VERA

We'll see each other again soon... \*

ON - Aunt Belle reading her paper at the stand, on the billboard, is written: "GERMANY - ULTIMATUM TO WAR!" The people around her are buzzing - mutterings such as: "They've got until morning" "I said it would come to this!" "They're not to be trusted!" \*

She looks across - at Vera and Roland, lost in one another, oblivious. \*

48 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - LATER

48

Vera is sitting opposite Aunt Belle, travelling home in a reverie. Aunt Belle is talking to some other passengers. Gradually, Vera tunes in -

PASSENGER 1

...My boys will be at the head of  
the queue, and it'll be a long one!  
There isn't a lad in the country  
doesn't want to go and thrash that  
bloody Kaiser!

They all nod. Vera picks up a newspaper and starts reading, \*  
her expression suddenly troubled. \*

49

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, MELROSE - NEXT EVENING

49 \*

Vera sits at her desk in her night dress, examining her upper arm, marked with the small bruises from Roland's grip. She carresses them, smiling to herself, gets a pen and paper out to write to him, when there's a knock at the door. \*

Edward comes in. \*

EDWARD

I've been talking to father about  
signing up. \*

Vera is taken aback. \*

VERA

Already...? \*

EDWARD

I'm an officer cadet. This is what  
we trained for. \*

ON Vera - as she realises he's right. \*

EDWARD

Father was his usual calm self,  
said he'd rather put a gun to his  
head than let me go! \*

Vera's mind is whirring. \*

VERA

It's happening so fast. But the  
papers are saying it'll all be over  
by Christmas - \*

EDWARD

Yes, if everyone plays their part!  
There are boys from town who've  
signed up already. How will it look  
if I'm not among them? \*

VERA

I'll talk to him. (Off his look)  
Calmly, I promise! \*

Edward gets to his feet.

EDWARD

I should let you sleep. (Sees the marks on her arm) What happened to you?

VERA

(hastily covering up)  
Nothing.

As Edward heads for the door -

VERA

I don't think Roland will go. He's really not the military type.

Edward looks at her.

EDWARD

Don't go losing your head over him.

VERA

Why not?

A beat - then Vera grabs a cushion and playfully chucks it at him. He grins, ducks out.

50 INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - THE NEXT DAY

50

A furious Mr. Brittain storms into the hallway, Vera following him -

MR. BRITTAINE

No, no, no, no, NO!

He marches into the living room -

51 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

51

Her father is pacing, he turns when he sees her, is about to say something -

VERA

Let me speak!

He concedes.

VERA (CONT'D)

All the papers are saying it'll be short and fast -

MR. BRITTAINE

I know a little more of war than you, young lady, and believe me, it's never short and never fast!

Vera takes a deep breath, contains herself.

VERA

If we believe that from the outset  
 it becomes a self-fulfilling  
 prophecy, doesn't it?! Maybe *this*  
 time, *this* generation, if everyone  
 plays their part, it might just be  
 over quickly like they're saying.  
 He might not even see any fighting!

She looks at her father - he looks haunted.

MR. BRITTAIN

You're so young -

VERA

What's he going to say when  
 everyone around him is signing up  
 and he isn't?

A pause -

VERA (CONT'D)

Let Edward be a man. He won't  
 forgive you if you don't.

Mr Brittain sags, the fight going out of him.

51A EXT. WHITE ROAD/LAKE - DAY

51A

SHOTS of the winding white road...the tranquil lake...

52 INT. VERA'S BEDROOM/ MELROSE - NIGHT (AUTUMN)

52

Several weeks later. Vera, in her night gown, is packing her things for Oxford, when she hears the phone ring. She hurries out...

53 INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

53

...Over to the phone, and picks it up. A crackly line. Mrs. Brittain, in her dressing gown, appears.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Who on earth rings at this time of  
 night?!

VERA

Hello?

ROLAND'S VOICE

Vera?

She can barely hear him.

VERA

Roland? Are you alright?

At a look from Vera her mother makes a token retreat, but she's all ears.

ROLAND'S VOICE

...When do you leave for Oxford?

VERA

(not wanting to be heard)  
Tomorrow morning's train. I change  
at Leicester.

ROLAND'S VOICE

We can travel together, I'll meet  
you there-

The line crackles - and cuts off. Vera tries, but he's gone. She hangs up, smiling to herself. Her mother bustles over.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Why did he want to know that? You  
can't travel alone together!

Vera looks at her, half-pleading, half-defiant.

VERA

Please, mother..?

She waits.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Alright. Don't mention it to your  
Father.

Vera smiles gratefully.

54

INT/EXT. TRAIN, LEICESTER STATION - DAY

54

Vera's train is stopped at Leicester station. She hangs out of a window, looking for Roland among the crowds climbing in and out, some soldiers in khaki visible amongst them.

55

INT. TRAIN, LEICESTER TRAIN STATION - A MINUTE LATER

55

Vera is moving down a crowded train corridor, lined with private compartments. Her eyes search for Roland, straining to find him. Then she sees him, coat on, further down the corridor, looking for her, emerging from a compartment.

\*

She hurries towards him, drinks him in with her eyes. Then she notices -

VERA

Where's your luggage?

The flicker of something in his face - he indicates a compartment, leads her inside.

56

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

56

Roland shuts the door. They're alone.

ROLAND

Sit down, there's something I need to tell you.

VERA

I don't need to sit down, what is it?

ROLAND

I'm not coming to Oxford, Vera.

Her shock -

\*

VERA

You've signed up...

ROLAND

A commission with the Fourth Norfolks, I'm joining them tomorrow.

VERA

Tomorrow!

She sinks down onto a seat under the impact of this news. Roland sits next to her.

VERA

How...? Edward's still waiting, everybody is!

ROLAND

My Uncle Theo's a military man. He pulled some strings.

VERA

Did he push you to it?

ROLAND

No! No I - asked him to.

She looks at him, stricken, betrayed.

ROLAND

Vera...I have to go. How many generations get a chance to be involved in something like this?! A bigger cause, that demands the best of us! How can I let others do my duty for me...?

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Vera's reeling...she sees his excitement.

ROLAND (CONT'D)  
I'll be in Norwich, it's not even  
active service. You wouldn't want  
me not to?

\*  
\*

She shakes her head miserably.

ROLAND (CONT'D)  
There'll be months of training, by  
which point the whole thing could  
be over. Ted and I will probably be  
coming to Oxford with you in the  
new year!

\*

Vera has tears rolling down her cheeks. Roland is upset,  
confused himself - he puts an arm round her.

ROLAND  
Let's not waste our time  
together...

He turns her face to him - they KISS, finally, for the first  
time, a hungry, passionate, long-awaited kiss.

CUT TO:

- The BLUR of TRAIN WHEELS chugging along the tracks -

57 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - LATER

57

Roland and Vera sit holding each other in exhausted silence,  
as, outside the window, a vista of the dreaming spires of  
Oxford comes into view.

VERA  
Isn't it strange, that I'm the one  
going to Oxford without Edward or  
you.

Roland holds her closer...his uncertainty showing...

CUT TO:

The TRAIN wheels churning round...

- As a SPADE DIGS into brown earth - We see a MAN digging a  
trench.

Behind him, other men are digging.

\*

CLOSE ON the man's spade as it uproots a beautiful flower -

\*

As THE TRAIN speeds on -

The man, cigarette in mouth, climbs out of the trench -

He throws his cigarette down, crushes it with his boot, gazes around him. We see what he sees - a tranquil, silent meadow, SLASHED across with trenches -

Like open wounds in the green earth.

58 EXT. QUAD, SOMERVILLE - DAY

58

Vera is walking along a quad, books in her arms, when Miss Lorimer nearly bumps into her.

MISS LORIMER

Ah, Miss Brittain, surprised to be here no doubt?

VERA

Considering I had no tuition...

Miss Lorimer's rudeness always manages to be eccentric rather than spiteful.

MISS LORIMER

Yes, and how it showed. Luckily you also displayed an original mind. Although whether you can bring any discipline to bear on it is quite another matter.

And with that, she walks off. Vera looks after her, lost for words.

59 INT. LIBRARY, OXFORD - DAY

59

Vera is getting some books down from a shelf, she carries them over to the desk where she's working.

VERA'S VOICE

I'm trying my best, Roland. But there's little peace of mind for me anymore. Every time I open a book, it's your face I see.

60 OMMITTED.

60

61 INT. VERA'S ROOM - DAWN (AUTUMN)

61

Vera is scribbling an essay. Through her window, we see an early sun rising over the Oxford spires. Vera stops writing, pulls out a half-written letter to Roland, and adds to it.

VERA'S VOICE

Of course I want to ask you to leave the army and come to Oxford.  
(MORE)

VERA'S VOICE (cont'd)  
 We should be here together! But I  
 can't do that. I won't.

62 EXT. BROAD STREET, OXFORD - DAY

62

Vera is making her way along Broad Street, among students on  
 foot and on bikes - ahead, on the other side of the road, she  
 sees - \*

VERA'S VOICE  
 Victor's been turned down because  
 of his poor eyesight... \*

- EDWARD, in a soldier's uniform. He hasn't seen her yet,  
 he's looking for a way through the traffic - her view of him  
 is blocked by a passing vehicle - \*

VERA'S VOICE (CONT'D)  
 But Edward's joining the Sherwood  
 Foresters soon.

Vera catches another glimpse of him -

Suddenly he's a CHILD of 7, in baggy shorts and a short  
 haircut, beaming at her -

A cart passes - and it's him again, the grown Edward in his  
 uniform. He sees her, smiles and crosses over -

VERA'S VOICE (CONT'D)  
 My heart lurched at the sight of  
 him - my little brother, suddenly  
 so grown up - at the thought of all  
 of you, headed for the unknown. It  
 comforts me at least to know you're  
 both on English soil. \*

Vera and Edward embrace.

63 OMMITTED.

63

64 EXT. QUAD, SOMERVILLE - MORNING

64

Vera emerges from a staircase entrance to see, around the  
 area of the porter's lodge, stacks of metal beds and  
 mattresses piled up, while porters carry more in. One of them  
 says to a colleague - "convalescent ward's in the next quad". \*

Vera turns to see a man in a wheelchair at the college  
 entrance - a war veteran. He's young, barely twenty, with  
 bandaged stumps where his arms once were. He's slumped  
 awkwardly, to one side, and slides a little further down  
 without being able to right himself. Vera feels his  
 humiliation. Their eyes meet briefly. \*

A NURSE comes bustling over, sees his predicament and helps sit him up. Vera watches the nurse's smile, the boy's gratitude...

65 OMMITTED.

65 \*

66 INT. PORTER'S LODGE/POST ROOM - DAY

66

Vera is taking letters out of her pigeon hole. One, a telegram, catches her eye. She quickly tears it open.

ROLAND V.O.

Leave for France Thursday. Charing Cross, twelve o'clock. Please confirm can come. Roland.

Vera looks up, utterly stunned; the news she had been dreading.

67 INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM - DAY

67

Vera stands before Miss Lorimer, who is sitting in a faded armchair, knitting with intent. The hearth is empty. On a side table is a photo of a fresh-faced young man.

\*

MISS LORIMER

We can't let students go gallivanting off to London!

VERA

(fuming)  
It's not a gallivant -

MISS LORIMER

We have to work twice as hard as the men, Miss Brittain, we have to be twice as good! Otherwise what's the point of me fighting all these years to prove we're worthy of degrees?

VERA

It's to say good bye to someone going to the front.

The needles work furiously. Vera notices the photo.

\*

VERA

(risking it)  
You have someone there already perhaps...?

Miss Lorimer throws Vera a cross look.

MISS LORIMER  
My brother.

She holds up the sock, full of mistakes.

MISS LORIMER  
Not where my abilities are best  
expressed. But then that's war for  
you, isn't it. The men go and  
fight, and we stay behind - and  
knit. \*

VERA  
How many pairs of socks will it  
take...? \*

They share a smile.

MISS LORIMER  
You'll be back the same day?

VERA  
Yes.

MISS LORIMER  
And you'll have a chaperone.

VERA  
Yes.

Miss Lorimer nods her consent.

VERA  
Thank you!

Vera strides down a bustling platform towards Roland, standing waiting for her. He looks pale and weak, not his usual self. Behind him is a poster of a gorilla holding a fainting maid in one arm, a club in the other. It reads "Enlist Now! Destroy this Mad Brute!"

The platform is bustling with soldiers and their families and friends. A certain cheerful British repression prevails - no one wants to make a fuss.

Vera runs up to him, wanting to hug him. But she stops short. They look at one another.

VERA  
(eyes burning)  
How long do we have?

ROLAND  
About an hour.

Vera's face - so little time.

VERA

You told me you weren't going to France yet!

ROLAND

Vera -

VERA

(realising)

You got a transfer!

ROLAND

(nodding)

The seventh Worcesters.

VERA

You're so eager to face death, then, are you?!

