

**Testament of Youth**

by  
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Based on the autobiography of Vera Brittain

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 head bandaged, 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 -

She starts to sink, folding in on herself, but with a last effort pushes up, and starts to slowly FLOAT UPWARDS -

- towards the surface -

She 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 on the lake side - 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!

Victor RUNS down the pier, DIVES in and swims towards her.

He surfaces to see her grinning face. He 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.

7A OMMITTED 7A \*

8 EXT. EDGE OF LAKE - A LITTLE LATER 8

Vera is finishing getting dressed behind a towel held up by Edward. Victor can be seen further away, hurriedly pulling on his trousers. \*

EDWARD  
So what about you and Victor?

VERA  
What about us?

EDWARD  
Come on....

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 a shivering Victor comes over, holding his shoes.

VICTOR  
I'm a block of ice! \*

Vera smiles, hands the towel to him, holding it out like a cover for his bare torso. He takes it, grinning, and dries off. \*

Edward, finishing getting dressed, checks his watch. \*

EDWARD  
Come on, we should be getting back. \*

VERA  
(disappointed)  
Do we have to? \*

EDWARD

Mother and father are expecting us.

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

VERA

(playful) \*

They're always expecting us!  
They're driving me mad!

VICTOR

I like your parents.

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  
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 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 - she smiles, loving it -

\*

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 front garden 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 - 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 garden path and strides up it, 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 manoeuvring a GRAND PIANO, overseen by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. BRITTAIN, 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 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 stops her 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. 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 again!

VERA

(bursting)

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

MR. BRITTAIN

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. BRITTAIN

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

MRS BRITTAIN

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, chucks 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 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* don't find husbands!

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. We see him from Vera's perspective.

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've 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.

EDWARD

Oxford really means a lot to you, doesn't it?

VERA

(heart felt)

I can't breathe here...

Edward smiles in understanding, he plays a few bars.

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

(thrown)  
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. The boys are ribbing Vera, who takes it in good humour - she teases Edward back, giving as good as she gets.

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...

ROLAND  
I'll stick with wonderful.

VERA  
At least you won't be buried alive in Buxton.

EDWARD  
Come on, think of all the gossip you're providing the local ladies with!

VERA  
Talking of which, Mrs Fraser mixed her china sets at dinner last week. The whole town's buzzing with it!

EDWARD  
The triviality of female lives...

Vera playfully swats Edward.

VERA  
Don't you dare...!

ROLAND  
(a chuckle)  
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 - a soft smile.

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

21 INT. HALLWAY/LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - MORNING 21

Vera is in front of a hallway mirror, checking her appearance - she's made more effort than usual with her dress. Satisfied, she walks on down the hall when she hears voices in the living room. She stops to listen.

EDWARD O.S.

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

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

MR. BRITTAIN

Three years of extra expense!

EDWARD

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

MR. BRITTAIN

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

We'll have the whole summer.

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

VICTOR

Good bye.

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. And  
possibly slightly derivative.

ROLAND

(stung)  
Derivative.

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 meet 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

(rapid)

I know you're only here for two nights but Oxford can get chilly you know, it's in a basin-

VERA

Aunt -

AUNT BELLE

I bought you an extra nightie just in case -

VERA

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 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

A mud-splattered Roland and Edward are playing rugby on a  
school playing field, running with the ball. Edward throws it  
out of the scrum, he seems to look across at Vera and give  
her a small smile.

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.

33A INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - DAY

33A

The tiniest smile plays on Vera's lips as she sits, listening to her mother and the gossiping ladies.

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. BRITTAIN

VERA!

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

MRS. BRITTAIN

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

She takes in Vera's very smart outfit.

MRS. BRITTAIN (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. BRITTAIN

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. BRITTAIN

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. BRITTAIN

No.

Her mother puts the final one on her.

MRS. BRITTAIN

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 - referencing the letter -

EDWARD

But you have to work on your Latin.

Vera scans the letter, laughs.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

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.

39

EXT. SCHOOL APPROACH, UPPINGHAM - SECONDS LATER

39

Vera moves through groups of people, until she spots Roland, in his cadet uniform, standing talking to his parents, Mrs. LEIGHTON, a tall woman in flamboyant dress, both sharply bright and playful, 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!

