

Testament of Youth

by
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Based on the autobiography of Vera Brittain

Revised Second Draft polish

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CLOSE ON -

The face of VERA (25); 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. She's in a nurse's crisp, white uniform. A swell of revellers push past, sweeping her away with them.

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

EXT. LONDON STREET - EVENING

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 crowd thickens, and slows to a halt. Faces turn upwards, waiting - and suddenly the street lights come on, one after the other, in a ripple of magical light the length of the street.

The crowd erupts into cheers. Vera manages a smile, but the sound cuts in and out, as though she's having trouble connecting.

EXT. LONDON STREET NEAR ST PAUL'S - EVENING

Vera is moving through the dense throng on Ludgate Hill, having to elbow her way. Up ahead, through the sea of faces, she catches a sudden flash of an OLD HAG's face - wizened, grey, the stuff of nightmares - staring at her. She gasps, stumbles back -

Turns - for a split-second only, a towering, black STEAM TRAIN HURLS at her -

But it's a motor car, spilling over with revellers. A WOMAN sits on top swigging from a champagne bottle. A YOUNG SOLDIER, his leg in plaster, sees Vera and leaps out. He grabs her hands, pulling her towards the car. Vera resists. Nearby, couples are dancing.

SOLDIER IN PLASTER

Relax, Nurse, it's over!

He pulls her into a hectic dance, next to the others. As Vera spins round, faces fly past, she sees her again - the old HAG - flashing past once, twice -

Vera is trapped, the panic rises - she breaks free -

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

She sees the steps to St. Paul's looming ahead of her, and stumbles up them, to the cathedral doors.

INT. ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - MOMENTS LATER

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. In her mind - a faint, rhythmic whispering, like the distant chugging of steam engine wheels -

A rich oil painting looms up and seems to leap out at her - a Biblical image of Hagar, a woman in rags, lost in the desert. Vera reads the caption beneath.

VERA
(a whisper)
"Watchman, will the night soon
pass?"

The rhythmic chugging merges into whispers now -

- low, desperate whispers.

As her eyes adjust, she sees, sitting in a pew, a woman kneeling in prayer, hands clasped, muttering under her breath. Gradually, other figures start to take shape in the penumbra - kneeling figures, figures with their hands clenched, or seated in numb silence, women all of them -

Woman after woman after woman, until the church is full of them, like an ocean of grief separated from the world outside...their whispers grow louder -

Vera puts her hands over her ears to block the sound -

CUT TO:

A BLACK STEAM TRAIN -

Looms above us, screeching mechanically -

AND WE CUT
FAST TO:

EXT. BRITTAIN FAMILY HOME, BUXTON - DAY

Vera, her face full of youthful energy, BURSTS through a garden gate -

- and starts to run down a white country road that snakes across hills. She holds onto her hat, her long skirts flapping.

A caption: **Four years earlier.**

Behind her, her mother appears. A flustered, organised woman in her late 40s.

MRS. BRITTAIN
Vera, please!

Vera turns back, elated, laughing.

VERA
They're here! They're coming!

MRS. BRITTAIN
But -!

But Vera is gone, running towards the black dot of an approaching car, holding onto her hat.

EXT. THE LONG WHITE ROAD, BUXTON - SECONDS LATER

Vera runs towards the oncoming motorcar with three men inside. The driver hoots. Vera turns and runs alongside them. Inside, her brother EDWARD - 18, elegant, artistic, very private - waves at her, next to him his lanky school friend VICTOR. MR. BRITTAIN, 50's, is at the wheel - a portly industrialist.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, MELROSE - MINUTES LATER

The car, escorted by a breathless Vera, comes to a stop before the imposing Victorian family home; Melrose. Servants immediately appear to help with the luggage. As Edward climbs out, Vera throws her arms round his neck.

VERA
(barely catching her
breath)
At last!

Edward grins, swings her round.

EDWARD
Big sis...

Mrs. Brittain comes flapping towards them.

MRS. BRITTAIN
Vera, the dust on you!

VERA
(a whisper to Edward)
They're driving me insane.

Edward steps over to peck his mother fondly on the cheek.

EDWARD
Mother...

Victor approaches Vera, holding a small bunch of wild flowers. He's boyish, with an eager, open quality. He offers the flowers to her.

VICTOR
For you.

Vera takes them with a smile. She knows he has a crush on her and finds it sweet.

VERA
Thank you.

EDWARD
We had to stop three times on the way.

MRS. BRITTAIN
Marigolds, how lovely.

Victor realises he has nothing for Mrs. Brittain.

VICTOR
Oh. I am sorry...

MRS. BRITTAIN
No, no dear, that's the right way round, I'm sure.

Mr. Brittain, helping unload the luggage, carries some over.

MR. BRITTAIN
The famous one's late, I'm afraid.

EDWARD
He's not famous Father, his parents write books, that's all.

Vera and Edward exchange an amused look. With Victor, they head for the house.

VERA

I've heard nothing but Roland this, Roland that all week. Father even sat down and opened a book himself, he's so keen to impress.

VICTOR

Roland is hard to please.

VERA

(dry)
Really.

VICTOR

Although he'll love you all, I'm sure.

INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - CONTINUOUS

They enter the house.

VERA

We'll have to see if we love him back.

VICTOR

Oh you will, he's brilliant.

VERA

Modest too I hope.

VICTOR

Absolutely.

VERA

Modest and brilliant, he sounds dreadful.

Victor is thrown. She smiles and takes them by the arm.

VERA

Quick, before mother traps us.

EXT. MELROSE - CONTINUOUS

Vera, Edward and Victor slip out of the front garden just as Mrs. Brittain emerges, catching a glimpse of them.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Edward? Vera?!

But they're gone, with peals of laughter. She sighs.

EXT. PAVILION GARDENS, BUXTON - LATER

Vera, still high with excitement, runs to a bench on the edge of the gardens, as Victor and Edward follow. Small groups are out walking and talking in the Spring sunshine.

VERA

Oops, Mrs Ellinger's spotted us.

Edward lights a cigarette. Vera nods to an elegant Edwardian lady a little distance away, with her two adult children. Mrs. Ellinger smiles back.

VERA

(to Victor)

By lunch the whole town'll know
you're here, by teatime they'll
have us married.

VICTOR

How terrifying.

VERA

Although she won't tell Mrs.
Woods, she's not talking to her
because she let her daughter out
unchaperoned, and Mrs. Woods
won't pass it on to Mrs. Finch
because she mixed her dinner sets
recently, which in Buxton is the
most vulgar crime.

VICTOR

It sounds like a complicated
place.

VERA

It's a living death - and I'm
trapped in it!

VICTOR

(concerned)

Vera, I'm so sorry.

The sincerity of his face makes her suddenly smile.

VERA

Come on!

She leaps up and pulls him down a street opposite, to a hat shop.

Edward stubs his cigarette and follows. Vera is gazing in the window at a beautiful display of fashion hats.

VERA
 (sighing)
 Look at those.

EDWARD
 Even prison has its consolations.

She grins.

VERA
 Last one to the pavilion buys the
 ice cream!

She runs off. The two men laugh, and follow her.

EXT. MELROSE - LATER

The three of them are walking towards the front door when they hear the sound of shouting from inside.

MR. BRITTAIN O.S.
 I will not be disobeyed in my own
 house!

Vera freezes. Then realises -

VERA
 Oh no, the post...

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, MELROSE - CONTINUOUS

They walk into the hallway to see brown paper packaging on the floor, and books strewn across it. Mrs. Brittain throws Vera a distressed look, as Mr. Brittain comes thundering down the stairs with a new armful of books, all of them academic. He throws them dramatically on the floor.

MR. BRITTAIN
 Hidden under the bed in her room!
 I thought we settled this!

VERA
 Father, look -

MR. BRITTAIN
 You are NOT going to Oxford!

VERA
 (flaring)
 Give me one good reason why?!

MR. BRITTAIN
 Because I said so!

VERA

I see, the superior masculine
mind at work! How rational!

Mrs. Brittain looks panic-stricken.

MR. BRITTAIN

Do NOT speak to me that way! I've
wasted enough money already on
your education!

VERA

(the injustice of it)
I'm the one with the brains!
(Catching herself) Edward's
clever too but -

EDWARD

(interjecting)
Vera's right, father -

MR. BRITTAIN

What good are brains to a girl if
she won't do as she's told!

They're both shouting now.

VERA

What, sit in Buxton with you and
Mother until I rot to death?!

MR. BRITTAIN

You could try playing the piano I
bought you, for a start!

VERA

I'm not playing that piano! The
money it cost could pay for a
whole year at Oxford!

MR. BRITTAIN

(to his wife)
She'll never catch a husband!

VERA

I don't want one!

On Victor - a little crestfallen at this.

VERA

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

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

Everyone is caught by the moment. After a pause -

ROLAND
(small smile)
That's clear, then.