ROLAND

No -

VERA

Yes you are, you must be!

ROLAND

Please...

She sees his face - suddenly vulnerable, hot with fever. She feels his forehead, as Aunt Belle comes bustling up.

VERA

You're sick, you've got a fever!

I can't even be angry with you now!

Roland can't help a weak smile.

AUNT BELLE

(reaching them)

Oh, doesn't he look handsome in that uniform!

Roland and Vera sit at a table together, holding hands underneath it as Aunt Belle bustles round them. She gets some aspirin from her handbag, gives them to Roland.

AUNT BELLE

Take these, dear, they'll bring the fever down.

ROLAND

Thank you.

Roland gets up to fetch the tea from the counter, but Aunt Belle pushes him back down.

AUNT BELLE  
Don't you move, I'll get it.

She bustles off.

VERA  
(immediately)  
I'm sorry! I didn't mean to be  
harsh.

ROLAND  
I've let you down.

VERA  
No!

ROLAND  
Now it's here I have a dust and  
ashes feeling about it.

They gaze at one another, too choked to speak. Aunt Belle, returning to the table, sees them - her face shows her kindness and sympathy. She puts the tea things down, starts to serve the tea.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

AUNT BELLE  
Influenza's ripping through the  
troops, you know, I read about it  
in the paper. Still, you'll be  
right as rain in no time, and  
don't you worry about Vera,  
she'll be taken good care of,  
won't you dear?

A pause, filled with aching silence. Aunt Belle looks at them both - sighs.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

AUNT BELLE  
(soft)  
I know. It's too deep for words.

Roland, Vera and Aunt Belle emerge from a subway, up onto a platform.

ROLAND  
Over there.

Roland indicates a train - puffing out steam like a sinister, waiting beast.

71 INT. CORRIDOR/TRAIN COMPARTMENT, CHARING CROSS - A LITTLE 71 \*

LATER

Vera and Roland are hustled into an empty compartment by Aunt Belle. An older couple try to enter the compartment too, but Aunt Belle stops them - determined to give the lovers their privacy.

AUNT BELLE

I'm sorry, this one's taken!

As the older couple move off, Aunt Belle throws Vera and Roland a sympathetic look and shuts the compartment door, leaving them alone together.

Roland moves over to her, puts his arms around her and kisses her - passionate, desperate. They hold onto one another.

ROLAND

I am coming back.

A whistle blows, there's a bustle in the corridor, voices shout, as people hurry to get off the train. They get to their feet; suddenly, time has run out.

VERA

Already!

72 INT. CORRIDOR/TRAIN DOOR - CONTINUOUS 72

Roland and Vera are caught in a wave of pushing, shoving bodies headed for the train door. Around them, couples kiss goodbye, relatives cling to their loved ones, the buttoned-up mood has transformed into near-hysteria. As they reach the door, Vera is suddenly tumbled outside by the crowd. She pushes and shoves to get back in, but the door is slammed shut. Aunt Belle is nearby in the heaving crowd.

Roland forces the window open, leans out. She grabs his hand, they hold on tight.

With a great groan, the heavy train starts to move, the women thronging around Vera fall away, but she keeps holding onto Roland, refusing to let him go...

VERA

Roland!

ROLAND

Write!

She runs with the train -

Their fingers pull apart - she lets go -

And she's left there - watching Roland, every fibre of her being straining towards him - there's a great hiss of steam, a howling hoot - \*

- and the train disappears from view. \*

Aunt Belle finds her through the crowd - \*

AUNT BELLE  
Poor child!

And we LIFT UP, to take in the length of the platform and its sudden absence of men - only women are dotted along it, frozen like statues in their emotion; wives, sisters, fiancees, mothers... \*

...As a strange, deathly silence falls over them all.

73 EXT. LANE, OXFORD - EVENING

73 \*

Later that day. A pale, shaken Vera is walking down an Oxford lane, back towards her college, when she hears a voice behind her. \*

VICTOR  
Vera! \*

She turns to see - \*

VERA  
Victor... \*

He's striding towards her, concern on his kind face. \*

VICTOR  
Roland asked me to come. He thought  
you'd need a friendly face. \*

Vera stops, nods mutely, suddenly feeling her emotions, her exhaustion. Victor gestures to a nearby bench, they sit together. \*

VERA  
What a mess... \*

Victor sighs, nods in agreement. \*

VERA (CONT'D)  
I can't stay here, not now. There's  
a call for volunteer nurses, I have  
to do something too! \*

Victor is struggling to find the right thing to say. \*

VICTOR

Roland won't die young, Vera. He  
was born to make his mark on the  
world.

Vera's face - eager to believe.

VERA

I've always thought so!

VICTOR

I'm sure of it.

She smiles - after a moment -

VERA CONT.

Thank you for being here. (A beat)  
I'm sorry if you were hurt Victor -

VICTOR

(interrupting)

No, please, it's fine.

VERA

But I feel I -

VICTOR

There's no need. In fact I've - met  
a girl.

VERA

That's wonderful, I'm happy for  
you! What's her name?

VICTOR

Molly. She's keen.

VERA

And she has you here with her.  
She's a luckier girl than I am,  
then.

She puts her hand on his, squeezes it with a smile.

A new day. Vera emerges from the porter's lodge to see a boy of about 13 riding a red bicycle. He sees her, cycles over, scrabbles inside his satchel and pulls out a telegram.

BOY ON BICYCLE

Telegram, from the War Office.

Vera takes it, reads the name.

VERA  
(dismay)  
Miss Lorimer...

She holds it out to him, but he resists taking it back.

BOY ON BICYCLE  
Would you, Miss...?

Vera hesitates, looks at the telegram in her hand.

BOY ON BICYCLE  
Thanks Miss! I hate it when they  
cry!

And with that, he turns and cycles off.

75 EXT. QUAD, ORIEL - A LITTLE LATER

75

Vera is waiting as Miss Lorimer emerges from a doorway, behind a few chattering students.

She sees Vera looking at her, and hesitates, sensing something. Vera steps over and hands her the envelope. Miss Lorimer tears it open - reads quickly, and staggers.

Vera supports her arm, and helps her to the curved dip in a stone arch. Miss Lorimer sits, stiff, stricken.

CLOSE ON Vera's face....

76 EXT. BROAD STREET, OXFORD - DAY (AUTUMN)

76

Vera, on her way to a lecture, passes a news stand. A chalked headline catches her eye: "Heavy Casualties in Neuve Chapelle." Small groups of women are already congregated, anxiously reading newspapers. Vera buys one.

She opens the paper, inside is a column of "Fallen in Combat". Vera looks down the column. It continues over the page. She turns over; sees an entire double spread, with column after column of men's names in tiny print. Reeling, she sits on a vacant bench, and turns over - another double spread. Hundreds of them - all dead.

CUT TO:

77 IN VERA'S MIND - SHE SEES -

77

Roland, in pouring rain, hunkered down in a muddy trench with other men, under heavy shell fire - he turns and looks straight at her - \*

A whistle goes, he turns to mount the trench - \*

\*  
\*  
\*

77A OMMITTED.

77A \*

78 INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM - DAY

78 \*

Vera is standing before Miss Lorimer.

MISS LORIMER

I have to tell you, Miss Brittain,  
 I'm stunned. Anyone can nurse. This  
 crisis needs people who can step  
 back and reflect!

\*

VERA

I can't stay here buried in books,  
 it's an absurd thing to do!

Miss Lorimer feels this keenly.

MISS LORIMER

You don't own the truth about how  
 to get through this! Your opinion  
 is just that - an opinion. You'd do  
 well to remember it.

\*

Vera feels chastened.

VERA

I'm sorry...I didn't mean...

Miss Lorimer composes herself.

MISS LORIMER

Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised.  
 But it's a hard-won place you're  
 giving up.

\*

\*

Vera looks at her.

VERA

(sincere)

I know.

Miss Lorimer nods - she turns away, Vera assumes she's dismissed and heads for the door.

MISS LORIMER

Miss Brittain! Be careful.

\*

A beat - Vera nods her thanks.

79 INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL HOSPITAL - DAY (AUTUMN) 79

Vera, dressed in the floor-length uniform of the VAD nurse, walks down a long, draughty corridor in the 1st London General, a Victorian construct in Camberwell. Her footsteps clip-clop on the floor.

\*

She cuts a resolute figure, but it's an image of isolation - of a person dwarfed by bigger events.

CUT TO:

80

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

80

Vera stands in a row of freshly scrubbed, eager VADs, as a stern career Sister in her 60's, JONES, inspects them.

SISTER JONES V.O.

I know what visions have brought you here, and I'm glad they carried you to our door, but that's where you leave them. You're not Angels of Mercy swooping down to mop the brows of grateful men; you're workers! And you'll do whatever you're asked, no matter how dirty, no matter how dull. Do I make myself clear?

VADS TOGETHER

Yes Sister.

Only Vera does not answer. Sister Jones notices, walks over and takes her hands. Smooth, white, spotless - a small sneer.

SISTER JONES

Airs and graces will not be tolerated. Anyone who finds that hard to stomach had better leave now.

Vera looks straight back at her.

81

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL LODGINGS - BEFORE DAWN

81

An alarm clock on a bedside unit rings. 5.45 am. Vera, asleep in a narrow bed in a bare, cold room with five other women, struggles to get up.

SISTER JONES V.O.

Your duties commence at 7 a.m sharp. You do not sit down in the wards, ever. You take instruction from the professionals who've been doing this job for years before you came along.

82

INT. BUS, CAMBERWELL - EARLY MORNING

82

Vera boards a crowded bus, as rain beats at the windows outside.

She pushes her way through the weary commuters, and manages to find a seat for herself at the back. She gazes out through the rain at the dreary grey street outside.

83 INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - LATER

83 \*

Sister Jones, a surgeon and two nurses are conferring together as Vera and fellow VADs bustle in. Sister Jones rounds on them.

\*

SISTER JONES  
Who sterilised the instruments  
today?

Behind her sits a tray of silver surgical instruments.

VERA  
I did, Sister.

SISTER JONES  
What do you think this is, a  
jolly picnic? A day out at the  
races perhaps?!

We see that Vera has arranged the instruments in pairs, like cutlery. A nurse, Miss Scott, titters. Her humiliation is clear to all.

\*

SISTER JONES (CONT'D)  
Or intensive surgical procedure!  
Why aren't there five sets?

VERA  
I didn't realise -

SISTER JONES  
Don't make excuses, get to it!

Vera scuttles into a small, adjacent annexe.

SISTER JONES  
(disgusted, to Scott)  
Help her, will you. (Calling  
after Vera) We're waiting!

\*

84 INT. ANNEXE - CONTINUOUS

84

Vera is hurriedly gathering more instruments to sterilise as Nurse Scott enters - in her flustered state, she drops some on the floor. Nurse Scott bends and picks them up, her expression milking every second of it.

\*

\*

85 INT. 1ST LONDON GENERAL -

85

MONTAGE of Vera -

1) WARD. As she correctly arranges the instruments under Ward Sister Jones's eagle eye -

VERA'S VOICE

The nurses here know I've come  
from Oxford, Roland, and they're  
determined to break me.

2) CORRIDOR. She carries a tray of sputum cups out of a ward -

3) OMMITTED.

VERA'S VOICE

Little do they know, the harder  
they push, the more grateful I  
am.

4) ANNEXE. She stands in a production line of three VADs, as they pass medical trays along, quickly assembling them.

VERA'S VOICE

Anything to stop me thinking, and  
fill the hours between news of  
you.

END MONTAGE.

86

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

86

Vera is sitting on her thin mattress, pulling socks off her damp feet. They're swollen and red with painful chill blains. BETTY, a pale, middle-class Northerner in the bed next to her, is gazing mournfully at a photo of a soldier.

BETTY

(tearful)

Do you have a photo of yours?

VERA

No.

Betty kisses the photo.

BETTY

Personally I couldn't get through  
the day without seeing his face.  
I don't sleep at night for worry,  
you know.

VERA

(dry)

Really.

BETTY

I'm too sensitive. I wish I was  
more like you!

She flings herself across her bed. Vera sighs to herself.

87

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

87

Vera lies in bed, wide awake, while next to her, Betty snores loudly in her sleep.

VERA'S VOICE

I hate it sometimes, of course I do. But then I think of you, out there in the danger, darkness and cold - precious life, a thousand times more tired than I!

She gets a newspaper out from under her bed and reads an article, frowning to herself. Then she gets up and studies a map of France on her wall. Drawing pins mark the front line of battle. Carefully, she repositions a few of them, as Roland's voice rises.

ROLAND'S VOICE

(a letter)

"One of my men has just been killed - the first. I've been taking the things out of his pockets and tying them in his handkerchief, to be sent back somewhere, to someone who will see in them more than a torn letter, a pencil and a piece of shell..."

88

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - LATER

88

Vera hurriedly carries a basin of hot soapy water across the ward to a curtained-off bed. The other beds in the ward are dotted with neatly bandaged men, but it's not full.