MRS LEIGHTON

(playfully sly)

Ah, now suddenly she's becoming a very intriguing young lady, don't you think Roland?

Roland's smile is reserved. Vera interprets this 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. WOODLAND PATH - CONTINUOUS

39A

Roland and Vera walk silently through the garden. 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 -

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? - but she ploughs on.

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

(glimmer of a smile)  
For someone who wants to be a writer...

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 proper at all!

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. ON Roland's expression - irritated that they still haven't lost her.

But he sees she's before a painting, absorbed in it. He guides Vera carefully towards an exit, right behind an oblivious Aunt Belle...

46 INT. STAIRWELL, ART GALLERY - CONTINUOUS 46

They burst like truants into a secluded stairwell, laughing.

ROLAND

I thought we'd lost her at the impressionists!

Vera laughs.

VERA

Aunt Belle's got eyes in the back of her head!

ROLAND

We're being very bad, you know, we're going to get a terrible report.

VERA

Mother won't be surprised. She finds me constantly exasperating. She thinks she has a very odd daughter.

ROLAND

Not odd, just different.

They stop, Roland turns to her - both suddenly aware they're alone. Roland is close now - he wants to kiss her.

VERA

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 both see her. Roland keeps looking at Vera, tightens his grip in frustration - 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 INT. TRAIN STATION - LATER

47

The three of them are walking through 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, that's what I need. 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 is finishing changing into her night dress. As she  
turns, she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and  
spots a faint purple bruise and a red mark on her upper arm,  
where Roland gripped her. She smiles in soft delight, as the  
memory of that moment floods back to her...touches the marks  
with her fingertips, then turns with a start, as Edward  
knocks at the door then walks 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 all happening so fast -

EDWARD

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. BRITTAIN

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. BRITTAIN

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!

He looks at her - his expression haunted.

MR. BRITTAIN

You're so young -

VERA

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

A pause -

VERA (CONT'D)

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

ON Mr. Brittain - the beginnings of self-doubt.

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. BRITTAIN

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. BRITTAIN

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?! I can't 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.

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 OMITTED.

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 us 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!

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 nods.

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, 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. They turn to one another, their fingertips lightly touching on the table.

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 -

AUNT BELLE

What? Too deep for words?

She sees it really is - sighs in sad sympathy.

70

INT. CHARING CROSS TRAIN STATION - LATER

70

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

We'll 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, fiancées, 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

Thank you.

Vera suddenly feels her emotions, her exhaustion. Victor sees, 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.

VICTOR

What would you do?

VERA

I don't know...nurse? There's a  
call for volunteers.

Vera shrugs, they smile.....He wants to find the right words  
for her.

VICTOR

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

Vera's face - eager to believe.

VERA

Do you think?

VICTOR

I'm sure of it.

She smiles - grateful -

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.

74

EXT. PORTER'S LODGE, SOMERVILLE - DAY

74

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 an astonished Miss Lorimer.

MISS LORIMER  
Nursing?! What on earth for?

VERA  
They need volunteers.

MISS LORIMER  
And I'm sure there are lots of  
eager young women out there who  
haven't embarked on promising  
careers at Oxford!

VERA  
I need to do something, I can't  
stay here buried in books, not now!

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

VERA  
(chastened)  
I'm sorry...I didn't mean...

MISS LORIMER  
This crisis needs people who can  
stand back and reflect. How can you  
think of giving up a golden  
opportunity you've worked so hard  
for?

Vera looks down, says nothing.

MISS LORIMER (CONT'D)  
So your mind's quite made up.

A pause - Then -

VERA  
(shaken)  
Yes, it is.

Miss Lorimer turns away from her. Vera realises she's  
dismissed.

VERA (CONT'D)  
Thank you, for.....

She peters out, and heads for the door. Throws Miss Lorimer one last look, but she still has her back turned.

ON Miss Lorimer - the upset showing on her face.

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 happy 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.

Sister Jones' steely gaze lands on Vera, she stops before her.

SISTER JONES

Hands.