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

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, BUXTON - NIGHT

Vera is sitting up in bed, reading a book, when there's a knock at the door.

EDWARD O.S.
Vera. It's me.

Vera hesitates, but doesn't reply. She wants to be alone.

The sound of violin playing drifts through the door. Vera smiles - relents. Opens the door.

Edward walks in, playing his violin, a beautiful piece. He finishes, puts it down.

VERA
One of yours?

EDWARD
Vera's mood. Listen.

He plays again - a few sharp notes that capture her fury. Vera smiles.

EDWARD
He needs to be handled, Vera, you know that.

VERA
I know, I do...

EDWARD
(tender)
I'll have a word with him.

Edward plays a few notes to express his trepidation. They laugh.

INT. LANDING, MELROSE - LATER

It's the middle of the night, the house is quiet. As the violin music plays over, Vera, in her dressing gown, creeps across the landing, being careful not to make any noise, and down the stairs.

INT/EXT. KITCHEN/BACK DOOR, MELROSE - NIGHT

Vera has the back door open and is searching outside, in and around the bins, when a noise in the kitchen makes her turn. She steps back inside to see Roland, sitting nearby.

ROLAND
Looking for something?

Vera quickly smooths down her hair. His self-assurance riles and attracts her.

VERA
None of your business.

He holds up a book.

ROLAND
It wouldn't be Wordsworth, would it? Or (reading) a critical appraisal of Shelley?

She sees him with her rather tattered text books.

VERA
(fierce)
You -! Give me those!

She takes them, examines them for damage, then leafs through the pages of one, as though looking for something.

ROLAND
All these romantics, it can't be good for you.

VERA
Don't worry, they have very little influence.

ROLAND
(a smile)
So I saw earlier.

She flashes him a look, gathers up the books.

ROLAND CONT.
I'm sorry about the bad timing, by the way.

VERA

It's of no importance to me!

Vera heads for the door, then turns back to him.

VERA

I know to you this is just some
amusing little episode, it's easy
when a lifetime's advantage is on
your side; but for me, to have
the chance to - to -

Exasperated by her emotional rawness, she marches out. Roland is touched. He picks up a piece of paper lying beside him, and unfolds it. A poem is scrawled on it.

INT. LANDING, MELROSE - LATER

Vera, holding her books, walks as carefully as she can across the landing towards her room. She glances at a closed door - her parents' room - where a light is on. She hears her father cough, and freezes: she creeps towards the stairs.

INT. CELLAR, MELROSE - NIGHT

Holding a gas lamp, Vera is inside the dank, junk-cluttered cellar. She finds an old table, puts the lamp on it, sweeps the dust off, and starts to arrange her books. She's not giving up.

INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - LATER

It's the early hours of the morning as Vera climbs wearily up out of the cellar, checking to see if anyone's around. She's startled to see Roland sitting on a step waiting for her.

VERA

What're you doing?

He hesitates - as though about to say something - decides against it.

ROLAND

I generally don't sleep. Neither
do you, by the looks of it.

VERA

(grimacing)

Yes, maths equations any day.

ROLAND

Look, I know about the Oxford exams, it's all about technique. I could help. (Pause) It would be a pleasure.

VERA

(quiet)

No. Thank you. I'll pass them by myself or not at all.

He smiles, not particularly surprised.

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, BUXTON - MORNING

Vera is getting dressed for a new day. She's wearing a shirt and skirt; always fashion-conscious, she looks at her image in the mirror. She chooses a brooch, holds it against herself, changes her mind and puts it down.

INT. HALLWAY/LANDING, MELROSE - MINUTES LATER

Vera is walking down the hall when she hears voices in the living room. She stops to listen.

EDWARD O.S.

Why not let her sit the exams.
She's unlikely to pass, Father,
she hasn't had any tuition.

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

EDWARD

I wouldn't feel right about going
myself if she didn't get a shot.

Vera watches Edward, feeling grateful, as her father ponders.

INT. BREAKFAST ROOM, MELROSE - A LITTLE LATER

Vera, Victor and Roland are eating breakfast together in silence. There's tension in the air between Vera and Roland. The tablecloth is very white, flowers decorate the table. Victor is aware of the atmosphere, but puzzled by it.

VICTOR

I thought we could go for a walk.

But no one seems to have heard.

VERA
 (a deep breath, to
 Roland)
 I'm sorry for last night, I was
 abrupt.

ROLAND
 I understand. And me being a
 man...

VERA
 What?

ROLAND
 Well, to a feminist like yourself
 that's instant provocation.

VERA
 I don't dislike men!

ROLAND
 (wry)
 But we are responsible for the
 ills of the world.

VERA
 Your phrase, not mine!

A beat.

ROLAND
 I'm happy to own it.

A truce. Victor looks at them both, feeling a little
 uncomfortable. Vera gazes at Roland, a smile playing round
 her lips; he's unsure what she's going to say.

VERA
 Your hair's sticking up.

His hands fly to his head, as he tries to smooth down his
 thick hair.

ROLAND
 I hate my hair.

VERA
 It's like a brush.

ROLAND
 Thank you.

VICTOR
 I knew you two would hit it off!

Vera smiles at him.

EXT. HILLSIDE, OUTSIDE BUXTON - DAY

A perfect spring day. The four of them are climbing a hill, Roland a little separate to the others. Edward, Victor and Vera reach the top, panting, and survey the view of rolling green hills - England at its most pastoral and beautiful.

VICTOR

Look at that.

Vera gazes out, as the breeze caresses them - feeling the freedom of it. She looks around for Roland, who is standing a small distance away.

VERA

(calling over, her tone
light)

Do you always set yourself apart?

He walks over to join them.

ROLAND

I was thinking.

VERA

We all think. But perhaps you
consider yourself different.

ROLAND

Perhaps.

VERA

Brilliant, even?

ROLAND

I didn't say that.

VERA

But you have won the class prize
every year for the past five.

ROLAND

That's a fact.

VERA

So, not to describe yourself as
brilliant is surely an insult to
the other clever boys in your
class.

VICTOR

Very clever boys.

ROLAND

(smiling, to Edward)

Does she always push this hard?

EDWARD
Now you know what I've suffered.

Vera shoves him, he grins at her.

EXT. THE HILLTOP - A LITTLE LATER

The land has flattened out now. Vera is lagging behind the men, who are gathered at a low wire fence. Victor turns to her.

VICTOR
Vera don't look!

VERA
Don't be silly, what is it?

She pushes him aside, to see a dead squirrel, its body torn, hanging on the wire.

VERA
Oh. Poor thing.

EDWARD
It had quite a struggle, by the looks of it.

VERA
Should we bury it?

Roland matter-of-factly picks the animal off the wire and chucks it to one side.

ROLAND
It's dead, it's over.

VICTOR
(to Vera)
Don't worry, I'm sure its soul's in heaven now.

VERA
(smiling at his quaintness)
Oh Victor...

They start to walk again.

VERA
Do you think it goes to the same heaven as the rest of us?

VICTOR
(thrown)
I suppose so.

VERA

What, we all crowd in together
with the squirrels and rats?

EDWARD

(a shudder)

Not rats, even God must hate
those.

VICTOR

Such a sentimentalist.

ROLAND

(amused)

No she's not.

VICTOR

Worrying about the fate of the
humblest creatures!

ROLAND

She's not worrying. Are you?

Vera looks at him. She's not.

ROLAND

(playful)

She's enquiring. She's like her
name. Vera, the seeker of truth.
It's a dangerous quality.

VERA

You presume to know a lot about
me.

ROLAND

More than you realise.

VERA

What's that supposed to mean?

Roland reaches into his pocket -

ROLAND

I have read one of your poems.

He takes out the poem he found in the pages of her text
book. Vera stares at it, aghast.

EDWARD

Poems! I didn't know you were a
poet!

Edward takes the paper, but Vera snatches it off him.

VERA

I'm not! It's just some silly -

She rounds on Roland, angry and humiliated.

VERA
(low)
- How dare you.

She turns and marches off.

EDWARD
Vera!

Roland is mortified by his mistake.

ROLAND
Oh God. I'm sorry, can I -?

He gestures, indicating he wants to go after her.

Edward nods. Roland sets off.

VICTOR
He's done it now.

Edward raises his eyebrows, not so sure.

EXT. WOODED GLEN - LATER

Roland walks along a path, through some thin trees, to a clearing by a stream. He sees Vera there, throwing stones in the water, fuming. He approaches with caution.

ROLAND
I'm sorry. I had no idea you kept
it secret.

VERA
Really. That's why you stole it
from me and stored it 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 throws another stone at the water.

A long moment.

VERA
I'm not.

ROLAND
No.

VERA
(hesitant)
You really - don't think me
ridiculous?

ROLAND
No.

VERA
What if I told you I want to
write for a living?

She throws a stone defiantly in the water.