Vera enters through the curtains to find Nurse Scott and another nurse, Miss Milton, working with urgency on an unconscious man; one is cutting away his ragged, filthy uniform, the other is completing the dressing to a head wound. We should suddenly feel the mud and stench of the trenches.

\*

NURSE MILTON

Fancy sending him over in this state.

\*

NURSE SCOTT

We're seeing more and more of it.

\*

Vera watches bits of blood-soaked khaki cloth fall to the floor. She puts the basin down, arranges some towels. When she turns round again, the man is suddenly naked; lying there Christ-like, broken, strangely beautiful.

Nurse Scott sees her. \*

NURSE SCOTT  
Since you're so eager, Brittain,  
you sponge him down.

The two nurses leave. Vera hesitates, slightly awe-struck by her task. She squeezes a wet sponge out, and, tentatively, starts to wash the blood and mud from his chest. His eyelids flutter.

WOUNDED SOLDIER  
(hoarse)  
Vera...

Startled, Vera leans in close.

VERA  
What did you say?

He opens his eyes wider now, looks at her...

WOUNDED SOLDIER  
Sister...

Vera realises her mistake - continues sponging him, smiling.

VERA'S VOICE  
I felt so close to you today,  
Roland. As though we were touching.

89 OMMITTED.

89

90 INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY (AUTUMN/WINTER) 90

A tired Vera hurries along a corridor, rounds the corner to see - up ahead, Edward, with a friend, GEOFFREY, a willowy young man of delicate features.

She reaches Edward and hugs him close. He looks at her, concerned.

EDWARD  
You look exhausted, what're they  
doing to you here?

VERA  
I'm alright.

Edward turns to make introductions.

EDWARD  
Vera, Geoffrey Thurlow. A friend  
from the battalion.

VERA  
 (anxious)  
 You're not leaving for France?

EDWARD  
 Not yet.

VERA  
 (relieved, to Geoffrey)  
 I'm sorry, forgive me...

She shakes Geoffrey's hand. He's shy, can't make eye contact with her.

GEOFFREY  
 No, the relief is all mine.

Vera smiles.

VERA  
 A peace-loving soldier? \*

GEOFFREY  
 Or a cowardly one perhaps. \*

EDWARD  
 Nonsense. Geoffrey was about to  
 train as a priest, that takes  
 courage. \*

They both smile. \*

GEOFFREY  
 Saved by the War, imagine that.

He glances at Edward, a shy, intense look. \*

EDWARD  
 (to Vera)  
 So, shall we go?

VERA  
 Where?

EDWARD  
 Didn't he write and tell you?  
 Roland's home on leave!

VERA'S FACE -

\*

MRS. LEIGHTON \*

He walked in the door yesterday and  
fell asleep for twenty hours  
straight. I haven't been able to  
get much out of him. \*

She gestures beyond the garden, across an adjacent bracken  
field looking out to sea, where Roland is sitting alone. \*

91A EXT. BRACKEN FIELD, CLIFF, LOWESTOFT - A LITTLE LATER 91A \*

Vera approaches Roland. He hears her, and turns. He's still  
in his dusty officer's uniform, and he looks different -  
worn, somehow, his expression full of anxiety, and remote. \*

ROLAND \*

(as soon as he sees her)  
I have to go back in three days. \*

Vera is shocked - but sits next to him. \*

VERA

Let's not think about that.

Roland looks at her almost as though at a stranger - \*

Then he sees Edward and Victor approaching. He leaps to his  
feet, suddenly more relaxed. \*

ROLAND

Ted! Vic!

He goes over to them, they all shake hands. Vera hears  
Edward introducing Geoffrey to him. She's confused - this  
is not what she expected.

92 OMMITTED. 92 \*

93 EXT. BEACH - LATER 93 \*

Roland is preparing to throw his army knife at an old  
wooden post in the sand, as the others watch. He takes aim,  
and throws - bulls eye. The men show their appreciation.  
Roland goes and pulls the knife out, a swagger to him.

As he comes back -

ROLAND

The worst is when you have to go  
out and repair the wire. Boot  
polish on the face, crawling on  
your belly in the mud and rain.

He sits on a dune, the others do the same.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

I was out one night with an officer called Harrison. We were so close to the Germans we could hear them whispering in their trench. Hast du feuer?

The others chuckle, hanging off his every word.

VICTOR

Were you scared?

ROLAND

You don't think about it. He's a good man, Harrison. I invited him to stay, but he's not interested in home leave. Says it makes a man soft.

VERA

God forbid any of you should be soft!

VICTOR

If I could get out there I don't think I'd want to come back.

VERA

(sharp)

You don't know the first thing about it!

Edward, sensing the mood, claps Victor on the back, indicates to Geoffrey.

EDWARD

Come on, let's get some tea.

Vera is left there with Roland, a tense mood between them. After a moment, Roland decides to head after the others.

VERA

Roland!

He turns to her.

ROLAND

That was unnecessary.

VERA

Talk to me! Otherwise how can I understand?!

ROLAND

(hard)

Perhaps you can't.

A pause.

\*

VERA

I sent you some poems a while ago,  
 I don't know if you got them.

\*  
\*  
\*

ROLAND

I don't think so.

\*  
\*

VERA

Have you written any yourself?

\*  
\*

Roland kind of snorts with derision at this idea.

\*

ROLAND

Poems?! Please....

\*  
\*

He sees her stricken expression -

\*

ROLAND

For God's sake!

He turns and strides away. Vera follows him, her skirts catching round her ankles. He moves faster, as though desperate to escape her.

VERA

ROLAND!

She catches up with him, roughly GRABS his arm. He SHAKES her off so hard, she stumbles and falls. He looks stricken, helps her to her feet.

ROLAND

I'm sorry - I'm sorry -

She grabs his hands.

VERA

This isn't the real you! This -!

She puts his hand to her cheek, then kisses it, then puts it to her waist, almost forcing him to hold her -

VERA

*This is real! Feel it! Remember, Roland! You and me together - now - here - this moment!*

He looks at her, raw, his armour cracking -

VERA (CONT'D)

The most precious part of you -  
 don't let war destroy it!

ROLAND

It might be gone already -

VERA

No! It's not! I promise you!

He PULLS her to him, in a sudden, desperate hug - buries his face in her shoulder. Vera hugs him back, holding him tight.

94

EXT. ABOVE THE BEACH - A LITTLE LATER

94

\*

Roland and Vera are sitting arm in arm. Gulls keen overhead. He strokes a wisp of hair from her face; the mood is quiet.

\*

\*

\*

ROLAND

Harrison's brother came back from leave engaged to his fiancee. Within ten minutes he'd put his head above the parapet and got his brains blown out. I was next to him when it happened.

She strokes his hair, his face.

VERA

We don't need to get married, or engaged!

Roland looks at her for a beat -

ROLAND

Perhaps we should.

\*

VERA

It's not what either of us wanted -

\*

ROLAND

Imagine it, though. You, in a beautiful dress. A sunny day, an old church. All the people we love. Champagne.

VERA

(gentle smile)

Cake.

\*

He smiles - haunted.

\*

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Does it get any better than cake?

\*

A beat -

\*

ROLAND (CONT'D)

Sometimes, over there, when I'm thinking of you - I imagine you pregnant.

\*

\*

\*

\*

VERA

(the sudden emotion of a realisation)

I want to have your child.

\*

\*

\*

\*

ROLAND

Marry me Vera.

VERA

Yes. Alright!

ROLAND

Next time I'm home. It'll give me  
something to fix on.

He hugs her to him, tight, his eyes burning.

ROLAND

I'm going to live.

A WIDE SHOT of Vera and Roland, two small beings clinging  
to one another.

95 EXT. BEACH, Lowestoft - DAY

95

Vera and Roland are flying a kite along the beach together,  
running with it, as it flutters up and down in the breeze,  
laughing.Vera stops and watches him for a moment - the look of  
almost childlike concentration on his face. Carefree, just  
for an instant.

VERA'S VOICE

Our generation will never be new  
again, or truly young.

96 OMMITTED.

96

97 INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

97

Vera, back in her VAD uniform, places a photo of Roland on  
her bedside, gazes at it.

VERA'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Our youth has been stolen from us.  
As for peace of mind, who knows  
when it will return...If it ever  
does.

98 INT. CHARING CROSS RAILWAY STATION - DAY

98

Vera is hugging goodbye to a uniformed Edward, next to the  
train he's about to board for France. The platform is  
swarming with men in khaki and family members. Geoffrey is  
saying farewell to Mr. And Mrs. Brittain.Edward pulls some sheafs of paper from his coat, and hands  
them to her with a smile.

\*

EDWARD

My music. Keep it for me, I'll  
finish it when I come home.

Vera nods, takes it.

Edward steps over to his father, shakes his hand. Then Mr. Brittain pulls him in for a stiff embrace.

Vera overhears two company commanders walking past -

COMMANDING OFFICER

I wish they wouldn't come, it  
makes it so much harder for the  
men.

The train whistle blows. Geoffrey and Edward bound onto the train with a final, cheerful wave. Vera and her parents watch, stricken.

99

INT. PLATFORM, CHARING CROSS STATION - A LITTLE LATER

99

Vera and her mother are about to enter the station cafe when Mrs. Brittain looks around for her husband. She sees him further along the platform, his back to them, seemingly studying a timetable.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Go and tell your father to hurry  
up, dear, will you.

Vera walks over towards her father, who is oddly immobile.

VERA

(approaching)

Daddy?

She reaches him, realises he's battling to hold down his emotions. She puts a hand on his shoulder.

VERA

Oh Daddy.

His shoulders start to shake - small, silent judders. She gets out a handkerchief, hands it to him, he puts it over his face.

100

INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - EARLY MORNING

100

Ward Sister Jones is holding the door open as nurses push trolleys piled high with laundered bed linen through. The mood is urgent.

SISTER JONES

Move it! Move it!

Vera, Betty and a few other girls come rushing along the corridor, making hasty adjustments to their uniforms - they've obviously been hauled out of bed.

SISTER JONES  
Two hundred extra beds by  
lunchtime! Hurry now!

101 INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - LATER

101

A white sheet flutters up - and down onto a military bed. Vera and Betty tuck the sheet in, as around them, other nurses make up beds, and orderlies busily erect new ones.

They finish, and stand back - as we PULL OUT to realise they're in the long hospital corridor, now filled wall to wall with newly prepared beds, with barely an inch between them.

BETTY  
What now?

VERA  
We wait.

102 EXT. STREET, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - LATER

102

Vera and Betty emerge from the hospital to see a gaggle of nurses outside, standing still and listening. They join them.

VERA  
What is it-?

One of the other nurses holds her hand up for quiet. They listen.

A distant, muffled BOOM resonates. Vera looks down at her sensible lace-up shoes. The pavement beneath her feet is shuddering.

Betty looks at her in disbelief.

BETTY  
It can't be...

Another boom resonates, the pavement shakes.

VERA  
It's France.

103

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

103

Vera and Betty balance medical trays as they squeeze their way between the tightly-packed beds, which are now crammed full of groaning, wounded men. Blaring, jaunty gramophone music goes some way to drowning the cries.

104

INT. ANNEXE - LATER

104

Vera is arranging surgical instruments on trays at one end of the annexe.

SISTER JONES

Brittain!

Vera whips round. The Ward Sister's beady eye sweeps across the trays - then an exhausted Vera.

SISTER JONES

Good work, Nurse. Make sure you get your rest.

Vera nods, pleased - some praise, at last.

105

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

105

Vera is walking along a street in the city of London, past a wall covered in propaganda posters.

VERA'S VOICE

There's news of Geoffrey, Roland.  
Edward's asked me to go and see him.

One poster, repeated over and over, shows a man sitting in an armchair with a little boy on his lap, and the caption: "Daddy, what did YOU do in the War?"

106

INT. FISHMONGER HALL - LATER

106

Vera is sitting next to Geoffrey, in a cramped little space partitioned off from other invalids in the huge, vaulted hall.

Geoffrey has changed, and it's shocking. He's seated in a chair, next to a bed, a blanket over his knees. His face is grey, his expression haunted, and he's shaking.

GEOFFREY

It's the way the men watch your every move, as though you have the answers, as though you have a clue...

He stops, breathless, almost choking.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

\*

VERA  
(soft)  
It's alright.

GEOFFREY  
When we went over the top...I held  
it together for them.

VERA  
You're very brave.

She tries to take his hand but he pulls it away, unable to  
bear human contact.

GEOFFREY  
I need to get back there.

This baffles Vera.

VERA  
...Why?

GEOFFREY  
The fear of going's the worst.  
(Pause) Nothing will be better  
until it's over.

107

INT. CORRIDOR, FISHMONGER HALL - ANOTHER DAY

107

Vera is helping Geoffrey to walk - he has the strange,  
flailing walk of the shell-shocked; a toddler's stagger in  
the body of an old man.