Vera holds out her hands. Sister Jones examines them, sees they're smooth, white, spotless - a small sneer. She drops them, walks on.

SISTER JONES

Airs and graces will not be tolerated, especially from those who've come down from an ivory tower. If you've any doubts, the door's there, you can leave now.

Silence. No one moves. Sister Jones gazes sternly at them.

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.

(MORE)

SISTER JONES V.O. (cont'd)

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 THAT DAY

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?

Behind her sits a tray of silver surgical instruments.

VERA

I did, Sister.

The Sister's eyes beam in on Vera, who looks tired.

SISTER JONES

And would you say you've done a good job?

Silence - Vera is thrown, but holds her nerve.

VERA

I - think so.

SISTER JONES

You think so. Really.

She reveals a tray of instruments underneath that haven't been touched.

SISTER JONES

What about these?

VERA

(shame)

I forgot -

SISTER JONES

You forgot. And what if someone had used them, not realising?!

VERA

I'm sorry -

SISTER JONES

It's human lives that could be put at risk! And I thought you were supposed to be intelligent.

Vera smarts - but says nothing.

SISTER JONES

Well get on with it, then!

Vera hurries forward, she catches another Nurse - Scott - smirking.

SISTER JONES

(disgusted, to Scott)

Help her, will you. (Calling after Vera) We're waiting!

84 INT. ANNEXE - CONTINUOUS

84

Vera is hurriedly sterilising the instruments as Nurse Scott enters - she manages to drop some clattering to the floor. Vera is shaken, as Nurse Scott helps her pick them up, her expression milking every second of it.

NURSE SCOTT

Bloody bluestockings....

Vera looks at her, dismayed.

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, 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.

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 the worry.

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 -

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. He's hardly said a word,  
he's outside - just sitting  
there...

She gestures beyond the window, to a field.

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

Vera approaches Roland, sitting in a bracken field adjacent to the family house, gazing out across the sea. 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, GRASSY SLOPE - A LITTLE LATER 94

Roland and Vera are sitting next to each other. Gulls keen overhead. The mood is quiet.

ROLAND

Harrison's brother came back from leave engaged to his fiancée. 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. (Pause) Home leave makes you soft.

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

Marry me Vera, next time I'm home!

VERA

(emotional)

Alright. Yes!

ROLAND

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.

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. BRITTAIN

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

A scene of barely contained chaos. 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 propagand 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.

VERA

Can I get you anything?

GEOFFREY

Edward...?

She knows what he's asking.

VERA

We had a letter yesterday, he's  
well.

A pause. Geoffrey's mind wanders.

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.

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. BRITTAIN  
(adjusting her)  
Positively bridal.

Vera glances at a clock.

VERA (CONT'D)  
Half an hour to go. He'll have  
had a long journey, he'll be  
tired.

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 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 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

It's 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. 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, 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, reading a letter. On the desk before her are a few other letters, and blank writing paper.

VERA  
(under her breath)  
Thank you for your letter...I'm  
sorry not to be of more help...

Frustrated, she screws the letter up into a ball, chucks it away, then picks up a pen, and starts intently writing.

116 INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY 116

Vera notices Betty and two VADs. They're looking at her, obviously wanting to say something. Vera turns impatiently away - she has no interest in hearing it -

BETTY  
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.

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, thank you, and I'm sorry to  
bother you again, 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 saying 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. You think I'll throw myself around like some hysteric. And why should you be the messenger of some terrible end? You've never even met me!

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 one 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) Did he - suffer 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 (SPRING)

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 (SPRING) 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. The shock...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 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 (WINTER)

132

Vera, composed and pale, sits opposite her parents.

VERA

My mind's made up.

MRS. BRITTAIN

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.

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

MRS. BRITTAIN

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 puts down some jam.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Damson.

Vera sighs, exasperated.

As Mrs. Brittain moves off again, Mr Brittain touches Vera's hand - his expression asking for her understanding....

Mrs. Brittain comes back with more things.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Some rollers for your hair...and cream. It'll help stop your hands chapping. And don't forget those poor elbows, it's easily done.

A beat. Vera reaches out, takes her mother's hand.

VERA

I'll make sure I use it. And I'll write every day, I promise.