VERA CONT.
And even achieve renown for it!

ROLAND
Don't you need some experience
first?

VERA
Of course!

ROLAND
You should write. Your efforts so
far are much better than my own.

Vera looks at him; he sees how much this means to her.

VERA
You'll have to show me.

ROLAND
I suppose I have no choice.

VERA
None.

They smile at one another.

EXT. HILLSIDE, BUXTON - LATER

Edward and Victor are walking on the hillside when they see Roland and Vera coming towards them, talking animatedly. As they watch, and hear the conversation, we stay on Victor -

ROLAND
I grew up with a mother who wrote
constantly, remember.

VERA
How did she manage?

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

Vera throws her head back and laughs. Victor watches -
seeing what's happening.

VICTOR
(pained)
Oh, good.

EXT. HILLSIDE - A LITTLE LATER

Vera is running ahead of the men, back now on the white
road leading to Melrose. She turns and looks as they walk
towards her, the sun glinting on them. So young and
beautiful, so full of life. She watches them, smiling with
pleasure.

INT. CELLAR, MELROSE - NIGHT

Vera, carrying a gas lamp, climbs down the cellar steps to
find a lamp already burning. Unnerved, she looks around.

VERA
Hello?

No sound. She goes over to her table. Lying there, are some
poems. She picks up the first, sees Roland's name at the
top, sits down to read.

EXT. BUXTON - DAY

Vera and the men are out walking in town with Mr. Brittain.
Vera and Roland are to one side, alone. Mr. Brittain,
talking to Victor and Edward, throws suspicious looks
across at them.

ROLAND
I can't believe we're leaving
today.

VERA
It's too soon.

A pause. Roland is hoping she'll mention his poems.

ROLAND
Did you read the verses I left
you?

VERA
Of course.

ROLAND
And?

VERA
(hesitant)
They're expertly crafted.

ROLAND
But -?

VERA
They seem - dry. As though you're
holding back.

ROLAND
Really.

VERA
I couldn't find you in them.

ROLAND
(put out)
Well, I can assure you they're
mine!

VERA
No, I didn't mean -

VICTOR
(calling)
Vera! Roland!

As the others join them -

VICTOR
We were talking politics. The
European situation.

MR. BRITTAIN
Everything alright?

ROLAND
Yes of course. We were
just...discussing it ourselves.
My mother thinks there'll be a
crisis, but not actual war.

MR. BRITTAIN
(amused)
Your Mother? What does your
Father have to say about that?

ROLAND

He's used to her standing her own ground. Actually he's a great believer in women's education.

Mr. Brittain grunts.

ROLAND CONT.

For practical reasons, I should add. He's been quite ill over the past decade, it's the income from Mother's books that's paid for my schooling. And now she's supporting her parents in their old age.

MR. BRITTAIN

Don't they have sons?

ROLAND

They died. Best to cover all bases.

EDWARD

It makes financial sense.

Vera throws Roland a grateful look, still feeling bad, but he won't meet her eye.

MR. BRITTAIN

Aren't you worried all these emancipated women will take your jobs?

EDWARD/VICTOR/ROLAND

(in unison)

No Sir.

MR. BRITTAIN

(grumpy)

The sooner I pack you off back to school, the better.

They laugh.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, BUXTON - LATER THAT DAY

A flurry of activity as the young men bring their luggage onto the platform, ready to depart. Vera and her parents help them. An anxious Vera sees Roland on his own, hauling luggage onto the train, and hurries over to him.

VERA

I offended you earlier.

ROLAND
Not at all.

VERA
You missed lunch, I've hardly
seen you.

ROLAND
I was rising to the challenge.
Here -

He reaches in a pocket, slips her a piece of paper.

ROLAND
I hope you find more feeling in
it.

It's a poem. He focuses his intense gaze on her, then leaps
on board the train. Victor approaches.

VICTOR
Vera...

She takes his hand, feeling affection for him.

VERA
Victor. Good bye.

He nods, his eyes showing his hurt.

EXT. BUXTON STATION - A MINUTE LATER

Vera stands with her parents, waiting to wave goodbye to
the men.

MRS. BRITTAIN
(under her breath)
What did Roland Leighton just
give you?

VERA
Nothing.

MRS. BRITTAIN
Show it to me please.

A pause, then, quietly -

VERA
No.

The steam train hoots. Roland, Edward and Victor lean out
of a window, waving and smiling. Vera gazes at them,
wanting to hold this image in her mind.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Down the long white road we
walked together
Down between the grey hills and
the heather...*

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, BUXTON

Vera is packing an overnight case with clothes, an air of anticipation about her.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*...Where the tawny-crested
Plover cries.*

EXT. BROAD STREET, OXFORD - DAY

Vera, dressed in her smartest outfit with white suede boots, is walking down Broad Street, case in one hand, followed by her chaperone Aunt Belle - a small, chubby woman in her 50s with a faintly comical face, who struggles to keep up with her and never stops talking. She is chattering now, but Vera doesn't hear - Roland's poem reverberates.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*You seemed all brown and soft,
just like a linnet,
Your errant hair had shadowed
sunbeams in it,
And there shone all April
In your eyes.*

Vera stops as a vista greets her eyes - a view of the dreaming spires. A smile spreads across her face.

EXT. SOMERVILLE COLLEGE, OXFORD - DAY

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

AUNT BELLE

Oxford can get terribly cold you know, especially at night. Now, I can leave you an extra nightie just in case -

VERA

No Aunt.

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

AUNT BELLE

I promised your mother to keep a proper eye on you, she does worry you know, and it's no trouble, I brought an extra one -

VERA

Aunt, please!.

AUNT BELLE

It's flannel! (Seeing Vera's face) Final word.

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

MISS LORIMER

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 have a hotel reservation 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.

INT. DINING HALL, SOMERVILLE - EVENING

Dinner-time. We move along a row of women, all dressed in dowdy black or grey, all scoffing heartily and talking. We reach Vera, she stands out in a blaze of coloured silk, like an exotic bird. 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 2
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.

INT. EXAM HALL - MORNING

Vera is sitting in an exam hall full of young women, all
eagerly scribbling away. She stares at the exam paper in
front of her, frozen.

She picks her pen up, takes a deep breath, and starts to
write. Miss Lorimer, walking through the rows, catches her
eye for the briefest moment.

EXT. EXAM HALL, OXFORD - LATER

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
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.

VERA

(wincing)

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

(calling out)

I'm from Buxton! Yes it's a
provincial backwater and yes,
they have debutantes' balls!

Miss Lorimer stops and turns to look at her, her face
unreadable.

VERA CONT.

But this is all I've ever wanted!

A pause, then -

MISS LORIMER

Well. Never mind.

And she's gone. Vera slumps, she can't believe it - she's
blown it.

QUICK, IMPRESSIONISTIC SHOTS OF -

Boots marching -

Young men dressed in smart military uniforms hoist rifles
onto their shoulders -

The rifle metal glints and sparkles in the sun -

VERA V.O.

Dear Roland, no it did not go
well at all. I'm afraid it's
unlikely I'll be joining you and
Edward at Oxford.

INT. VERA'S BEDROOM, MELROSE - DAY

Vera is putting the finishing touches to a pretty summer dress.

ROLAND V.O.
 (overlapping)
 I'm sorry to hear it. I'll be seeing you at Speech Day all the same, I hope?

INT. STAIRCASE/HALLWAY, MELROSE - LATER

Vera comes down the stairs, as her Mother rushes through, bustling to get ready.

VERA V.O.
 Yes, my letter from Somerville should've arrived by then.

Vera sees some letters lying on the doormat. She picks them up. The top one has an Oxford post mark.

VERA V.O.
 I won't have the courage to open it. I don't want to see the look on Father's face when he finds out I've failed.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 Vera!

Vera stuffs the letter in a pocket in her dress and turns to her Mother, who hands her a pretty hat. Vera goes over to a mirror to put it on. Mr. Brittain appears holding a newspaper.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 Do hurry dear, we're late!

MR. BRITTAIN
 Archduke Ferdinand of Austria's been shot dead in Sarajevo.

VERA
 Where's that?

MR. BRITTAIN
 Balkans. The Austrians won't like that one bit.

Mrs. Brittain sees the hat on Vera.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 That's lovely!

Vera smiles, pleased with her reflection.

EXT. PLAYING FIELD, UPPINGHAM - DAY

We see the marching young men again, more fully now, in their gleaming uniforms and stiff, neat rows as they're put through their paces by a barking voice.

On the sidelines, families stand watching the parade. Vera threads between them, scanning the men -

She picks out Edward, Victor....and Roland. She pushes to the front and stops opposite him, smiling playfully; he looks straight at her but remains poker-faced.

HEADMASTER'S V.O.
(speech to gathered
assembly)

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

Vera grins at Roland; he cracks just a little.