VERA'S VOICE  
He was at the front just eleven  
days. It's taken three months for  
him to even start to walk again.

108

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - EVENING

108

Vera is on night duty in the dark, quiet ward. Her duties  
finished, she sits down and eagerly pulls out a letter from  
Roland. She starts to read.

ROLAND'S VOICE  
Good news. My Christmas leave has  
been approved. I'll be home to  
make you my wife!

Vera is delighted.

ROLAND'S VOICE (CONT'D)  
And I have a surprise, something  
I think will please you.

VERA  
(whisper to herself)  
What?

ROLAND'S VOICE  
You'll see when we meet. I've  
been posted to company  
headquarters, three miles behind  
lines. I'll be here until my  
leave. I'm safe, Vera.

VERA  
Safe...

109 INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - EVENING (WINTER)

109 \*

Vera and other nurses move between beds of sleeping men,  
hanging up Christmas decorations - tinsel and some holly.

As she's next to one bed - the occupant, Billy, calls out. \*

BILLY  
Nurse!

Vera turns to look at the man, his expression warm.

BILLY  
You're walking on air, Nurse!

Vera smiles.

BILLY  
Go on, spill the beans!

Vera hesitates, then decides to tell him.

VERA  
I'm going to Brighton in the  
morning to meet my fiance, we're  
getting married.

BILLY  
Over there, is he, fighting the  
Boch?

She nods.

BILLY  
Now you're a reason for a man to  
get through, Miss, if you don't  
mind my saying.

She tucks him up with a smile.

VERA  
Settle down and get some sleep.

110 INT. HOTEL LOBBY, THE GRAND, BRIGHTON - DAY (BOXING DAY 110  
1915, WINTER)

An excited Vera is fixing a hat on, in a large gilt mirror in a corner of the elegant, high-ceilinged lobby. Her mother is with her, helping. Around them, we get a sense of the coming and going of guests, and smart, uniformed staff. Muffled, discreet elegance. A phone is ringing somewhere.

VERA  
How do I look?

MRS. BRITTAINE  
(adjusting her)  
Positively bridal. Haven't you  
heard from him yet?

VERA  
He only got home last night,  
Mother.

She glances at a clock.

VERA (CONT'D)  
Half an hour to go.

A HOTEL CLERK in black comes over.

HOTEL CLERK  
Miss Vera Brittain?

VERA  
Yes.

HOTEL CLERK  
A telephone call for you, Miss.

VERA  
(surprised)  
That must be him! I hope he's not  
going to be late.

She follows the clerk over to a desk, where apricot pink flowers sit a blue glass vase. Her mother watches, with a trace of anxiety.

ON Vera's hand as, in slight slow motion, she reaches for the receiver. She lifts it to her ear.

VERA  
Hello?

The line is fuzzy, but no one replies the other end.

VERA  
...Roland?

She hears a sob - someone is crying. Anxiety floods her.

VERA

...What?

MRS. LEIGHTON'S VOICE

(choking sobs)

Vera...Oh God Vera...Oh God...

Vera's blood starts to turn to ice. All other sound cuts out - just the throbbing pulse of her heart.

Around her, the lobby FREEZES - people stopped in their tracks, the hotel clerk, her Mother -

- The world at a standstill.

MRS. LEIGHTON'S VOICE

(choking sobs)

He's dead...Roland's dead.

Vera's EYES - staring at a silent, frozen world. A breeze tinkles the ceiling chandelier - then ruffles the flowers in the blue vase, their colour so dazzling bright, it hurts the eyes.

111 OMMITTED.

111

112pt1 OMMITTED.

112pt1 \*

112pt2 EXT. BEACH, BRIGHTON - DAY

112pt2

Gulls, flying against a grey sky, keening angrily.

112pt3 Vera, standing on the beach, gazing stunned and numb 112pt3  
into the waves as they crash and suck at the shingle...

112pt4 A small crab scuttles across her shoe, Vera barely 112pt4  
noticing - \*

CUT TO:

112pt5 HOTEL BEDROOM - A numb, blank Vera sits in an armchair, 112pt5  
anxiously watched by her parents, a cup of coffee in front \*  
of her. There's still no sound.

She tries to pick up the delicate porcelain cup, but her \*  
hand shakes so much, it's impossible. The cup chinks loudly  
against its saucer. Her parents exchange a worried glance. \*

CUT TO:

112pt6 OMMITTED.

112pt6

113 INT. SITTING ROOM, LEIGHTON HOUSE, LOWESTOFT - DAY(WINTER)113

Vera sits, straight and still, on a couch. Mrs. Leighton is nearby, red-eyed, lost in her own world. Roland's younger sister Clare, 15, is there. So is Victor, now in uniform. Grief isolates them all.

Mr. Leighton stands before them, reading from a letter.

MR. LEIGHTON

Letter here from an officer in his company. (Reading)...died of wounds at Louvencourt clearing station.

VERA

What was he doing at the front?

Mr. Leighton looks at her blankly - in shock.

MRS. LEIGHTON

Why was he in a trench?

Mr. Leighton scans the letter.

MR. LEIGHTON

Suddenly sent there by all accounts, for a big push.

VICTOR

There was nothing in the papers.

MR. LEIGHTON

Never happened. False alarm. He was out mending wire. (Scanning the letter) Shot by a sniper at 2 am while bravely carrying out duties. Taken straight to Louvencourt, died late afternoon...noble and painless death.

VERA

That's a long time after he was shot! What happened?

Mrs. Leighton, agitated, gets up; none of them want to think about this.

MR. LEIGHTON

Painless...I suppose the man would know.

Mrs. Leighton goes over to a record collection, pulls out a gramophone record.

\*  
\*

MRS. LEIGHTON

He loved this piece....

\*

She turns away, close to tears. Vera feels someone taking her hand - looks down. It's Clare, smiling at her through tears, reaching out. Vera gives her hand a quick squeeze, but she can't respond to the emotion... \*

114 EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

114 \*

Vera is standing there, in a bleak wind, as Victor comes out and joins her. There's a light dusting of snow on the ground. After a moment -

VICTOR  
I'm off to France in a few days.

VERA  
Oh Victor...

VICTOR  
(trying to keep it  
light)  
Yes, funny enough the eyesight  
doesn't seem to be such a problem  
anymore.

VERA  
Will you see Molly before you go?

Victor quickly nods....He struggles to find the words -

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
He always told us to seize the  
moment, Vera, remember? He was so  
good at that...living to the  
full.

Vera manages a smile - nods.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
A painless and noble death...It's  
important to hold onto.

VERA  
(detached)  
He had nearly a whole day after  
he was shot. Why was there no  
message for us?

Victor doesn't know what to say.

VERA (CONT'D)  
I have to find out what happened.  
Someone must have been there with  
him.

Victor looks at her, eyes brimming with sadness.

115      INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - DAY (WINTER)      115      \*  
 Vera sits at a small desk, surrounded by various letters,  
 intently writing a fresh one.

116      INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY      116      \*  
 Vera is at a window, reading a letter.

VERA  
 (under her breath)  
 Thank you for your  
 letter...unable to help...

Frustrated, she screws it up into a ball. Then notices  
 Betty and a group of VADs. They're looking at her,  
 obviously wanting to say something. Vera turns impatiently  
 away - she has no interest in hearing it -

VAD 1  
 Vera -

Vera turns. Her closed expression is not encouraging.

VAD 2  
 We're sorry for your loss.

VAD 1  
 He's in a better place now.

VERA  
 (sharp)  
 I doubt he'd agree with that.

VAD 3  
 It will get better.

BETTY  
 Time heals all wounds.

VERA  
 I have no desire whatsoever to be  
 healed!

She pushes through them, and walks away. The women look  
 miserably at each other.

117      INT. ANNEXE, CONVALESCENT HOME, LONDON - DAY      117      \*  
 Vera, holding a letter, walks through an annexe in a  
 convalescent home.

118

INT. CONVALESCENT SUN ROOM, LONDON - CONTINUOUS

118 \*

She enters a large, light-drenched sun room dotted with recovering soldiers. She enquires of one of them, he points to a young man in convalescent blues - GEORGE - at the far end, one arm in a sling. As Vera approaches, she takes in a tall, slim young man with an attractive face - nothing much of the soldier about him. A Nurse is helping him to his feet.

VERA

Excuse me I'm Vera Brittain,  
fiancee to Roland Leighton -

George realises who she is - his expression closes, with gentle weariness.

CONVALESCENT NURSE

The officer's not receiving  
visitors today.

GEORGE

(a gesture to the nurse)  
I did write to you, Miss Brittain-

VERA

Yes I thank you for that, and I'm  
sorry for the solicitations, it's  
just -

GEORGE

(interrupting, gentle)  
There's really nothing more I can  
say.

VERA

But you - you did see Roland at  
the clearing station that day -

George starts limping painfully away, propped up by the nurse, who tut-tuts disapprovingly at Vera.

GEORGE

Comfort yourself that it was a  
quick and painless end.

VERA

Everyone keeps telling me that,  
but Roland lived for hours after  
he was shot!

George didn't know she knew this.

GEORGE

(closing it down)  
I'm sorry for your loss.

He keeps walking. Vera hesitates - then pursues him.

VERA

I understand! You're afraid I'll make a scene, start throwing myself around like some hysterical. And why should you, after all you've been through, be the messenger of some terrible end to a family you've never met?

He turns to look at her - she sees the hesitation on his face.

VERA (CONT'D)

I need to know the truth. It's the only thing left I can do for him.

A beat. George gestures to the nurse, who leaves them. Vera waits.

GEORGE

Would you like to sit down?

VERA

I'm fine.

George clears his throat. This is difficult.

GEORGE

It was a messy wound, low down in the abdomen. They operated, they did their best. I was in the bed next to him. He didn't stand a chance.

\*  
\*

Vera looks straight at him the whole time.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

He came round for a few hours.

VERA

Did he say anything? Was there a message?

GEORGE

(gentle with her)

The pain was too great, Miss Brittain. It made anything else impossible.

Vera remains steady.

VERA

I see. Yes, that would explain it.  
(Pause) He - suffered a great deal?

George just looks at her - then nods.

Vera closes her eyes for a brief moment, struggling to deal with this.

GEORGE

They're short of everything in the clearing stations, it's chaos, not enough medics for the number of wounded. They were waiting for morphine stocks.

VERA

Did some arrive?

GEORGE

He got a dose near the end.

Vera's relieved to hear this.

VERA

Were there - any words? Anything?

George is silent.

VERA

Please...

GEORGE

He said - Lying on this hillside for six days has made me very stiff.

Vera looks at him - then down, defeated by this.

GEORGE

I'm sorry. None of it makes any sense.

Vera holds out a hand.

VERA

You're very kind. I won't forget it.

George takes her hand, presses it between his; suddenly drawn to that strength and resolve of hers.

Vera turns and walks away. He watches her go.

119

OMMITTED.

119

120

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

120

Vera sits in her small room, writing a letter to Victor.

VERA'S VOICE

Dear Victor. I met the officer in question, he...

She stops, thinks. Takes up her pen again.

VERA'S VOICE

He confirmed what Roland's colleague told us. It was a painless and noble death. Comfort yourself with this, dear Victor, as you face the trials ahead.

121 EXT. LEIGHTON HOUSE, LOWESTOFT - DAY

121

Vera is heading up the snowy garden path when Roland's distraught sister Clare comes running out to greet her.

\*  
\*  
\*

CLARE

Roland's kit. They've sent it back to us!

Clare runs back into the house. Vera hesitates, not sure if she can face this.

\*

122 INT. LIVING ROOM, LEIGHTON HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

122

Vera walks into the living room to be met by a terrible sight. Mr. and Mrs. Leighton are standing frozen in horror, looking at a heap of blood and mud-stained khaki clothes in the centre of the room. The smell is terrible - Vera covers her nose and mouth with her hand.

MRS. LEIGHTON

How could they do this?! How could they send us that....that, it's not my Roland!

\*  
\*  
\*

Mrs. Leighton turns away from the horrible sight.

MRS. LEIGHTON

Take it outside, take it!

\*

Mr. Leighton steps forward, but Vera stops him.

VERA

Wait.

She goes over to the bloody heap, stares at it for a moment. Then kneels down beside it. She has to brace herself to breathe normally, because of the smell.

VERA

Oh God....

She reaches across, picks up a damp, blood-soaked item - Roland's vest, ripped and torn.

She picks up his cap, all flattened and squashed. Next, his jacket, covered in dried viscera. Vera holds it up. She has to look, she has to check....Bracing herself, she reaches into the inside pocket. The filth of the trenches comes off on her hands, but she carries on. She feels something - pulls out Roland's wallet. Her fingers are trembling, but she opens it. Inside, is a photo of her. Vera wipes hair from her face, gets a streak of dirt across it. She feels something else, reaches in and pulls out - a sheaf of papers.

