

Testament of Youth

by
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Based on the autobiography of Vera Brittain

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

7

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

7

Vera surfaces in a beautiful lake, shimmering in a spring

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

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

Her mother comes over and takes her arm.

MRS. BRITTAİN
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. BRITTAİN
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 CACOPHANY!

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. BRITTAİN
Vera! Come back and apologise now!

Vera's expression is defiant. Mrs. Brittain hovers anxiously

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. BRITTAIN

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

MRS. BRITTAIN

Your father hoped you'd be happy, dear -

VERA

That piano could pay for a whole year at Oxford!

MR. BRITTAIN

Ah, here we go!

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 BRITTAIN

Now stop it! I'm simply concerned you're turning yourself into a bluestocking, because they *

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.

13 EXT. GARDEN, MELROSE - TWILIGHT

13

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
 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...

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

*

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

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

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. BRITTAI N' S VOICE
Vera!

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

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

Vera is overjoyed - she hugs her father.

VERA
Thank you Daddy!

MR. BRITTAI N
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. BRITTAI N
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 OMITTED

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

VERA
(flustered)
Thank you.

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!

w 141 Tm /TT2 1 k b r i t h i n g t h a i r, c h a t t e r i n g,

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. BRITTAI N

VERA!

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

MRS. BRITTAI N

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

*
*
*

She takes in Vera's very smart outfit.

*

MRS. BRITTAI N (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. BRITTAI N

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. BRITTAI N

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. BRITTAI N

No.

Her mother puts the final one on her.

MRS. BRITTAI N

That's the one!

Vera pulls it off.

VERA

Awful!

Mrs. Brittain sighs with irritation.

MRS. BRITTAI N

What's in the letter, dear?

Vera keeps stubbornly silent.

MRS. BRITTAI N (CONT' D)

You can't go hiding things in this way, Vera, now tell me!

VERA

(tense)

It's from Oxford.

MRS. BRITTAI N

(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. BRITTAI N

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. BRITTAI N

What? Oh. Perfect, yes.

Vera sighs, looks at her reflection.

MR. BRITTAI N (CONT' D)

Was that the right answer?

Mother and daughter share a smile.

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

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 (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. BRIT TAIN O. S.

VERA!

They turn to see her mother descending on them. *

MRS. BRIT TAIN

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!

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!

EDWARD

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

VERA

VERA

*

VERA
Rol and? Are you al right?

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. BRITAIN
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. BRITAIN
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?

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

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

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 -

*
*

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!

68

INT. CHARING CROSS TRAIN STATION - DAY

68

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!

69 INT. CAFE, TRAIN STATION - LATER

69

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.

*

*

*

*

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 *
All ready! *

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.

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,
fianceses, 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
Rol and 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)

*
*

VERA
(di smay)
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

OMMI TTED.

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! *

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) OMITTED.

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.

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

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

*

Nurse Scott sees her.

*

NURSE SCOTT
 Since you're so eager, Britain,
 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 - *

91

EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE, LOWESTOFT - DAY

91

Vera, Edward, Geoffrey, and Victor are in the Leighton's
front garden with a flamboyantly-dressed Mrs. Leighton. The
family house is perched dramatically above the beach. *

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.

*
*

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?

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!

ROLAND
Marry me Vera.

*
*

VERA
Yes. Al right!

*
*

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.

*

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. BRITTAI N
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?"

INT. FISHBONG JOHAL- DATER

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! *

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. BRITAIN
(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 Britain?

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	OMMI TTED.	111	
112pt1	OMMI TTED.	112pt1	*
112pt2	EXT. BEACH, BRIGHTON - DAY Gulls, flying against a grey sky, keening angrily.	112pt2	
112pt3	Vera, standing on the beach, gazing stunned and numb into the waves as they crash and suck at the shingle...	112pt3	
112pt4	A small crab scuttles across her shoe, Vera barely noticing -	112pt4	*
	CUT TO:		
112pt5	HOTEL BEDROOM - A numb, blank Vera sits in an armchair, anxiously watched by her parents, a cup of coffee in front of her. There's still no sound.	112pt5	*
	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	OMMI TTED.	112pt6	

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, funnily 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. *

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 hysteric. 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' S VOI CE

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

She stops, thinks. Takes up her pen again.

VERA' S VOI CE

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 (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.

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 tommyes, standing in a
trench, waiting silently to go over the top.

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. BRITTAI N
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. BRITTAI N
Damson. *

VERA
My favourite. *

MRS. BRITTAI N
Some rollers for your hair...you
said your last ones were lost. *

Vera nods, touched by her mother's efforts. *

MRS. BRITTAI N *

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

They share a smile.

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

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.

137 INT. GERMAN WARD - LATER

137

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.

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.

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!
 Bunni ekins!

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
Natürlich.

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

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
Etapes 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. *

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

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 tomies 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 tomies 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!

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.

842tem)

*

*

*

*

*

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

*

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. BRITTAI N *

Vera! Thank goodness! *

VERA *

(low, to her father) *

How is she? *

His expression shows his concern...Vera heads over. *

VERA *

Mother...? *

MRS. BRITTAI N *

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. BRITTAI N *

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. BRITTAIN
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) 171

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, ARMI STICE 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, ARMI STICE 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

*

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 OMITTED. 182 *

183 Now 181B 183 *

184 Now 181A 184 *

185 Now 181C 185 *

186 OMITTED. 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 shell hole, 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

*

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.

*

VERA

But I can read books anytime!
(Realising, steadying 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 Britain!

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. STREET, 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!

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 Britain!

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.

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

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:

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