HEADMASTER'S V.O. CONT.
Loyal to yourselves, loyal to
kith and kin - but above all
else, loyal to your homeland.

We pull back, to discover row upon row of boys in uniform, ranging in age from 18 down to 13. Suddenly, they look very innocent - very vulnerable.

EXT. PLAYING FIELD - LATER

The headmaster stands on a podium addressing the gathered parents and students on the lawn.

HEADMASTER CONT.
For if a man cannot be useful to
his country, he's better off
dead.

He pauses for a moment's dramatic effect - then climbs off the podium to polite applause.

EXT. GREEN LAWNS - LATER

Groups of people are scattered across the lawn, chit-chatting politely. At the far end, Vera is with Edward, Roland and Victor. Nervously, she hands Edward her envelope and paces while he opens it.

VERA

If I tell Father now it'll
completely ruin the day, but
waiting 'til I'm stuck back at
home with the two of them is
equally awful -

EDWARD

You got in.

VERA

What?

She snatches the letter from him, scans it.

VERA

(stunned)
I got in!

Victor immediately takes her hand and shakes it vigorously.

VICTOR

Well done Vera! Excellent news!

She looks at Roland, unable to believe it.

VERA

I got in!

The delight shows on his face.

EXT. GREEN LAWN - SAME TIME

Her parents are standing there with the headmaster and his
wife, chatting politely, as a breathless Vera comes running
over, holding the letter out to her Father.

VERA

Oxford!

He takes the letter, scans it quickly.

VERA

I did it!

MR. BRITTAIN

Good God.

MRS. BRITTAIN

(proud)
Dear girl!

MR. BRITTAIN

She's a Brittain through and
through!

Vera laughs, loving him for the irony of this - and for the acknowledgement.

EXT. GREEN LAWN - LATER

It's tea time at the gathering; Vera weaves her way through groups of people sipping tea and eating cakes, pursued by Roland, who is trying to get close to her; she plays with him, dodging out of reach.

ROLAND

We'll be able to see one another!

VERA

I don't know, they keep the women under lock and key at Somerville, we can't go anywhere without a chaperone.

ROLAND

Then I'll be your chaperone!

VERA

I'd have to know you much better.

ROLAND

You might not like what you find. I can be horrible, as you know.

VERA

True. On the other hand, so can I.

Roland manages to grab her arm, he pulls her through an arched doorway, into the rose garden.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN, UPPINGHAM - CONTINUOUS

Roland pulls her through the garden. It's secluded, no one is around.

VERA

(laughing)

What're you doing?

He pulls her past beds of beautiful roses.

VERA

Someone will see us!

EXT. THE ROSE GARDEN - SECONDS LATER

Roland pulls Vera through a narrow, flower-covered arch. They're in a kind of bower of trellises;

pink and orange roses foam everywhere, so rich and luxuriant they seem to cushion the two of them like a bed.

Roland is close to her. They look at one another, it's suddenly intense. He reaches up and brushes a wisp of hair from her cheek, then leans in to kiss her - she pulls back slightly.

ROLAND
What are you afraid of?

VERA
Nothing.

ROLAND
(smiling)
That I'll foil your plans, seduce you and lock you away for my plaything?

VERA
Just try.

ROLAND
I intend to

He leans in and kisses her softly. Their first kiss.

ROLAND
(murmuring)
Anything you want, Vera. This is our time. We can make the world what we want it to be.

She looks into his face - a feeling of joy surges through her - she leans forward and kisses him again, more passionately this time.

On VERA - eyes half open, through eyelashes she sees Roland's cheek, caught in sunlight.

IN HER IMAGINATION - seen from ON HIGH, she and Roland roam across a vast field of green. Then, her POV - she looks up, to a limitless blue sky dotted with high cloud - a sense of freedom, of endless horizon -

MRS. BRITTAIN O.S.
VERA!

The vision ends - they break apart, startled.

MRS. BRITTAIN O.S.
Come here right away!

Vera quickly tidies her hair and they make their way out into the garden. Her mother sees them and strides over.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 What do you think you're doing?!
 This is most improper!

Roland steps forward.

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

Vera smiles.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Vera is sitting opposite her parents on the way home, a book on her lap, but she's gazing dreamily out of the window while they both study her.

MR. BRITTAIN
 (gently, teasingly)
 Vera. Oh Vera.

She's oblivious. They glance at one another, raise their eyebrows.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 Vera!

She looks round, caught out.

MR. BRITTAIN
 (wry)
 Literary types don't earn much,
 you know.

VERA
 There'd be two incomes, Father.

He grunts and picks up his paper, cracking it open and hiding behind it. Vera smiles.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 (leaning forward)
 Perhaps you'll want to drop
 Oxford now?

VERA
 Certainly not! Nothing's changed!

She looks away again, annoyed.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM, CHARING CROSS - DAY

Vera strides along a train platform, followed by a huffing and puffing Aunt Belle.

VERA V.O.

Dear Roland, my parents seem to think that since I met you I should lose all ambition. They don't understand that being with you makes the future feel like a limitless horizon, where a woman and man may live equally, work equally - and love equally.

On the concourse, she spots Roland waiting, an apricot pink rose in his hands. She goes up to him.

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!

EXT. LONDON STREET - LATER

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.

EXT. ROUND THE CORNER - CONTINUOUS

Roland quickly swings Vera against a wall and snatches a kiss with her, some passers-by look at them in scandal; just as quickly, he swings her back out and they walk together, trying not to laugh.

INT. THEATRE, LONDON - AFTERNOON

Vera and Roland sit next to one another in an almost empty theatre. Aunt Belle is squeezing past Vera, then stops.

AUNT BELLE
 (to Roland)
 Move along, dear.

Roland looks along the row - empty seats. Reluctantly, he moves along. Aunt Belle sits herself down between them with a smug smile.

INT. THEATRE - LATER

The performance is underway. Roland stretches one arm behind Aunt Belle, and across to Vera. She keeps looking ahead as gently, sensually, he strokes her neck.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT, LEICESTER - EVENING

Vera is sitting in a train travelling home, lost in a dream. They've stopped at Leicester, and as people climb off and on, Vera notices a crowd gathered round the newspaper stand - people look shocked and animated, there's an indefinable buzz.

She peers, suddenly curious. A middle aged woman with a suitcase squeezes past her.

VERA
 Excuse me, has something
 happened?

WOMAN TRAVELLER
 (indignant)
 Only War with Germany.

The woman plumps herself down opposite, looks straight at her.

WOMAN TRAVELLER CONT.
 I said it would come to this!
 They're not to be trusted.

Vera is shocked.

EXT. BUXTON TOWN CENTRE - DAY

To the sound of boots marching - Vera and Edward walk along a Buxton shopping street. The main shops all have long queues of anxious shoppers outside them.

ROLAND V.O.
 Dear Vera, how quickly things
 change. It seems every young man
 in the country is jostling for
 the chance to join up and fight
 for what's right.

They see a large crowd of men outside the post office, and go over.

EXT. POST OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Vera and Edward push through the crowd and see a notice pinned on the door: "Join Up Now! For King and Country!"

CUT TO:

A QUICK FLASH OF AN IMAGE -

A spade digging into grassy earth.

ROLAND V.O. CONT.

So far all my efforts have met with frustration.

The sound of marching boots grows stronger as -

CUT TO:

INT. FACTORY - DAY

We see BULLETS - hundreds upon hundreds of them - rolling along on a factory conveyor belt.

ROLAND V.O. CONT.

Is Edward faring any better, I wonder?

- WORKERS pack RIFLES into huge crates.

VERA V.O.

Far from it. Father has been slamming doors and cursing that he's not about to hand over his only son.

QUICK CUT TO:

THE SPADE, DIGGING THE EARTH -

Deeper now, churning up the brown soil.

EXT. HIGH STREET, BUXTON - DAY

Vera is part of a crowd, watching as a battalion of stiff, proud soldiers march like gleaming heroes down the street, to applause and cheers. Vera's face is proud and excited as she joins in the applause.

VERA V.O. CONT.

War is a terrible, frightening thing, of course. But my God it has a strange glamour to it.

At the end of the parade come a group of Buxton women, mainly middle-aged and older, carrying banners reading "Buxton Women Against the Enemy Huns!" Vera smiles.

VERA V.O. CONT.

Even smug little Buxton has been shaken to the core.

EXT. GREEN FIELD - DAY

The Spade - in the brown earth -

We MOVE OUT to discover a soldier digging a trench. He lights a cigarette, climbs out of the trench.

All is calm, low-key. He gazes out, across a large green field, like the one of Vera's imagination.

The brown trench stretches across it, like a wound opened in the earth -

A presage of things to come.

INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - NIGHT

Vera, in her night gown and just woken, is hurrying down the hallway to a phone, her mother right behind her. She picks up the receiver - it's a very crackly line.

VERA

Hello?

ROLAND'S VOICE

Vera?