Vera lays them down. They're splattered, filthy, but she smooths them out. They're poems, headed "For Vera". One has dried violet flowers folded into it.

Vera gazes at them - overcome, her emotions rising to the surface; sobs of grief and joy combined. At last - something from him. At last, she can grieve... \*

123

EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE - LATER

123

Vera and Mr. Leighton are digging a hole in the frozen ground, as Mrs. Leighton watches, Clare pours boiling water from a kettle to help thaw the soil. Over this:

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Violets from Plug Street Wood,  
Sweet, I send you oversea.*

Vera and Mr. Leighton shovel Roland's kit into the hole. Then they start to bury it.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*(It is strange they should be blue,  
Blue when his soaked blood was red,  
For they grew around his head;  
It is strange they should be blue.)*

CUT TO:

124

EXT. PLUG STREET WOOD, BELGIUM - DAY

124

We see Roland as he spots some violets growing beneath a tree. He walks over to pick them - sees a man's semi-decomposed corpse lying there, very still. The violets are growing in the blood-stained earth around his head. A bird twitters somewhere, leaves rustle in the breeze.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Violets from Plug Street Wood -  
- Think what they have meant to  
me -  
Life and Hope and Love and You.  
(MORE)*

ROLAND'S VOICE (cont'd)  
 (And you did not see them grow  
 Where his mangled body lay,  
 Hiding horror from the day.  
 Sweetest, it was better so.)

125 INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

125

Vera hurries down a hospital corridor, towards a ward.

ROLAND'S VOICE  
*Violets from oversea,  
 To your dear, far forgetting  
 land:  
 These I send in memory,  
 Knowing you will understand.*

126 INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

126

Vera approaches a man sitting in a chair by his bed, his head entirely bound in dressing save for the lower face and one eye. It's Victor.

VERA  
 Victor...

He stirs. He looks different - shrunken, almost child-like. Vera tries to make eye contact, but his one eye stares back at her, sightless.

VICTOR  
 Who is it? Is that...?

We realise he's blind. She takes his hand.

VICTOR (CONT'D)  
 Vera.

VERA  
 Oh Victor....

VICTOR  
 (trembling attempt to be  
 light)  
 What a fix, eh.

He plucks at the blanket across his lap.

VICTOR  
 This blanket's driving me mad,  
 it's far too itchy!

VERA  
 I'll take care of it.

Upset, she takes the blanket off, then sits back down, trying to keep her voice steady.

VERA

Does Molly know? Would you like  
me to contact her for you?

A beat.

VICTOR

There's no Molly, Vera. There  
never was.

On Vera - stricken.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

(managing a smile)

Couldn't have you feeling sorry  
for me, could I?

127 INT. DORMITORY, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

127 \*

A thoughtful Vera is getting ready to go out - coat and hat on. She checks her appearance in the mirror - gazes at her face for a moment, gaunt, worn. Then she goes over to a box of cakes, closes it carefully up, and readies to leave.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

128 EXT. GARDEN, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - A LITTLE LATER

128

Vera is settling herself down in a chair next to Victor, who has been brought outside to get some fresh air. The opened box of cakes is beside him.

\*

VICTOR

I'm getting a visit from an  
officer who lost both eyes at the  
start of the War. He's going to  
tell me about Braille.

VERA

That's the Victor I know, always  
the optimist.

VICTOR

(A new cynicism)

Yes, inspirational stories for  
the damned. What about you? Still  
writing?

VERA

Writing! Goodness no.

VICTOR

Really? You've got some material  
now.

VERA

That belongs to another life. I have much more important things to interest me, like being here with you.

Victor gropes for her hand, she takes it. He gives it a squeeze.

VERA (CONT'D)

I've been thinking, Victor, and I want to look after you. We belong together now, don't we? You're going to need someone, and I -

\*  
\*  
\*

Victor listens, alert and very still.

VERA (CONT'D)

(swallowing)

- well, Roland would like it. You knew him better than anyone in the world, except Edward.

VICTOR

Poor Vera. Are you proposing to me now?

VERA

Yes, yes I am.

Victor lifts her hand to his lips and kisses it.

VICTOR

(gently)

Then I must turn you down.

A moment - as Vera accepts, gradually realising he's right. They sit there, lost together, holding hands.

129 INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

129 \*

Vera is fast asleep in her narrow bed when there's a sudden pounding at the door. Vera and Betty both sit up with a start.

\*

VOICE OUTSIDE

Brittain! You're wanted!

130 INT. BIG WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAWN

130 \*

Vera hurries into the ward, looking for Victor. She sees his bed has been curtained off. A Nurse - SISTER ELIOT - sees her and steps over.

\*

## SISTER ELIOT

He called for us about an hour ago, said there was a loud clicking noise in his head.

Vera pulls back the curtain - sees Victor lying in bed, dead.

## SISTER ELIOT

It was very quick. I'm sorry.

Vera nods, sinks into a chair by the bed. Sister Eliot pulls the curtain closed and leaves her. Victor's peaceful in death, his hands folded across his chest, that shrunken, child-like look accentuated.

Vera gazes at him....

131 EXT. TRENCH, FRANCE - DAY

131

The hollow FACES of rain-soaked young tommies, standing in a trench, waiting silently to go over the top.

One smokes, another nervously bites his lip, another's gaze is vacant...we come to Edward, his hair greying at the temples - remembering he's still only 20 - the truth of War etched on his face.

## EDWARD'S VOICE

I'm so glad you were near, and saw him so nearly at the end. We share a memory of both of them, dear Vera, that is worth all the rest of the world, and the sun of that memory never sets. And you know that I love you, that I would do anything in the world in my power should you ask it, and that I am your servant as well as your brother. (Pause) Edward.

132 INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - DAY

132

Vera, composed and pale, sits opposite her parents.

## VERA

My mind's made up.

## MRS. BRITTAINE

But France, the front, it's so dangerous!

## VERA

I'll be behind the lines. It's as close to Edward as I can get, I - need to be there.

\*  
\*  
\*

\*  
\*  
\*

Mr. Brittain pats his wife's hand, indicating she should back off.

Mrs. Brittain gets up and fetches some gifts - jars of jam and cream, some rollers.

MRS. BRITTAINE

I've been gathering some things for you, I suppose you can take them to France too. There's so little available now, but - cook's last jar...

She indicates the jam.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Damson.

VERA

My favourite.

MRS. BRITTAINE

Some rollers for your hair...you said your last ones were lost.

Vera nods, touched by her mother's efforts.

MRS. BRITTAINE

And cream. For those poor hands.

She takes her daughter's chapped, worn hands in hers.

VERA

I'll make sure I use it.

MRS. BRITTAINE

(unable to hold it in any longer)

What can I do...? We haven't heard from him -

MRS. BRITTAINE

(gentle, warning)

Edith...

MRS. BRITTAINE

...In six weeks!

VERA

It doesn't mean anything. Sometimes the letters don't get through. I'll write to you every few days, I promise.

Mr. Brittain's eyes glimmer with admiration for her.

MR. BRITTAINE  
 Why was I ever disappointed you  
 weren't a boy?

They share a smile.

133 INT. ARMY BUS, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE, FRANCE - DAY (WINTER)33

Vera, in her VAD uniform, sits in a crowded army bus as it pulls into Etaples military base. Her fellow passengers, all army personnel, leap up and bustle out.

Vera gets to her feet, takes hold of her suitcase.

134 EXT. ETAPLES - DAY

134

Vera, holding her suitcase, enters Etaples military base - a warren of makeshift wood and tin huts. She looks down at her feet - sinking into the MUD of Northern France.

The place is bustling with activity, wounded men on stretchers are carried past, army personnel bustle along, nurses, red cross vehicles rumble past. Some Chinese labourers are building a new hut, shouting to each other in Chinese.

Vera stands there, wondering which way to go. From somewhere, comes the sound of soldiers singing: "Good bye-eee, Don't Cry-eee, Wipe the tear, Baby dear, from your eye-eee..."

Vera sees a young VAD, Dorothy, pass, she goes over to her, shows her a piece of paper. \*

VERA

Excuse me, I'm to report to C  
 section.

Dorothy looks at the paper. \*

DOROTHY

Third on the right. (grimace)  
 You're under Sister Milroy - good  
 luck.

And with that, she's gone. \*

135 EXT. HUTS, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE - LATER

135

Vera has found Hope Milroy and is following her as she strides along between huts. Young, vivacious, Hope has a clipped manner and a reputation as an eccentric.

HOPE

There's about thirty men to a hut, some of them are an absolute mess -

She turns to Vera with a bright smile, opens the door to a tin hut.

HOPE (CONT'D)

They're supposed to pass through the clearing stations, but that's not saying much anymore.

She steps aside to allow Vera to enter.

136

INT. GERMAN HUT, ETAPLES BASE - CONTINUOUS

136

Vera walks in to discover a hut crammed full of thirty men. Some groan with pain, others are unconscious. Their wounds are visibly dreadful.

Hope leads Vera through them, talking in a loud voice. A few of the soldiers follow them with large, expressive eyes. Hope gestures to a door at the far end.

HOPE (CONT'D)

The theatre's through there.  
We're short on everything,  
including surgeons.

She steps over to one patient, who is unconscious, with a bandaged arm stump.

HOPE (CONT'D)

Had to saw this chappie's arm off myself yesterday, quite a job.

Vera looks horrified.

HOPE (CONT'D)

Not ideal, of course, but then -  
(beaming) this is War.

A voice calls out.

WOUNDED SOLDIER

Schwester! Wasser, wasser bitte!

Vera spins round, startled. The man, very sick and weak, is looking at them. Vera's face - as she realises her patients are Germans. Hope sees.

HOPE

Oh, didn't I mention? This lot are Huns. I find it best to number them, myself, much quicker.

(MORE)

HOPE (cont'd)  
 First Hun, second, third, fourth.  
 Ah, (lowering her voice) keep an  
 eye on fourth, he's only got a  
 few hours left.

Vera's reeling. 'Fourth' is the wounded soldier who cried out.

WOUNDED SOLDIER  
 Ich sterbe! Hasst du kein hertz?

HOPE  
 Well, that's it. Best to get stuck in right away, I find.

VERA  
 (sudden panic)  
 I - do I have to? What about the British huts?

HOPE  
 (oblivious smile)  
 You've been in charge of your own ward before, I take it?

VERA  
 No, never!

HOPE  
 Lovely! Over to you, then.

And with that, she heads for the door. As she passes the wounded soldier's bed -

HOPE  
 (to Vera)  
 See to him, will you. No idea what he's on about.

Vera is left standing there, stunned.

VERA  
 He says you're heartless.

A sweating Vera is dealing with the dressing on a soldier's back wound. She lifts the blood-stained gauze to reveal a raw mass of pus and blood. A moment's shock.

Then - she goes to a nearby work top. The only equipment is a pair of grubby forceps in a cracked jar. Soldiers cry out for her help. Vera looks around her, overwhelmed, trying not to panic.

138 EXT. DISPENSING STATION - ETAPLES

138

A queue of nurses wait to collect medical supplies from two orderlies manning the dispensing station. Vera, at the head of the queue, hurries away with her arms full of lint, bandage, medicines and antiseptic.

139 INT. GERMAN WARD - LATER

139

Vera has a bottle of antiseptic, but is looking around for a jar to use. There's nothing.

A CORNER OF THE WARD - Vera is rummaging through her suitcase. She pulls out the jar of cream her mother gave her.

BACK AT THE WORK TOP - Vera is washing the jar free of all the cream. Quickly, she pours antiseptic into it, shoves in instruments for sterilisation.

140 INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY

140

Vera is dressing a leg wound on a German soldier. On the hut floor, lie piles of dressings saturated with blood and pus. As she finishes, her eyes meet his - his look of intense gratitude moves her. Vera smiles and nods in acknowledgement.

\*  
\*

VERA'S VOICE

Here I am, dear Edward, fighting  
with every inch of strength to  
save men who, fifty or so miles  
away, you're risking your life to  
kill. It makes you wonder,  
Edward, really it does.

141 EXT. HILL, ETAPLES BASE - DAY (SPRING)

141

Vera is standing at the top of the gentle slope above the base - below her, the vast stretch of huts that makes up Etaples base, cut through by the railway line. She's been here a while.

VERA'S VOICE

I waited for you again on Sunday.  
I'll be here every week, until you  
can come.

A figure walks towards her, waving - Hope.

HOPE

(as she approaches)  
Miss Brittain! You'll get  
sunburn!

Vera says nothing, Hope can see she's upset.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
Another no-show?

Vera nods.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
He'll get here when he can, I'm  
sure. Come on, let's walk.

VERA  
I need to rest.

HOPE  
Nonsense. Best thing for nervous  
upset is exercise.

She's already striding off.

VERA  
(calling)  
I'm not upset!

HOPE  
(calling)  
Chop chop!

Vera sighs, follows her.