Mrs Brittain nods, trying to be alright. Mr. Brittain's eyes glimmer with admiration for her.

MR. BRITTAIN

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

They share a smile.

133 INT. ARMY LORRY, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE, FRANCE - DAY 133

Vera, in her VAD uniform, sits in a crowded army lorry as it pulls into Etaples military base. It's raining outside.

Through the window, she sees wounded men on stretchers carried past, army personnel and nurses hurrying along, red cross vehicles rumbling by. Some Chinese labourers are building a new hut, shouting to each other in Chinese. Her fellow passengers, all army personnel, leap up and bustle out.

Vera gets to her feet, takes hold of her suitcase and climbs out. Her feet immediately sink into the MUD of Norther France. From somewhere comes the distant sound of song. It's soldiers singing: "Good bye-eee, Don't Cry-eee, Wipe the tear, Baby dear, from your eye-eee..."

As the army lorry departs, the sight that greets her is desolate - mud, rain, and a warren of makeshift wood and tin huts.

134 EXT. ETAPLES - SECONDS LATER 134

A wet Vera enters a small courtyard of huts, her feet sinking into a quagmire of mud.

Then she sees him - outside one of the huts, a shellshocked Tommy, wrapped in an old army blanket, standing there shivering and soaked. The look in his eyes cuts right through her. Two nurses emerge to encourage him back inside, but he seems not to hear them.

Vera sees a young VAD, Dorothy, pass, and approaches her, showing her a piece of paper.

VERA

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

Dorothy looks at the paper, points.

DOROTHY

That hut there. (grimace) You're  
under Sister Milroy - good luck.

And with that, she's gone.

135

EXT. HUTS, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE - LATER

135

Vera, now drenched with rain, 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. (a  
passing nod to how wet Vera is)  
Plenty of time to change later.

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.

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  
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  
(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 (AUTUMN) 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.

## HOPE

(low, as she passes Vera)  
The Germans are getting closer.

Their faces are tense, but they carry on. The ward is lit up by flashes of hard, white light from the shell fire - the strain showing on all the 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...Dorothy, the young VAD, comes up to her.

DOROTHY

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.

DOROTHY

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 INT. BRITISH HUT - LATER

152

Vera is carrying a gramophone player across the ward, back to Edward's bed, where he lies sleeping. She sets it up beside him, pulls the hand across to play a scratchy old record. The music swells through the hut, as she strokes his forehead.

153 OMMITTED 153

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.

A pause -

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, and climbs up into the bus.

160 EXT. CANVAS HUTS, ETAPLES - DAY (SPRING/SUMMER) 160

An exasperated Vera, clutching a telegram, marches between the tents of Etaples.

161 INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY 161

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 lying on a chaise longue, reading a magazine like a convalescent.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Vera! What a relief!

She looks pale and strained, but not seriously ill. Vera looks at her in dismay.

VERA

Mother...?

MRS. BRITTAIN

I've had a terrible turn. Cook left, and you can't get anything in the shops anymore! Butter, meat, eggs....what am I going to make for you and Edward?

VERA

I thought you'd had a breakdown...

MRS. BRITTAIN

Nothing's been done in the house. It's all quite dreadful.

Vera sinks into a seat.

MRS BRITTAIN (CONT'D)

I'm so glad you're home!

Vera looks at her - understanding and exasperation combined.

CUT TO:

164 VERA - 164

1) SCULLERY YARD, MELROSE. Sleeves rolled up, furiously beating carpets -

2) HALLWAY, MELROSE. Vera vigorously 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, 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, in No Man's Land, 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. 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. Spring's out there waiting. I'm going to help you, whether you like it or not.

She smiles her warm smile at Vera - a lifeline.

190 EXT. SOMERVILLE GARDENS - DAY (SPRING) 190

Vera and Winifred walk through the gardens together, talking animatedly, smiling. Vera is much better.

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. She softens just slightly.

MISS LORIMER

Miss Brittain. What is it?

Vera approaches.

VERA

I'm sorry to disturb you -

A pause. Vera is nervous.

VERA (CONT'D)

I wanted to say thank you for allowing me to come back again. I do really appreciate it.