She can barely hear him.

VERA

Roland? Are you alright?

Her mother makes a token retreat, but she's all ears.

ROLAND'S VOICE

...When do you leave for Oxford?

VERA

(lower)

Tomorrow morning's train. I change at Leicester.

ROLAND'S VOICE

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

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?

Vera is half defiant, half pleading.

VERA

Please, mother..?

She waits.

MRS. BRITTAIN

Alright. Don't mention it to your
Father.

Vera smiles gratefully.

INT/EXT. TRAIN, LEICESTER STATION - DAY

A train is stopped at a platform. As people bustle on and off, we find Vera, hanging out of a window, looking out for Roland. Doors start to slam shut, she's getting anxious, when suddenly he appears, pushing through the crowd. She sees him, yells. He spots her.

INT. TRAIN TO OXFORD - CONTINUOUS

Vera, giddy, laughing, helps pull Roland on board just as the train pulls out. She sees he has no luggage.

VERA

Oh no, your bags!

She misses his sober, worried mood. He takes her hands and sits her down.

ROLAND

How are you?

VERA

Where's your luggage?

ROLAND

Vera I'm - I'm not coming to
Oxford.

VERA

What?!

ROLAND
I got a commission with the
Fourth Norfolks, I'm joining them
in Norwich tomorrow.

VERA
(stunned)
I don't understand -

ROLAND
My Uncle Theo pulled some
strings, he's a military man.
It's all happened so fast.

VERA
Did your parents push you?

ROLAND
No! No, it was me.

Vera's mind is whirring, she's very upset.

ROLAND
How many generations get a chance
to be involved in something like
this? We'll still be together,
it's a delay, that's all.

VERA
If you survive!

ROLAND
I will.

VERA
You're sure of that?!

ROLAND
I have a feeling about it.
(Grinning) I might be wounded.
Just enough action to get me the
Military Cross.

VERA
It's not funny.

ROLAND
(sudden, earnest)
I love you, Vera.

She looks at him - moved, confused.

VERA
But -

ROLAND

The Norfolks aren't due for
France for a long time yet. All
the talk is of a short, sharp
victory, it'll probably be over
before I even get there!

Vera looks into his face, she wants to believe him.

EXT. THE TRAIN -

The wheels turning - turning...

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - LATER THAT DAY

Roland and Vera, in the carriage alone, are locked in a
kiss. As they pull apart, Vera is clearly upset. She turns
away, towards the window, to hide it.

Outside, the calm fields are bathed in the soft yellow
light of the fading day. The spires of Oxford come into
view. They gaze at the ethereal sight.

ROLAND

(a moment's doubt)
Oxford...

VERA

How strange after all the
struggles, that I'm the only one
of us now going.

She takes his hand, grips it tight.

EXT. JUNCTION, TRAIN TRACKS OUTSIDE OXFORD - EVENING

Trains converge and cross each other along a tangle of
tracks that cut their way through the eternal countryside -
a sense of many human lives at a crossroads.

EXT. QUAD, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Vera is walking along a Somerville quad, books in her arms,
now in the more sober dress of an undergraduate, when Miss
Lorimer nearly bumps into her.

MISS LORIMER

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

VERA

Well, considering I had no
tuition -

Miss Lorimer sighs. Her rudeness always manages to be eccentric rather than spiteful.

MISS LORIMER
Yes, and how it showed.

Before Vera can object -

MISS LORIMER CONT.
Luckily you 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.

INT. LECTURE HALL, OXFORD - DAY

Vera sits in a crowded lecture theatre, full of women and the occasional man, trying to concentrate on the male lecturer at the front, but she's distracted, fidgety.

VERA V.O.
Oxford is not what I expected, Roland. I have no peace of mind, you see; every time I open a book, it's your face I see.

EXT. LECTURE HALL, OXFORD - LATER

Vera emerges onto the steps of the lecture hall, to see women standing outside handing white feathers to the male students in civilian clothes. One woman aggressively thrusts a feather at a young man refusing to take it.

ANGRY YOUNG WOMAN
Coward! Shirker! Shame on you!

Vera watches.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Vera is sitting in the library, trying to write an essay. She stops, pulls out a half-written letter to Roland, and adds to it.

VERA V.O.
I want to ask you to refuse France, to leave the army and come to Oxford; we should be here, writing together! But I can't do that. I won't.

EXT. OXFORD STREET - DAY

Vera, walking down a street, sees Edward standing waiting for her on the other side, smart in army uniform.

VERA V.O.

And now Edward my little brother.
He came to see me the other day.
He looked so handsome, so
suddenly grown up.

She stops to check before crossing, dodging between some passing traffic. She catches a glimpse of Edward on the other side -

Suddenly 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. She crosses the road to him -

VERA V.O. CONT.

He's joining the Sherwood
Foresters soon.

- takes his arm.

INT. STAIRWELL, SOMERVILLE - MORNING

Vera is walking down her staircase when she sees, out of a window, men erecting metal beds in the quad below. Curious, she skips down faster.

EXT. QUAD, SOMERVILLE - CONTINUOUS

Vera emerges to see an incongruous sight - long rows of hospital beds have been set up. Lying on a few, are wounded soldiers bandaged in pristine white.

Nearest her is a young man, barely twenty, with bandaged stumps where his arms once were. He's lying awkwardly, his pillows badly arranged. He tries to right himself but can't - Vera looks, feeling his humiliation. Their eyes meet briefly.

A NURSE comes bustling over, she adjusts the pillows for him, pulls him straight. Vera watches as they exchange a few words - the look on his face; relief, gratitude.

EXT. ORIEL COLLEGE - DAY

Vera and a group of female undergraduates, holding their luggage, enter the central quad of Oriel, and look around.

It's deserted. They stand there, a small cluster, looking slightly lost.

VERA V.O.

We've been moved out of college to make room for the overflow of wounded. Oxford is fast becoming a ghost town - it seems all the young men in England are being taken from us.

INT. PORTER'S LODGE/POST ROOM - DAY

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.

INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM - DAY

Vera stands before Miss Lorimer, who is sitting in a faded armchair, knitting with intent. The hearth is empty.

MISS LORIMER

We can't let students go gallivanting off to London at the drop of a hat.

VERA

(fuming)

It's not a gallivant -

MISS LORIMER

You need to focus on your studies, Miss Brittain.

Vera feels desperate. Her eyes stray to the knitting - a pair of grey socks are taking shape. Vera looks at her with realisation.

VERA

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

The needles work furiously.

VERA

(risking it)

You have someone there already perhaps...?

Miss Lorimer throws Vera a cross look, leaps up and goes to the window. Vera waits.

MISS LORIMER

My brother. I've been a sympathiser with the Women's Cause for years, you know. Just as we were getting somewhere along comes War, and what happens. The men fight, and the women sit, and wait.

VERA

And knit.

They smile at one another.

MISS LORIMER

How many pairs of these will it take?

She chucks the socks down on a chair.

MISS LORIMER CONT.

You'll be back the same day?

VERA

Yes.

MISS LORIMER

And you'll have a chaperone.

VERA

Yes.

Miss Lorimer nods.

VERA

Thank you!

INT. CHARING CROSS TRAIN STATION - DAY

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, inhibited by custom.

ROLAND
No Aunt Belle?

VERA
(eyes burning)
She'll be here any second. How
long do we have?

ROLAND
About an hour.

Vera's face - so little time.

VERA
(sudden outburst)
You don't write to me for weeks,
and then suddenly you're leaving
for France! You told me you
weren't going yet! You promised!

ROLAND
Vera -

VERA
(realising)
You got a transfer!

ROLAND
The seventh Worcesters.

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

ROLAND
No -

VERA
Yes you are! You must be!

ROLAND
Please...

She sees his face - suddenly vulnerable, hot with fever.

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

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
 his uniform!

INT. CAFE, TRAIN STATION - LATER

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

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

ROLAND
 Thank you.

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

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

She bustles off.

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

ROLAND
 I've let you down.

VERA
 No!

They gaze at one another, too choked to speak. Aunt Belle returns and starts dealing out 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 sits down, picks up her tea cup. Still they say nothing.

AUNT BELLE
 (not unkind)
 Why don't you say something? Is
 it too deep for words?

Roland and Vera look self-conscious. Aunt Belle looks at them, heaves a deep sigh.

AUNT BELLE

Dear, dear. You're all so young.

Roland and Vera can only gaze at one another.

INT. CHARING CROSS TRAIN STATION - LATER

Roland, Vera and Aunt Belle make their way along a platform. He stops to check platform numbers, points to a train on the platform opposite, where no sunlight penetrates.

ROLAND

Over there.

Vera looks. The train is in shadow. A great puff of steam emanates from it, like a sinister, waiting beast.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT, CHARING CROSS - A LITTLE LATER

Vera and Roland sit opposite one another in a compartment, tense with the impending separation. Aunt Belle, next to Vera, rummages in her handbag.