142 EXT. WOODS, ETAPLES - LATER

142

Hope and Vera are walking together through beautiful, sun-dappled woods. Quite a way ahead of them, a limping officer and a VAD are walking, a self-conscious distance between them.

HOPE  
Look at those two. All the signs  
are there. Give them a few  
minutes and they'll be in the  
bushes. Not my preferred  
location, the flora and fauna  
round here are prickly as hell.

Vera looks at her in surprise.

HOPE (CONT'D)  
Do I shock you, Nurse?

Vera smiles, shakes her head.

VERA  
I don't think there's going to be  
much room left for etiquette when  
all this is over.

HOPE

Won't life be dreadfully dull,  
 though? (Seeing something) Ah,  
 there we go.

She gestures to where the couple were a minute ago.

HOPE (CONT'D)

You see? Gone.

Hope runs on, calling out.

HOPE

Here little bunnies! Where are you?  
 Come on out, Mummy won't be cross!  
 Bunniekins!

A rustle in the undergrowth - they catch sight of two figures scampering off through the trees, the man with his trousers down throws her a dirty look. Vera laughs. Hope grins, enjoying her prank.

142A EXT. WOODS, ETAPLES - A LITTLE LATER

142A

Vera and Hope walk, enjoying the fresh air.

VERA

(hesitant, a confession)  
 You know, some of the time here I'm  
 actually happy -

HOPE

'Course you are, you're addicted to  
 it, Brittain, just like the rest of  
 us. It's what happens when it's  
 over that's the real worry.

Vera looks at Hope - whose face is flooded with sudden unspoken pain.

HOPE (CONT'D)

All that mopping up to be done -  
 ghastly.

But she battens down the hatches, grabs Vera's arm.

HOPE

Come on, race you back!

They run off, laughing.

143 INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY

143

Bloody chaos. About 15 freshly wounded men have been brought in, in a critical state.

Vera, Hope and another VAD are desperately trying to cope, rushing between the beds, as orderlies bring more men in on stretchers.

Hope passes the bed of a man whose arm is turning black.

HOPE

Gangrene. Brittain, get some powder on this filthy Hun!

Vera throws Hope a look at this language, scurries over with a powder bottle, shakes it on the man's arm. He's whimpering with fear.

143A INT. GERMAN WARD - LATER

143A \*

Hope is by the bed of a uniformed officer who's bleeding profusely from the neck. Vera comes over to her side. Hope is trying to stem the bleed.

She sees Vera, pulls her briefly aside.

HOPE

It's hopeless. Get the screen.

Hope stays with the man, who grabs her hand tight.

DYING OFFICER

Lieber Gott...Nicht so!

\*

HOPE

Alright old boy...alright...

DYING OFFICER

(raw fear)

Nicht so! Nicht hier!

\*

His eyes suddenly lose focus, a look of panic comes over him. Vera is pulling a screen on wheels round the bed.

DYING OFFICER

Meine augen! Ich sehe nichts!

\*

He lashes out, flailing. Hope struggles to hold him down. Vera comes over to help, it takes both of them.

HOPE

Calm down old chap -

DYING OFFICER

(total panic)

Hilf mir!

\*

Vera suddenly grips his hand, leans in close.

VERA

Sei still! Alles in ordnung.

Hope looks at her in surprise. Hearing his own language makes him stop and listen - Vera smooths his brow. He calms, starts to whimper like a frightened child, delirium fast engulfing him.

\*

DYING OFFICER  
Klara...? Klara, bist du's?

A pause.

VERA  
Ja...ja, ich bin da.

He calms right down, grips her hand tightly.

VERA  
(a whisper)  
Keine angst haben...

\*

DYING OFFICER  
Verzeihe mir Klara...verzeihe  
mir...

Vera can't hold back the tears, She leans in and kisses him on the forehead.

VERA  
Naturlich.

Hope has tears in her eyes too.

Vera watches the life leave him. Then focuses on the hand gripping hers, as it slackens....

Silence. She closes his eyes.

A noise rouses her - Hope is opening a small window above the man's head.

HOPE  
To let his soul escape.

Vera looks up, sees a tree branch right outside - she hears the peaceful twitter of a bird.

She freezes, then starts to shake - the utter, pointless horror of it pushing her close to the edge...

Hope sees. She comes over. Bends down, takes her hands, looks her straight in the eye.

HOPE  
(calm, firm)  
Control your mind. It's the only way.

Vera nods, trying, trembling.

HOPE

Deep breaths. With me, come on.

They breathe deeply together.

HOPE

In....out.....that's it.

Vera gradually calms. Hope sees this, pats her hands.

HOPE

Good girl.

A gesture that says - time to get on.

VERA

(nodding, getting to her  
feet)

I'm fine now. Thank you.

FADE TO:

144

A MONTAGE -

144

1) GERMAN WARD. Vera picks up a pile of bloody, muddy khaki uniforms, sees something moving across them. She looks closer - a swarm of lice.

2) OUTSIDE GERMAN WARD. Vera dumps the uniforms in an enormous bin.

3) VERA'S DIGS/WASH AREA. A naked, shivering Vera sits in a BATH, pumping in a thin stream of hot water. The water runs out. She has barely an inch to bathe in. She looks at her fingers - red, puffy, broken-veined - the hands of someone thirty years older.

VERA'S VOICE

A whole year without seeing you,  
dear brother, and yet it feels  
like I've been in France my whole  
life.

4) GERMAN WARD. Vera breaks icicles from the inside of the window frame -

5) OUTSIDE. Vera is hanging sheets on a washing line. Further along, at the periphery of her vision, sheets flap. The sun shines, a breeze blows. Suddenly, at this periphery, barely glimpsed, there's a KITE -

And Roland's hands - strong, brown, alive - his cheek, as he runs with the kite, his hair - his mouth, smiling -

She turns. But he's gone. Just a row of sheets flapping. On Vera's face - a soft smile -

## VERA'S VOICE

Etaples has become a kingdom of death and, strange to say, I'm a contented dweller in it.

END MONTAGE.

145 OMMITTED.

145 \*

146 INT. BRITISH WARD - NIGHT

146

Inside a dark ward full of wounded men, with the sound of a deafening bombardment uncomfortably close. Vera and Hope move from bed to bed with cups of water or tea, soothing the men. They're lit up by flashes of hard, white light from the shell fire - the strain showing on all their faces.

\*

\*

\*

147 INT./EXT. BRITISH/GERMAN WARDS - DAWN

147

Vera emerges, exhausted, from the British ward, and walks along a narrow path connecting it to the German ward -

She opens the door walks right through the German ward to the other side, emerges to see, a large field -

Filled to the brim, with row upon row of wounded, dying or dead men, lying on stretchers or on the bare ground - hundreds of them - mud-covered, torn, bloodied men, their groans and cries echoing.

On Vera - shocked at the sight of so much suffering. More stretchers are being brought in by orderlies, while the dead are being carried away.

148 EXT. FIELD OF WOUNDED, ETAPLES - SECONDS LATER

148

Vera walks among the men. Many of them are choking, in the final stages of gas poisoning, great yellow blisters on their skin. They've come straight from combat. Some of them look straight at her, their expressions harrowing. Orderly 1 runs up to her.

## ORDERLY 1

Mustard gas!

Vera takes this in. Voices call out, pleading.

## VOICES OF MEN

There were so many of them,  
Nurse! / The gas! / Please Sister,  
help me! / We've had it, nurse!

One, a young man nearby, claws at her skirt.

MUSTARD GAS VICTIM  
Nurse...my throat...

A horrible gargling noise rises up from his throat. Vera turns to him, but she knows there's nothing she can do.

VERA  
I'll get you some water....

Vera hurries over to a water tank, fills a cup, is heading back to the dying man when Orderly 1 approaches again.

ORDERLY 1  
One of the boys was insisting he knew you, probably delirium, I've seen it before -

VERA  
Where?

Some wounded Tommies lying on the ground nearby listen.

ORDERLY 1  
We had to take him round the back.

A grimace suggests this is not a good place to be.

ORDERLY 1  
Said his name was Edward I think -

Vera starts - looks at him - then heads immediately off.

WOUNDED TOMMY  
Oi, Miss, I'm Edward too, you know!

ANOTHER WOUNDED TOMMY  
And me!

Vera disappears from view, the Tommies grin at one another.

149      EXT. BACK OF TENTS - A MINUTE LATER

149      \*

Vera is round the back of the tents, where the dying men have been taken. Most of them are either unconscious, or already dead. She passes among them, heart in her mouth, scanning their faces, searching...a young VAD comes up to her.

YOUNG VAD  
Nurse Brittain! This lot are done for, you're needed in surgery.

Then she sees him - Edward, unconscious on a stretcher. He looks dead. She rushes to him.

YOUNG VAD  
Nurse! They want you now!

Vera is oblivious. She falls to her knees, checks quickly - finds a pulse.

VERA  
He's alive -!

She checks him over -

VERA  
It's not gas...not gas...Edward!

No response. She finds a large, infected wound on his arm. She spots a few orderlies nearby.

VERA  
Help me! Quickly!

They head over, help her lift the stretcher.

150 INT. BRITISH HUT - LATER

150

Vera has found a space for Edward in a hut, where the wounded are packed in like sardines. Flies buzz, the heat is stifling. She's quickly cutting his jacket off him, as Hope administers him with an injection.

HOPE  
(grim faced)  
Vera, you have to face it...

VERA  
(doesn't want to hear it)  
No! No...

She doesn't take her eyes from Edward - every inch of her strength is concentrated on him. Hope realises - gives her a quick pat, and withdraws.

Vera finds something in his jacket pocket - a dirt-stained letter. She opens it, scans it quickly, sees the signature "Geoffrey" - puts it to one side.

151 INT. BRITISH HUT - NIGHT

151

Vera is intensely focused on Edward, nursing him as he tosses with a searing fever, his body wracked, muttering and groaning.

152 EXT. BRITISH HUT - LATER

152 \*

Vera is carrying a gramophone player, hurrying back towards the nursing hut.

153 INT. BRITISH HUT - SECONDS LATER

153 \*

She sets up the gramophone next to Edward, pulls the hand across to play a scratchy old record. The music swells through the hut. She returns to Edward's side.

154 INT. BRITISH HUT - DAWN

154

An exhausted Vera is asleep, laid out across Edward. She starts awake, realises - looks up, to see his eyes are open. He's looking at her with his gentle smile.

EDWARD

(weak)

I dreamt an angel played me  
music...

Vera is on her feet, ecstatic. She hugs him, kisses him, tears falling. She helps him sip some water -

VERA

Here....

- adjusts his pillows for him.

EDWARD

We were back at the lake together,  
all of us. Remember the day Victor  
dived in..?

Vera smiles at the memory.

EDWARD

I told him there were rats.

\*  
\*  
\*

His expression transforms - at some horrible memory.

\*  
\*  
\*

EDWARD

Oh God....

VERA  
(soothing him)  
Shhhh.

She picks Geoffrey's letter up, from the side.

VERA

I found this in your jacket last  
night...from Geoffrey.

Edward smiles at this.

\*

VERA

I didn't read it.

EDWARD

I'll read it to you. I want you to  
hear his voice.

Vera nods. Edward opens the letter.

EDWARD

(reading)

We walked back to barracks last  
night, all of us thoroughly  
exhausted.

CUT TO:

155

EXT. THE WESTERN FRONT - EVENING

155

A vast expanse of mud. Geoffrey is one in a line of battle-weary men, trudging their way back from the front line.

GEOFFREY'S VOICE

It was a scene of devastation,  
and yet, as I looked at it, a  
strange feeling came over me...

Geoffrey turns. On the horizon, beyond the mud, are shell-torn trees with blackened, claw-like branches, lit by the brilliant gold of a setting sun. He stops to watch, as the other men carry on.

GEOFFREY'S VOICE

The setting sun had lit up the  
water in the shell holes so they  
looked like pools of gold, -

We see the field of mud through Geoffrey's eyes now - dotted with little pools of bright gold water. His eyes move to a river, running along the bottom of the trees, also lit in gold.

GEOFFREY'S VOICE

- with a river of gold, and  
purple clouds fleeting in the sky-

MOVE CLOSE - on Geoffrey's face.

GEOFFREY'S VOICE

And I felt a presence there,  
greater than all this...such peace,  
Edward.

CUT TO:

156 EXT. MILITARY BASE, ETAPLES - DAY (WINTER)

156

A male administrator hands Vera a telegram. She sees from the writing what kind of telegram it is - she looks stricken. Tears it open. Her hand goes to her mouth -

CUT BACK TO:

157 EXT. WESTERN FRONT - EVENING

157

Geoffrey gives the scene one last look, then turns back to join his battalion.

GEOFFREY'S VOICE

I thought of you, dear friend,  
and I knew I'd see you again...

CUT TO:

158 INT. BRITISH HUT, ETAPLES - DAY

158

Edward sits there, reading the letter to himself, smiling.