MISS LORIMER

I can't tell you the bother it caused.

A pause.

MISS LORIMER (CONT'D)

If that's everything?

VERA

Actually, no - (deep breath) I'd like to change courses to history.

Silence. Miss Lorimer looks at her, unreadable. Vera squirms.

VERA (CONT'D)

I feel I need to study real events,  
I mean, why things happen the way  
they do, between people and nations  
- and what, if anything, we can do  
to stop or change them.

Silence.

VERA (CONT'D)

I realise this looks like a  
reaction to the last four years,  
and possibly it's a sign I'm a mess  
and it won't solve anything - but  
I've given it a lot of thought and -  
it's the only way I can try to make  
sense of things.

Miss Lorimer gets to her feet, walks round her desk, glances  
briefly at the photo of her dead brother. Vera has no idea  
which way this is going.

MISS LORIMER

I understand you were at the front?

Vera is surprised at this turn in the conversation - she  
nods.

MISS LORIMER (CONT'D)

I did wonder about you, as a matter  
of fact.

They hold each other's gaze - much is unspoken.

MISS LORIMER

I'll see what I can do.

Vera sees the sympathy and understanding in her face.

VERA

Thank you.

Miss Lorimer nods. Then -

MISS LORIMER

"There is some soul of goodness in  
things evil, would men observingly  
distill it out." Henry the Fifth,  
Miss Brittain, one of my  
favourites. Both history, and great  
literature. They don't have to be  
mutually exclusive.

VERA

(a smile)

No.

MISS LORIMER

Well off you go. You've given me  
yet another headache to deal with.

But this time, they share a warm smile.

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.

MALE SPEAKER

There's talk among our politicians  
of how to make Germany pay for the  
last four years...

Vera hears cheers, stops before a poster outside which reads:  
"War Reparations - Should Germany pay?"

MALE SPEAKER (CONT'D)

Only recently the German foreign  
minister dared suggest that we're  
all responsible for the War and  
should jointly pay the price! To  
which we say to him, who started  
it?!

More cheers - Vera 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

There's nothing the Kaiser can do  
to compensate the men and women of  
this country, but still, the  
Germans must pay! In money, in  
goods and industry, and most of  
all, in humbled pride!

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 (CONT'D)

History has proved the Huns can't be trusted. 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 and a tooth for a tooth, is a dangerous one, surely. Germany *will* rise again one day, and if her pride is too damaged she'll do so intent on revenge, and the whole cycle could be repeated!

MALE SPEAKER

Are you suggesting we let them walk all over us?

An angry MOTHER pushes her way to the front.

MALE SPEAKER (CONT'D)

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 the Germans!

Cries of support for this - the angry mother wants to get up on the stage - the speaker helps her up.

## ANGRY MOTHER

They killed my eldest at the Somme!  
Then my next one, Harry. (To  
George) And you stand there and  
defend them...!

## GEORGE

I'm not defending what they did -

## AUDIENCE MEMBERS

They're war mongers! They bombed  
our cities first! And our ships!

## GEORGE

We have to look to the future - to  
the world we want to create!

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 (CONT'D)

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 time 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 was dying -

Murmurs - people don't like this. Some get up and walk out.

VERA (CONT'D)

He cried out for a woman he loved, Klara. He faced the end of his life by asking her forgiveness!

Mutterings of disapproval swell louder - Vera looks at the angry mother.

VERA (CONT'D)

I lost a brother 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 their hands too that I was holding - 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)

I speak to those of us who were left behind. The mothers, sisters, the 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 *might* have some meaning if we stand together now, and say no! No to fighting, 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 195

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...

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.

205A EXT. OXFORD LANE - DAY 205A

As a new, calmer Vera walks back towards College, Winifred joins her, wheeling her bike. They walk and chat together in easy companionship.

206 EXT./INT. SOMERVILLE/PORTER'S LODGE - DAY 206

Vera and Winifred walk through the gates into college and into the porter's lodge.

They check their pigeon holes for post - Vera's surprised to see a note there. She opens it. It reads simply: "May I see you again? George."

Vera looks up - catches Winifred's eye, then looks away, smiling softly.

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 writer 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.**