AUNT BELLE

Chocolate, anyone?

She produces a chocolate bar.

AUNT BELLE

It's milk. Shocking how it's gone up in price, mind you everything has since this whole business started, that's if you can get it in the first place.

VERA

(desperate)

Aunt! Please!

She looks from Vera to Roland, gets it.

AUNT BELLE

Of course. I'll be right outside.

She throws Roland a kind nod and smile, and bustles out.

Roland comes over, puts his arms round Vera, and kisses her - passionate, desperate. Then they hold onto one another.

ROLAND
Remember how I walked in on you
that day in Buxton?

Vera smiles at the memory.

ROLAND
You were so cross.

She looks at him - too choked to speak.

ROLAND CONT.
Vera if I don't come back -

VERA
You will -

ROLAND
- find someone else.

A whistle blows, there's a bustle in the corridor, voices shout, as people hurry to get off the train.

VERA
You're coming back!

Roland and Vera get to their feet; suddenly, time has run out.

VERA CONT.
It doesn't end like this!

INT. CORRIDOR/TRAIN DOOR - CONTINUOUS

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 out of the door by the crowd. She pushes and shoves to get back in, but the door is slammed shut. Roland forces the window open, leans out. She grabs his hand, they hold on tight.

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

VERA
Roland!

ROLAND
Write!

She runs with the train -

Their fingers pull apart - she lets go -

Vera staggers, and falls to her hands and knees. She watches 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 comes running up, and helps her to her feet.

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.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, OXFORD - EVENING

Later that day. Vera walks through the ticket area of Oxford station like an automaton. She emerges into the evening light, is surprised to see - Victor, in military uniform, standing there waiting for her.

VERA

Victor...

VICTOR

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

Vera suddenly stumbles, overwhelmed by the effort of keeping going. Victor grabs hold of her arm, helps her to a bench, where they sit. He hands her a handkerchief.

VERA

I'm sorry....

VICTOR

No, of course.

Victor gazes at her, miserable himself.

VERA

(wiping her face)
What a mess...

They smile at one another.

VERA

I can't stay here, not now. I have to do something.

VICTOR

What?

VERA

I don't know. Nursing.

VICTOR

You?!

VERA

(raw)

I barely know him, you know, I'm quite ignorant about men. I've asked mother to explain the facts but she's such a prude. Now I might never find out!

VICTOR

(at sea with this)

Vera, of course you will.

VERA

No, if it's not him, it won't be anyone!

On Victor - it still hurts.

VICTOR

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

Vera looks at him, her face eager to believe.

VERA

You think?

Then she smiles softly.

VERA CONT.

You're such a good friend. I don't really have any female friends. Isn't that odd. It's always been Edward, then you, now him. (A beat) I'm sorry if you were hurt -

VICTOR

(interrupting)

Vera, 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, Victor, I'm so glad! What's her name?

VICTOR
Molly. She's keen.

VERA
I hope she won't be losing you to War soon.

VICTOR
The medical board's failed me twice, it's my eyesight. Desk work only I'm afraid.

VERA
She's a luckier girl than I am, then.

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

EXT. BUILDINGS, ORIEL COLLEGE - DAY

A new day. Vera is walking across the quad, reading a telegram from Roland.

ROLAND V.O.
Crossed safely to France. Moving to billets today.

She looks up to see a boy of about 10 on a red bicycle, cycling across the green lawn towards her. He stops, 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.

EXT. QUAD, ORIEL - A LITTLE LATER

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....

EXT. STREET, OXFORD - DAY

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.

INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM - DAY

Miss Lorimer is sitting behind her desk, looking at Vera, seated opposite her, in amazement.

MISS LORIMER

I have to tell you Miss Brittain,
I'm stunned.

VERA

There's a call for volunteer
nurses.

MISS LORIMER

Anyone can nurse! This crisis
needs people who can step back
and reflect.

Vera is looking down, saying nothing.

MISS LORIMER CONT.

That isn't given to everyone. You
already have a place here, you
can't possibly think of giving it
up!

Vera speaks with care and thought.

VERA

The first morning the wounded were moved into college I noticed one of them - a boy about my age, he'd lost both arms. He was trying, but he couldn't even sit up. Eventually the duty nurse saw, and she came over and helped. The look on his face - you can't stack all the learning and books in the world against it!

A beat. Miss Lorimer looks at Vera shrewdly.

MISS LORIMER

Your young man is in good health?

Vera nods. Miss Lorimer sighs and shuffles some papers - she knows it's over.

MISS LORIMER

You would've done well without love.

A pause.

VERA

I know.

INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL HOSPITAL - DAY

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.

WARD SISTER V.O.

I know what visions have brought you here, and I'm happy they carried you to our door...

CUT TO:

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

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

WARD SISTER CONT.

...but that's where you leave them. Because you're not Angels of Mercy swooping down to mop the brows of grateful men; you're workers. And you'll do whatever you're asked, no matter how dirty, no matter how dull. Do I make myself clear?

VADS TOGETHER

Yes Sister.

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

WARD SISTER

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

Vera looks straight back at her.

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL LODGINGS - BEFORE DAWN

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.

WARD SISTER V.O.

Your duties commence at 7 am sharp. You do not sit down in the wards, ever.

INT. BATHROOM, CAMBERWELL LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

Vera, shivering in her dressing gown, stands waiting for a sink to be free - four sinks in a row are being used by other women.

WARD SISTER V.O.

You take instruction from the professionals who've been doing this job for years before you came along.

EXT. TRAM STOP, CAMBERWELL - DAWN

Vera and her colleagues wait in driving rain at a tram stop as a tram approaches. The doors open, but it's crammed full of workers - no room. They turn and trudge on in the rain.

INT. SURGICAL WARD - LATER

The Ward Sister, a surgeon and two nurses are conferring together at one end of the ward as Vera and fellow VADs bustle in. The Ward sister rounds on them.

WARD SISTER
Who sterilised the instruments
today?

Behind her sits a tray of silver surgical instruments.

VERA
I did, Sister.

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

We see that Vera has arranged the instruments in pairs, like cutlery. Nurse 1 titters.

WARD SISTER CONT.
Or intensive surgical procedure!
Why aren't there five sets?

VERA
I didn't realise -

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

Vera scuttles into a small, adjacent annexe.

WARD SISTER
(disgusted, to Nurse 1)
Help her, will you. (Calling
after Vera) We're waiting!

INT. ANNEXE - CONTINUOUS

Vera is hurriedly gathering more instruments to sterilise as Nurse 1 enters - in her flustered state, she drops some on the floor. Nurse 1 bends and picks them up, her expression milking every second of it.

INT. 1ST LONDON GENERAL -

A series of SHOTS of Vera -

As she correctly arranges the instruments under the Ward Sister's eagle eye -

VERA V.O.

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

She carries a tray of sputum cups out of a ward -

Her arms full of bed sheets, she dumps them in a laundry room -

VERA V.O. CONT.

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

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

VERA V.O. CONT.

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

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

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

BETTY

(tearful)

Do you have a photo of yours?

VERA

No.

Betty kisses the photo.

BETTY

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

VERA

(dry)

Really.

BETTY

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

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

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

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

VERA V.O.

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.

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - LATER

Vera hurriedly carries a basin of hot soapy water across a 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 1 and another nurse 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

Fancy sending him over in this state.

NURSE 1

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.

The first time she's seen a naked man.

Nurse 1 sees her.

NURSE 1

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, he groans in pain. He opens his eyes just wide enough to see her.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
 (hoarse, barely audible)
 Sister...

His eyes close again. Vera is moved.

VERA V.O.
 It could've been you I was
 bathing today, Roland. I felt so
 close to you, at last.

She sponges, more confidently now, as Roland's voice rises.

ROLAND V.O.
 ...the fleshless, blackened bones
 of simple men who poured out
 their red, sweet wine of youth
 unknowing, for nothing more
 tangible than Honour, or their
 country's Glory, or another's
 Lust for Power. Let him who
 thinks War is a glorious, golden
 thing, who loves to roll forth
 stirring words of exhortation,
 let him but look at a little pile
 of sodden grey rags that cover
 half a skull and a shinbone, and
 what might have been its ribs...

We stay on the man's skin as she sponges him - the shape of
 the bones beneath that skin, so delicate, so perfect...

ROLAND V.O. CONT.
 ...or this skeleton lying on its
 side, resting half crouching as
 it fell, perfect but that it is
 headless, and let him realise how
 grand and glorious a thing it is
 to have distilled all youth and
 joy and life into this fetid
 heap!

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - LATE AT NIGHT

Vera sits up in bed while the others sleep, reading
 Roland's words by lamp light, deeply moved by their power.

INT. CORRIDOR, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

Vera, exhausted, walks down a corridor, towards the sound
 of beautiful piano music.