EDWARD'S VOICE

...either in this world, or the  
hereafter.

He finishes, looks up. He sees something that makes his face fall.

We see it too - Vera, standing there, red-eyed, a telegram in her hand. He knows what it means. She comes over to him, hands him the telegram. Puts her arms around him.

Edward weeps, as Vera comforts him.

159 EXT. MUD ROAD, ETAPLES - DAY

159

Edward is leaving. He and Vera walk along a mud road together, the odd vehicle trundling past. A heaviness hangs over them.

VERA

I'm glad it's Italy you're going to, the fighting's lighter there.  
(Pause) When it's over let's travel together, exotic places. Where would you like to go?

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

EDWARD

I would've said Italy.

\*  
\*

They smile.

\*

EDWARD  
 (suddenly serious)  
 Go back to Oxford, Vera. Do what  
 you always wanted to do.

VERA  
 If this War ever ends!

EDWARD  
 It will.

VERA  
 I can't imagine that anymore.

EDWARD  
 Do it.

VERA  
 Only if you come too -

Edward suddenly hugs her, very tight.

EDWARD  
 You leave first, otherwise I won't  
 have the strength to.

Vera turns slowly, heads back towards the base. She turns one  
 last time, to see Edward standing watching her. He raises a  
 hand in farewell, gives her a cheerful smile and a nod.

160 EXT. CANVAS HUTS, ETAPLES - DAY (SPRING/SUMMER) 160

An upset Vera, clutching a telegram, marches between the  
 tents of Etaples.

161 INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY 161

An upset Vera marches up to Hope, sitting at one end of the  
 ward making some notes, and puts the telegram down before  
 her.

Hope glances over it, gives her a sympathetic look.

HOPE  
 Domestic duties beckon.

162 INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - DAY 162

We're inside the large, staid hallway. A grandfather clock  
 ticks. The sudden domestic scene is a marked contrast to  
 the noisy chaos of Etaples.

The front door is pushed open, Vera struggles in with her  
 luggage. She stands there, still in her uniform, taking in  
 the atmosphere. No servants, no signs of real life.

163

INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - A MINUTE LATER

163 \*

Vera walks in to find her mother sitting in an armchair staring into space. Mr. Brittain is reading the paper nearby. They both look up - Mr. Brittain hurries over, pleased to see her, he takes Vera's hands in his. Strain shows on his face.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Vera! Thank goodness!

VERA

(low, to her father)  
How is she?

His expression shows his concern....Vera heads over.

VERA

Mother...?

MRS. BRITTAIN

Cook left, you know! Everyone's gone. And you can't get anything in the shops anymore. Butter, meat, eggs. What am I going to make for Edward?

Vera exchanges a worried look with her father.

VERA

You haven't been well...

MRS. BRITTAIN

He'll need a proper meal. And nothing's been done in the house. It's all quite silly, you know! The whole thing!

Mr. Brittain sighs...

CUT TO:

164

VERA -

164

1) SCULLERY YARD, MELROSE. Sleeves rolled up, beating carpets -

2) HALLWAY, MELROSE. Vera dusts and polishes furniture.

165

INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - EVENING

165

Vera and her mother and father are sitting at a dining table, having a light meal of soup. Vera picks up a spoonful, pours it back in the bowl. It's thin like water.

VERA

Time to find a cook.

166

INT. UTILITY ROOM, MELROSE - DAY

166

Vera is instructing the new girl, a chubby teenager; she notices how heavily made up she is.

VERA

There's household chores too, if you don't mind, a mountain of ironing.

She indicates a full basket of ironing in a doorway.

NEW MAID

(reluctant)

I have to go at five. (Off Vera's look) I've a dance.

\*

Vera just looks at her -

VERA

(sharp)

They still have those, do they?

167

INT. STAIRCASE, MELROSE - DAY

167

Vera is carrying a vase of flowers up the stairs, she passes Mr. Brittain coming down, carrying a newspaper.

MR. BRITTAINE

Beautiful, dear.

Vera smiles.

168

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, MELROSE - SECONDS LATER

168

Vera is putting the flowers down when she glances up out of the window to see something in the distance -

On a visible stretch of the white winding road, a boy on a bike seems to be cycling towards them, a satchel slung across him -

Vera is frozen to the spot - almost stops breathing. Palms sweat, heart races. The boy disappears from view.

168A

INT. UPSTAIRS LANDING, MELROSE - CONTINUOUS

168A

Vera hurries out onto the landing, trying to keep sight of the boy, and into the front bedroom...

168B INT. FRONT BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

168B

Vera hurries to the window, looks out, trying to see...No boy. Was she imagining it? She steps back, almost letting herself feel some relief, when -

He bobs back into view, closer now to the house. Vera watches him through the glass, as he stops at the garden gate. Cycles up to the front door - disappears from view beneath the porch. She hears the clang of the doorbell.

Vera is frozen, waiting.

A figure steps out from beneath the porch.

Edward. In his khaki. He looks up at her. Vera puts her hands on the pane, as though to reach him -

She hears her father answer the door - a muffled exchange.

Below, Edward fades to nothing.

Then - the sound of a terrible, animal cry from her father.

Vera - seen from behind. Head bowed, hands against the glass pane.

\*

169 INT. UTILITY ROOM, MELROSE - SECONDS LATER

169

Vera marches past the room to see the new maid calmly ironing socks. The sheer normality of the scene stuns her - how can life go on the same as before...? She storms in, her fury welling up, grabs the ironing basket, HURLS it against the wall.

\*\*\*\*\*

VERA

You don't iron socks!

\*\*\*\*\*

The girl bursts into tears. Vera storms out of the back door, SLAMS the door shut.

170 EXT. HILLSIDE, OUTSIDE BUXTON - DAY

170

Vera is climbing a green hill, pushing herself to the limit, RAGING against fate -

CLOSE ON - her feet, striding across green grass, up higher, and higher -

\*\*\*\*\*

- to the top of the hill. She stops, panting for breath, turns -

To see everything behind her is a field of MUD, right up to where she's standing now -

Her life laid to waste.....

Her stricken face, as the mud engulfs her feet -

CUT TO:

171 AN EMPTY CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY (NOVEMBER 1918)71

The same corridor Vera walked down at the start of her journey into nursing.

Vera's figure appears at the far end, small, isolated. She stops. Folds her hands before her.

An image of complete aloneness.

172 INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

172 \*

Vera is mopping the corridor floor when the loud boom of cannon fire sounds from outside. She doesn't even flinch.

There's a sound of shouting, peals of laughter, running footsteps. Vera looks up to see two young nurses, faces flushed, running towards her.

CELEBRATING NURSES

It's over! The armistice is signed! It's finally over!

Vera just watches with no reaction. There's the sound of celebrations already kicking off in the street outside.

One of them turns back, looks directly at her.

CELEBRATING NURSE

(jubilation)

We won!

Vera's face - as she takes this in. Then she returns to her tray, an automaton.

173 EXT. LONDON STREET, ARMISTICE DAY - DUSK

173

Vera, in civilian clothes now, is pushed along by the jostling crowd. People shout, cheer, wave rattles, but the sound cuts in and out, Vera can't connect with it.

174 EXT. THE CROWD, ARMISTICE DAY - LATER

174

To muffled sound, Vera is being whirled round and round by the jubilant soldier -

- she breaks free -

175 EXT. LONDON STREET - A MINUTE LATER 175

Vera sees the church steps ahead of her, stumbles and pushes her way through the crowd towards them.

176 INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER 176

Vera stumbles inside, her footsteps echoing on marble. Above her, the high-vaulted dome, ahead of her, row upon row of pews. It's another world in here, silent and dark.

Vera walks down a side aisle. She hears - a faint, rhythmic whispering -

Francis Danby's painting of a shipwreck in storm-ripped seas LOOMS ahead of her now -

As the whispering grows louder, and she sees the women taking shape in the darkness, their desperate prayers -

Vera puts her hands over her ears to block the sound - then sinks into a pew. After a moment, she clasps her hands together, as though in prayer.

VERA'S VOICE

They'll want to forget you, they'll want me to forget. But I can't - I won't...

\*  
\*  
\*

CUT TO:

177 EXT. MAIN QUAD, SOMERVILLE - DAY (WINTER) 177

Brilliant sunshine. An Oxford quad.

Muffled sound. Students walk past, smiling, chatting, laughing. As though nothing has changed.

Vera steps into frame, holding a small suitcase.

VERA'S VOICE

...I promise you, all of you.

\*

178 INT. VERA'S OLD ROOM, SOMERVILLE - DAY 178 \*

Vera is at the bed in her old room, unpacking.

\*

She glances at the familiar view, then the familiar desk by the window. On it, a pen and a pad of writing paper. Open, blank, ready. But no one to write to.

\*

179 OMMITTED. 179 \*

180 EXT. DINING HALL, SOMERVILLE - EVENING 180  
 Vera is among students heading for the dining hall doors.  
 She sees Miss Lorimer.

MISS LORIMER  
 Miss Brittain! Back at last.

VERA  
 Yes.

A pause - Vera hopes for some acknowledgement of  
 intervening experiences - \*

MISS LORIMER  
 (awkward)  
 So - it's Chaucer this term. You've  
 certainly got some catching up to  
 do. \*

Vera just looks at her...as they move on with the crowd. \*

181 INT. DINING HALL - LATER 181  
 Vera sits silently, huddled in her drab clothes, in stark  
 contrast to the rows of animated, brightly-dressed young  
 women, eating and talking in high spirits.

181A EXT. GARDENS, SOMERVILLE - DAY 181A \*  
 Vera is walking through the gardens when she sees a group of  
 female undergraduates enjoying a merry picnic on the lawn.  
 One of them, Winifred, a flamboyantly dressed girl with an  
 open, enthusiastic face and blonde hair that's impossible to  
 tame, roars with laughter. She looks up, notices Vera  
 watching. She looks so isolated, like a shadow... \*

Winifred gets up to beckon her over, but Vera hurries away. \*

WINIFRED  
 The new girl's a little strange. \*

COMPANION  
 She was at the front, for quite a  
 while I hear. \*

Winifred watches Vera disappear, intrigued. \*

181B INT. LIBRARY, SOMERVILLE - DAY 181B \*  
 Vera is in the library, a book open before her, trying to  
 concentrate, when suddenly - \*

WINIFRED  
 Hello! \*

She jumps slightly, turns to see Winifred's beaming, friendly face. \*

WINIFRED \*

Winifred Holtby, I just found out  
we're tutorial partners this term! \*

No response. Winifred ploughs on. \*

WINIFRED (CONT'D) \*

If there's ever a book you can't  
find here, just ask. It'll probably  
be buried under the mess in my  
room! \*

Vera ignores her, irritated by her sunny cheer. Winifred has  
another go - \*

WINIFRED (CONT'D) \*

I heard you want to be a writer.  
Don't be shy, me too! We could look  
at each other's work if you like - \*

VERA \*

(cutting) \*

Look, I really must get on! \*

A pause. Winifred is taken aback - then graciously accepts  
this. \*

WINIFRED \*

Of course. \*

Vera tries to concentrate on her book. \*

181C INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - LATER

181C \*

Vera is sitting in her room, the curtains nearly drawn  
against the daylight, reading one of Roland's stained poems.  
The other poems and the dried violets are spread out on the  
bed next to her. \*

Vera is rocking, reading the words intently, muttering them  
to herself. We notice her knuckles are white with gripping  
the paper. \*

Her hands start to shake. \*

She's stuck on the same line, repeats it over and over... \*

VERA \*

(under her breath) \*

Down the long white road....down  
the long white road.... \*

Her eyes fill with tears - her whole body starts to shudder - \*

Suddenly, she HITS her forehead repeatedly with the palm of her hand - over and over, trying to banish thoughts - \*

She tries the lines again - but she can't move on - \*

She begins to cry - overwhelmed - cracking up - \*

The anguish of her inner state playing on her face - \*

182 OMMITTED. 182 \*

183 Now 181B 183 \*

184 Now 181A 184 \*

185 Now 181C 185 \*

186 OMMITTED. 186 \*

187 INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - EARLY MORNING 187 \*

Vera is in bed, tossing with insomnia. She hears a scratching sound, like a rat. Turns in her bed, puts her hands over her ears - the sound is gone - it's all in her head. \*

CUT TO:

VERA SEES - IN HER MIND -

ROLAND lying in a water-filled shellhole, one leg bloodied and broken, as a fellow-soldier holds him, the racket of War all around them -

BACK TO:

VERA -

Tossing and turning in bed - that scratching sound is back, she whimpers, frightened - \*

188 EXT. SOMERVILLE ARCHWAY - EARLY MORNING 188 \*

Winifred is walking to breakfast, when she notices a figure slumped in an archway. It's Vera, the books she was carrying scattered on the ground before her. She's just passed out. Winifred hurries over, kneels next to her. Vera is out of it, panting, barely aware of her surroundings. Winifred sees her anguish. \*

WINIFRED

Vera? Goodness, are you alright? \*

Vera doesn't respond - she's trembling all over - she slips again, falling - Winifred tries to catch her, she hears her voice -

\*  
\*  
\*

WINIFRED'S VOICE  
Somebody give me a hand here?