INT. COMMON ROOM, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - CONTINUOUS

Vera walks in to see two men in uniform at a piano. As she approaches, she sees it's Edward, with a friend, a handsome young man of delicate features. Their four hands move across the keys, playing in perfect harmony.

Edward sees her, stops.

VERA
(joyous)
One of yours?

EDWARD
It's unfinished.

VERA
It's beautiful.

He gets up; she hugs him, pressing him tightly to her. He prizes her off and looks at her tired face, concerned.

EDWARD
What are they doing to you here?

VERA
I'm alright.

Edward remembers, turns to make introductions.

EDWARD
Vera, Geoffrey. 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
Ah, a peace-loving soldier?

GEOFFREY
I'm afraid a cowardly soldier.

EDWARD
Nonsense. Geoffrey was about to
train as a priest. That takes
courage.

They both chuckle.

GEOFFREY
Saved by the War, imagine that.

He glances at Edward, a shy, intense look, which Vera catches.

EDWARD
(to Vera)
So, are you ready?

VERA
For what?

EDWARD
You haven't heard? Roland's home
on leave!

EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE, KEYMER - DAY

Vera stands in the bright sun, looking down at Roland, asleep in the foetal position on a sun bed, still in his dusty khaki uniform. He looks transported in from another universe.

They're in the garden of his family home in Keymer, Sussex. His mother, heavy-boned, dark blonde and dressed in flamboyant colours, stands with her.

MRS. LEIGHTON
He walked in the door yesterday
and fell straight asleep. We've
hardly exchanged two words.

He stirs suddenly, as though sensing Vera there. His eyes open - look at her, full of anxiety, remote somehow.

ROLAND
(immediate)
Have to go back in three days.

Vera sits next to him, shocked.

VERA
Let's not think about that.

Roland sits up, rubs his neck, groggy. Gathers himself. He takes her in, but there's a distance.

Then he sees Edward and Geoffrey in the background - and Victor.

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.

EXT. BEACH, SUSSEX - LATER

Vera and Roland are walking along the beach together, a distance between them. After a moment -

VERA

(faltering)

It must be hard to know where to begin.

Silence. Roland won't look at her.

VERA

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

ROLAND

I'm not sure.

VERA

Have you written any yourself?

Roland kind of snorts with derision at this idea.

ROLAND

Poems?!

Vera says nothing, stung.

Further up the beach, the other men are throwing pebbles in the water.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

They're all sitting in the sand dunes as Roland talks animatedly to the men. Vera listens with growing dismay.

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. 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.

ROLAND

That was unnecessary.

VERA

(bursting)

What's happened to you, Roland? You say one thing in your letters and now this - how am I supposed to understand?!

ROLAND

(hard)

Perhaps you can't.

He sees her stricken face -

ROLAND
Just leave me alone!

He turns and strides away. ON Vera - hurt. Then her face sets.

VERA
(under her breath)
No.

EXT. BEACH - A MINUTE LATER

Roland is striding along the water's edge, lit by the orange glow of a late afternoon sun. Vera follows him, skirts catching round her ankles.

VERA
(low, to herself)
Down the long white road we
walked together - Between the
grey hills and the heather -
(sudden shout) Roland!

Roland slows to a stop. Vera stops too, waits. After a moment, he looks at her -

VERA CONT.
What happened to the Roland who
wanted to write? Who - who told
me the world was ours for the
making?!

She steps closer.

VERA CONT.
Don't let this War destroy us.

He looks at her, torn, confused - then holds out a hand. She takes it. He pulls her into a tight, desperate hug.

EXT. BEACH - A LITTLE LATER

Roland and Vera are lying kissing in the sand. Gulls keen overhead. As they pull apart, he looks at her, strokes a wisp of hair from her face.

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. Home leave
makes you soft, you see...

She strokes his hair, his face.

VERA

Don't marry me, then. Let's not get engaged.

ROLAND

I'm scared...even if I do survive, I'll come back some empty shell.

VERA

I won't let that happen! I'll write every day to remind you.

ROLAND

(sudden)

Next time I'm home, let's get married!

Vera looks at him, unsure.

ROLAND CONT.

Let's make a child. Something from both of us! Please.

VERA

Yes! Yes, but promise me you'll keep your head down!

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

ROLAND

God I want to live. Forget ambition, status, success - just life.

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

EXT. BEACH, KEYMER - DAY

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, the kite fluttering in the breeze. Carefree, just for an instant.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Roland, in uniform and army cap, is framed for a photo. He looks haughtily into the camera. A FLASH.

INT. PHOTO STUDIO - DAY

Vera now poses, a more dreamy look, chin rested in palm, gazing into the distance, in the style of the time.

VERA V.O.

Our generation will never be fresh again, Roland, or truly young. Our youth has been stolen from us. As for peace of mind, who knows when it will return...

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

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

VERA V.O. CONT.

If it ever does.

INT. CHARING CROSS RAILWAY STATION - DAY

Vera and her mother and father, are saying goodbye to Edward, next to the train he's about to board for France. The platform is swarming with men in khaki and family members. Mr. Brittain shakes Edward's hand, then pulls him in for a stiff embrace.

Geoffrey comes over, shakes hands with the family, they say goodbye. Vera notices two company commanders nearby, gazing at the emotional farewells dubiously. Vera overhears -

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.

INT. CAFE/PLATFORM, CHARING CROSS STATION - A LITTLE LATER

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.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - EARLY MORNING

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

WARD SISTER
 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.

WARD SISTER
 The new wards in the park please!
 Two hundred extra beds by
 lunchtime!

INT. WARD, CAMBERWELL GREEN - LATER

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 to survey the new ward. It's huge, and crammed full of empty, waiting beds.

BETTY
 What now?

VERA
 We wait.

EXT. STREET, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - SECONDS LATER

Vera, Betty and the other nurses cross the street from the park to the main hospital building. A gaggle of nurses are gathered outside, standing still, 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.

INT. NEW WARD, CAMBERWELL GREEN - DAY

Vera and Betty are scuttling with medical trays along the ward, now crammed full of groaning, wounded men. The blaring, jaunty gramophone music goes some way to drowning the cries.

INT. SURGICAL WARD - LATER

Vera is arranging surgical instruments on trays.

WARD SISTER

Brittain!

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

WARD SISTER

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

Vera nods, pleased - some praise, at last.

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL - NIGHT

Vera is in bed, exhausted but awake. Betty lies fast asleep nearby. Vera forces herself to sit up and, with great weariness, gets out her writing paper and pen, and writes.

VERA V.O.

Dear Roland, Edward came through the push. He's going to get the Military Cross.

(MORE)

VERA V.O. (cont'd)
 Imagine, my music-loving brother,
 the peace-keeper in the family -
 a War hero.

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

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

VERA V.O. CONT.
 There's news of Geoffrey too.

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?"

Vera reaches a high-arched gateway, looks up at the sign: Fishmonger Hall. She goes inside.

INT. FISHMONGER HALL - LATER

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

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

GEOFFREY
 I held it together in front of
 the men.

VERA
 You're very brave.

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

INT. CORRIDOR, FISHMONGER HALL - ANOTHER DAY

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 V.O.
 He was at the front just eleven
 days, Roland. It's taken three
 months for him to even start to
 walk again. Why are the Germans
 doing this to us?

EXT. STREET, EAST END OF LONDON - DAY

Three little kids are playing on a London street. One girl of 6 is staring, rapt, into the sky.

GIRL'S POV; A long, silver tube hovers in the sky. A zeppelin. She points. The other kids come running, stare at the magical object.

VERA V.O.

Britain is in shock. For so long
we lived believing what was going
on outside our own front doors
didn't matter.

The children are standing staring at the zeppelin, as an ominous whistling sound echoes - then - a huge EXPLOSION -

It RIPS the ground under their feet, blowing them and everything around to smithereens.

VERA V.O. CONT.

Then we woke one day to discover
that a single shot fired by an
assassin in a far-away Balkan
state could have the power of
life and death over us.

The dust settles, to reveal, through a cloud of grey, a huge crater - and the silence of destroyed life.

INT. NEW WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - NIGHT

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 V.O.

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

Vera is delighted.

ROLAND V.O. CONT.

And I have a surprise, something
I believe will please you.

VERA

(whisper to herself)
What?

ROLAND V.O.

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

VERA

Safe...

EXT. ST. JAMES' PARK, LONDON - DAY

Vera and Geoffrey walk through St. James' Park. It's a cold December day. The central lake has been drained and is now a field of mud with army tents pitched in it.

VERA

(happy)

I'm meeting him at the Grand in Brighton, Mother and Father are staying there for a while, then we'll come to London for the ceremony, just a small affair.

Geoffrey spots a small, lone flower poking out of the ground. He bends down, with a shaking hand picks it, and hands it to Vera with a gentle smile.

GEOFFREY

(sincere)

Congratulations.