\*  
\*

The running footsteps of other women coming towards her -

\*

189 INT. VERA'S ROOM - DAYS LATER

189

Vera is lying on her side, in bed. The crisis is over, but her expression is blank, pale, without hope. Behind her stands Winifred, holding books and some grapes.

\*  
\*  
\*

WINIFRED  
I brought some more books for  
you.

Vera remains with her back turned, saying nothing. Winifred decides to open the curtains, letting in a flood of sunlight. Then comes back and sits down.

WINIFRED (CONT'D)  
Did you manage to read the last  
ones?

Winifred sees a pile of books on the floor, they look untouched. She sits down. Vera feels her patient, calm presence. After a moment - Vera turns to face her.

\*  
\*  
\*

VERA  
I saved my brother's life over  
there, you know. In France. (Pause)  
But the War still got him.

A beat -

WINIFRED  
It made us all feel powerless.

VERA  
Were you there too?

WINIFRED  
For the last few months. I  
volunteered at a signals station  
near Abbeville.

\*

Vera's eyes just look at her -

\*

WINIFRED (CONT'D)  
We're surrounded by ghosts. Our  
job now is to try and give a  
voice to them.

\*

Her words resonate deeply with Vera.

WINIFRED

But you need to start at the beginning. Get up, get dressed. Eat. I'm going to help you, whether you like it or not.

\*  
\*

She smiles her warm smile at Vera - a lifeline.

\*

190 EXT. RIVER CHERWELL, OXFORD - DAY

190

Vera and Winifred walk along the river together, talking animatedly, smiling. Vera is much better. She stops - gazes up at a tree branch, where a lone bird sings.

\*

CLOSE ON HER as she gazes at it...so simple, yet so beautiful. In that moment, something in Vera connects again with the eternal beating pulse of the natural world....

191 INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - DAY

191

Miss Lorimer is sitting at her desk when there's a knock at the door. A framed portrait of her dead brother sits nearby.

MISS LORIMER

Not now, thank you!

She hears a noise, looks up in irritation to see Vera standing there. Her expression briefly softens.

MISS LORIMER

Miss Brittain. What is it?

Vera approaches.

VERA

I'm sorry to disturb you -

\*

Vera, words tumbling, struggles to express herself.

VERA (CONT'D)

But I'd like to change to history -

\*

She sees Miss Lorimer's expression.

VERA (CONT'D)

I realise it's unorthodox and I -

MISS LORIMER

(interrupting)

You were admitted to read English-

VERA

But I can read books anytime!  
 (Realising, steadyng herself) I  
 want to study War, the reasons it  
 comes about, and, is there anything  
 we can do to stop it?

Miss Lorimer's face reveals nothing.

VERA (CONT'D)

You've been so kind, keeping my  
 place open, and yes...this is a  
 reaction to the last four years.  
 But I'm trying to find some way to  
 make sense of things.

\*  
\*  
\*

A pause. Vera braces herself, waiting...Miss Lorimer picks up  
 her pen.

MISS LORIMER

I'll see what I can do.

VERA

Oh! Thank you.

She turns to head for the door.

MISS LORIMER

Miss Brittain!

Vera turns round. Miss Lorimer's face shows her recognition  
 of Vera's pain.

MISS LORIMER

I'm glad to see you're better.

\*

Vera nods her thanks.

\*

192

EXT. OXFORD - EVENING

192

Vera is walking along with some shopping when the sound of  
 a speaker's voice inside a hall attracts her attention. She  
 stops, sees a poster outside which reads: "War Reparations -  
 Should Germany Pay?" She hesitates, then goes inside.

193

INT. OXFORD HALL - A LITTLE LATER

193

Vera is pushing her way to the front of a large, angry  
 crowd, mainly of locals, roused by a middle-aged speaker on  
 stage.

MALE SPEAKER

We let Germany off the hook once  
 before, and look where that got us!  
 This time they'll pay! These war  
 reparations must be just the start!

Vera looks at the faces in the crowd - most of them nodding in heartfelt support, muttering angrily to themselves.

One face arrests her for its familiarity - it's GEORGE, the officer who told her of Roland's death. He hasn't seen her.

MALE SPEAKER

History has proved it, once a Hun  
always a Hun! Our chance is now,  
when we've got them on their knees!  
We need to pound them into the  
ground for what they did to us, so  
they're incapable of rising again!

Cheers, shouts of "Hear hear!" "Get the bloody Huns!" from the audience.

GEORGE O.S.

There's a flaw to your argument!

People turn, take in George.

MALE SPEAKER

Come up on stage, Sir, unlike the  
Kaiser's lackeys, we British  
welcome dissent!

Laughs, cheers, as George leaps onto the stage.

GEORGE

The philosophy of an eye for an  
eye, a tooth for a tooth, is surely  
dangerous! Germany will rise again  
one day, and if her pride is too  
damaged she'll do so intent on  
revenge, and the whole cycle will  
be repeated!

MALE SPEAKER

So you're defending our enemies?!

GEORGE

I'm defending no one, my point -!

An angry MOTHER pushes her way to the front.

MALE SPEAKER

(interrupting)

We have mothers here whose sons  
gave their lives for the nation!  
This lady here - look her in the  
eye, Sir, and tell her to love  
Fritz and his friends!

Cries of support for this - the angry mother wants to get up on the stage - the speaker helps her up.

## ANGRY MOTHER

The Germans killed my eldest at the Somme! Then my next one, Harry, he died too. (To George) How can you stand there and defend their murderers?!

## AUDIENCE MEMBERS

We didn't start it! They're war mongers, always have been!

More shouts of outrage, boos! George looks cornered. This is too much for Vera - she pushes through to the front, holds out a hand. George helps her up. He recognises her, with a start.

## GEORGE

Miss Brittain!

## VERA

Officer -

## GEORGE

George, please....George Catlin.

They shake hands hastily, as Vera is hustled to the front.

## MALE SPEAKER

The lady has something to say!

She realises all eyes are on her. She's thrown suddenly - a pause, then -

## VERA

I - I was a nurse at the front during the War.

A silence.

## MALE SPEAKER

Good on you, little Miss! Is there anyone else who'd like to -

## VERA

No! I haven't finished.

Silence, everyone waits for her to carry on. Vera scrabbles to order her thoughts -

## VERA

I - for a while I looked after a hut of German officers.

## AUDIENCE MEMBER

Not too well, I hope, Miss!

Chuckles, murmurs. Vera looks directly at the angry mother.

VERA

As you were speaking, I was remembering one of them. I never knew his name, but he was a brave man, and somebody's son. I held his hand as he lay dying -

Murmurs - people don't like this. Some get up and walk out.

VERA (CONT'D)

He called out for a woman he loved, Klara. Over and over, he faced the end by asking her forgiveness!

Mutterings of disapproval swell louder - Vera looks at the angry mother.

VERA (CONT'D)

I lost a brother, Edward, in the war, and my fiance! There was no final message for them, no hand to hold; just pain and a dirty, undignified death! I can't make sense of it either, except - when I held the hand of that German, it was Roland's hand too that I was holding, and Edward's - their pain was the same pain, their blood the same blood - our grief is the grief of hundreds and thousands of German women and men!

People now start to BOO loudly, the mother walks out, more follow her, until only a few are left.

VERA (CONT'D)

All of you! But especially those of us who were left behind! The mothers, sisters, women - we send our men to war! I fought my father to let my brother go. Because we think it's the right thing, the honourable thing, but all I can do is stand here and ask you, is it? Was I right? Or can I find the courage to accept there might be another way? (Pause) Perhaps their deaths have meaning only if we stand together now, and say no! No to killing, no to war! No to the endless cycle of revenge. (Pause) I say no more of it!

The few remaining people are silent, as her words resonate.

VERA (CONT'D)

(soft)

No more.

She looks round, at GEORGE - their eyes meet.

194 EXT. STREET, OXFORD - LATER

194

George and Vera are walking home together in silence, the atmosphere around them delicate as glass. He stops, and turns to her.

GEORGE

I've often wondered how you were.  
I never forgot our meeting.

Vera looks at him softly -

VERA

Neither did I.

Vera looks away - as a shadow crosses her face, at the memory.

CUT TO:

195 EXT. MELROSE, BUXTON - DAY (SPRING)

195

A beautiful spring day. Vera stands on the garden path, gazing at Melrose. The house is shut down, the curtains closed, it has a neglected feel to it.

She starts walking towards the front door.

196 EXT./INT. FRONT DOOR/HALL, MELROSE - SECONDS LATER

196

Vera unlocks the creaky door, swings it open, and steps into the silent hallway. So many memories....

197 INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - A MINUTE LATER

197

Vera stands in the living room. The large pieces of furniture are covered in dust sheets.

She sees her piano, with dusty sheaf music lying on top of it.

She goes over, lifts the lid. Tinkles a few notes. Then shuffles through the music, until she finds Edward's piece.

She sits down and starts to play, hesitantly...the notes ringing out in the empty house.

198 EXT. THE LONG WHITE ROAD - DAY

198

Vera walks down the long white road, towards the lake. She sees it glittering through spindly trees.

## ROLAND'S VOICE

*The sunshine on the long white road  
That ribboned down the hill,  
The velvet clematis that clung  
Around your window sill  
Are waiting for you still....*

199

EXT. LAKE - DAY

199

Vera stands gazing out at the peaceful water, by the old jetty. It's still there, intact.

## ROLAND'S VOICE

*Again the shadowed pool shall break  
In dimples at your feet...  
And when the thrush sings in your  
wood  
Unknowing, you may meet  
Another stranger, sweet.*

Vera starts to shed her clothes, one by one, until she's down to her petticoat.

Then she walks into the water.

200

EXT. LAKE - LATER

200

Vera swims through the water, feeling the strength in her limbs.

## ROLAND'S VOICE

*And if he is not quite so old  
As the boy you used to know,  
And less proud, too, and worthier,  
You may not let him go -*

Their voices drift over to her - Roland, Edward, and Victor's \* voices as they once were, laughing and chatting, carefree - \*

## ROLAND'S VOICE

*For daisies are truer than passion  
flowers,  
It will be better so.*

And it's quiet again - \*

The water ripples out around her -

She moves through it, surrounded by the beauty of nature, immersed in it, at one -

201

EXT. LAKE - MOMENTS LATER

201

Vera walks out of the water, lifting her face to the warm sun.... Something in her transformed by this experience...

Up ahead, she sees something, by a tree trunk. Goes over, and picks up -

An aqua-blue bird's egg. Fragile. Perfect. But for a single crack.

202 INT. TRAIN - LATER

202

Vera sits in a train compartment, pen in hand, a notebook on her lap, making hasty notes. It's as though a dam has burst - her hand can't move quickly enough across the page.

She stops, as a memory of Roland's voice suddenly fills her head -

ROLAND'S VOICE

I kept quiet because I was moved by it, I found it beautiful...and you seem an impossible person to say that to.

Vera gazes out of the window, as the past floods back....

CUT TO:

203 EXT. GREEN GLADE, BUXTON - DAY, 1914, A MEMORY

203 \*

Vera is with Roland in the green glade.

VERA

You really - don't think me ridiculous?

He smiles, shakes his head.

VERA (CONT'D)

What if I told you I want to be a writer - and - I even dream of earning a living by it?

Roland smiles gently at her.

ROLAND

Don't you need some experience first?

VERA

Of course!

CUT BACK TO:

204 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

204

Vera gazes at her page of writing, overwhelmed by the memory...

205 EXT./INT. PORTER'S LODGE, SOMERVILLE - DAY 205

A porter carrying the post walks into the lodge, and over to the pigeon holes. He starts to distribute the letters.

CLOSE ON - his hand holding a letter addressed to "Vera Brittain". He places it in her pigeon hole.

206 EXT./INT. SOMERVILLE/PORTER'S LODGE - DAY 206

A new, calmer Vera walks through the gates into college - She walks into the porter's lodge, checks her pigeon hole mechanically - she's surprised to see a note there. She opens it. It reads simply: "May I see you again? George."

Vera looks up - smiles softly to herself.

CUT TO BLACK:

AS, ON-SCREEN, THE FOLLOWING WORDS APPEAR:

"Testament of Youth" was published in 1933, to immediate acclaim. The first print-run sold out in a day, and the book became the voice of a generation. It remains in print to this day, as one of the most powerful war memoirs ever written.

Vera became a life-long pacifist and campaigner for women's rights, and a successful novelist and journalist.

She and George married and had two children. Their daughter, Shirley Williams, became a leading force in British politics, and now sits in the House of Lords.

**The End.**