VERA

Will you come?

GEOFFREY

(taken aback)

To the wedding?

VERA

We should both like it very much.

A pause - then -

GEOFFREY

It would be an honour.

INT. WARD, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - NIGHT

Vera and other nurses move between beds of sleeping men, hanging up Christmas stockings for them. There are some meagre decorations on the walls - tinsel and some holly.

As she deals with one bed -

SOLDIER IN BED

Nurse!

Vera turns to look at the man. His eyes smile at her in the dark.

SOLDIER IN BED

You're walking on air, Nurse!

Vera can't help smiling.

INT. LOBBY, GRAND HOTEL, BRIGHTON - DAY

An excited Vera is fixing a hat on, in a large gilt mirror in the hotel lobby, as her mother helps. She's wrapped in a warm fur coat. Guests mill in and out, the hotel is smart and hushed, the Grand in its heyday. A phone is ringing somewhere.

VERA

How do I look?

MRS. BRITTAIN

(adjusting her)

Positively bridal. Haven't you heard from him yet?

VERA

He only got home last night, Mother.

She glances at a clock.

VERA CONT.

Half an hour to go.

A HOTEL CLERK in black comes over.

HOTEL CLERK

Miss Vera Brittain?

VERA

Yes.

HOTEL CLERK

A telephone call for you, Miss.

VERA

(to her mother)

That'll be him! I hope he's not going to be late.

She follows the clerk over to the desk. 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 a blue glass vase, their apricot pink colour so dazzling bright, it hurts the eyes.

CUT TO:

WHITE OUT.

Just the sound of gulls, keening angrily.

THEN UP ON - Vera, standing on the shingle beach, stunned, numb.

Her eyes focus on a worm, burrowing into a dead crab.

She stares at the worm, as it grows bigger and multiplies - into a seething mass, like maggots on a corpse...

Horrified, she feels the sick rising in her throat - turns away - and vomits.

CUT TO:

IN THE HOTEL - Vera sits at a table, anxiously watched by her parents, a cup of coffee in front of her. There's still no sound.

She tries to pick up the delicate porcelain cup, but her hand shakes so much, it's impossible. The cup chinks loudly against its saucer.

CUT TO:

VERA lying in a narrow bed in the hotel. Seen from above, she looks flattened by the weight of her grief.

CUT TO:

VERA is spinning down, through empty space,
Head over heels - falling, falling....

CUT TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM, LEIGHTON HOUSE, KEYMER - DAY

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, in uniform. Grief isolates them all.

MR. LEIGHTON, gruff, handsome, with a large moustache, stands before them, reading from a letter. He's stiff of body, and partially deaf.

MR. LEIGHTON
(slightly too loud)
Letter here from an officer in
his company. (Reading)...died of
wounds at Louvencourt clearing
station.

VERA
What was he doing at the front?

MR. LEIGHTON
Beg your pardon?

MRS. LEIGHTON
(loud)
Why was he in a trench?

Mr. Leighton grunts, 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 gets up.

MR. LEIGHTON

Painless...I suppose the man would know.

She puts the needle across on a gramophone player.

MRS. LEIGHTON

He loved this piece.

They all sit and listen to a Beethoven sonata. But Vera can't bear it. She jumps up and leaves the room.

EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE, KEYMER - MINUTES LATER

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

Victor...

VICTOR

(trying to keep it light)

Yes, funnily enough the eyesight doesn't seem to be such a problem anymore.

Vera looks down, upset. After a moment -

VICTOR CONT.

He often talked about War, you know.

(MORE)

VICTOR CONT. (cont'd)
 He thought it would be good for
 the country, strip away all the
 superfluous and leave only the
 essential.

Vera finds no comfort in this - but Victor does.

VICTOR CONT.
 A painless and noble death...I
 can't help feeling he'd be
 pleased.

VERA
 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.
 I want to know what happened.
 Someone must have been there with
 him.

Victor looks at her, eyes brimming with sadness.

INT. VERA'S ROOM, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

Vera sits at a small desk, surrounded by various letters,
 writing a fresh one.

INT. COMMON ROOM, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

Vera, by her open locker, is reading a letter.

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

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

VAD 1
 Vera -

Vera turns. Her closed expression is not encouraging.

VAD 2
 We're sorry for your loss.

VAD 1
 He's in a better place now.

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

VAD 3
 It will get better.

BETTY
 Time heals all wounds.

VERA
 I have no desire whatsoever to be
 healed!

She pushes through them, and out of the door. The women look miserably at each other.

EXT. CONVALESCENT HOME, LONDON - DAY

Vera stops outside an elegant building in the City of London, checks the number against the address on a letterhead. Satisfied, she heads for the door.

EXT. WALLED GARDEN, CONVALESCENT HOME, LONDON - DAY

She enters a small, walled garden 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,
 fiancée to Roland Leighton -

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

CONVALESCENT NURSE
 The officer's not receiving
 visitors today.

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

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

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

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

George starts limping painfully back towards the main door,
 propped up by the nurse, who tut-tuts disapprovingly at
 Vera.

GEORGE
 Comfort yourself that it was a
 quick and painless end.

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

George didn't know she knew this. He reaches the main door.

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

George steps inside, Vera hesitates - then pursues him.

INT. CORRIDOR, CONVALESCENT HOME - CONTINUOUS

Vera follows him down a corridor lined with large, sunny
 windows.

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

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

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

A beat. George gestures to the nurse, who leaves them. As
 her footsteps echo and fade, 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. He didn't stand a chance.

Vera looks straight at him the whole time.

GEORGE CONT.
He came round for a few hours.

VERA
Did he say anything? Was there a message?

George struggles with this.

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

Vera remains steady.

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

GEORGE
Yes.

Vera closes her eyes for a brief moment.

GEORGE CONT.
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
Some arrived?

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.

INT. ROOM, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - NIGHT

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

VERA V.O.

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

She stops, thinks. Takes up her pen again.

VERA V.O. CONT.

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.

INT. ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

Vera and Geoffrey are sitting in a pew in the dark,
tranquil church. The rich oil painting of Hagar, in rags
and suffering in the Desert, looms above them.

VERA

I lied in my letter to Victor
yesterday.

GEOFFREY

(careful)

Perhaps in certain circumstances,
a lie is the more moral choice.

VERA

Is it? It seems to me this War
has made liars of us all. (Pause)
I can't remember his face, you
know. I keep trying. I'm so
scared I'll forget him.

GEOFFREY

Then don't try. Let him sit on
the edges of your mind, he'll
come back.

VERA

(bitter)

You're asking me to have faith?
Roland had faith, of sorts. He
believed he'd survive, or sustain
some minor wound that would make
a hero of him, but he was shot
like a rat in the dark. What does
your God have to say about that?

She looks at him to see he has tears in his eyes - of
compassion for her. Vera's own eyes are dry.

VERA

(softer)

How can we bear it?

He takes her hands, and holds them.

EXT. LEIGHTON HOUSE, KEYMER - DAY

Vera comes running up the garden path, to be met by
Roland's distraught sister Clare.

VERA

What's happened?

CLARE

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

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

INT. LIVING ROOM, LEIGHTON HOUSE - SECONDS LATER

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
Oh God! That's not my Roland!

Mrs. Leighton turns away from the horrible sight.

MRS. LEIGHTON
Take it out and burn it, please!

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 the photo of her. Vera wipes hair from her face, gets a streak of mud across it. She feels something else, reaches in and pulls out - a sheaf of papers.

Vera lays them down. They're splattered, dirty, 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.

EXT. GARDEN, LEIGHTON HOUSE - LATER

Vera, holding the dried violets, and the Leighton family stand watching as Roland's kit burns on a bonfire. Over it, we hear:

ROLAND'S VOICE

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

EXT. PLUG STREET WOOD, BELGIUM - DAY

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.
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day.
Sweetest, it was better so.)*

INT. HOSPITAL, LONDON - DAY

Edward, in uniform, sits on a bench in a hospital corridor. His face is drawn, he looks ten years older. The hair at his temples is grey. Remembering he's only twenty.

ROLAND'S VOICE

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

Vera is hurrying down the corridor towards him. He gets up to greet her. She slips her hand into his, he leads her towards a ward.

INT. WARD, VICTOR'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Vera and Edward approach 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.

Edward sits in a chair, indicates Vera can approach.

VERA

Victor...

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

VICTOR

Who is it? Is that...?

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

VICTOR CONT.

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. Edward helps. Vera 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.

(managing a smile)

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

EXT. BUCKINGHAM PALACE - DAY

Vera and Edward, the latter newly decorated with the Military Cross, are posing outside the Palace gates for a photographer. Other recipients and their families mill around. Mr. and Mrs. Brittain are talking to people nearby. The Flashbulb explodes - the photographer moves on.

VERA

I'm so proud of you.

Edward tries to smile, but it's more of a nervous tick.

EDWARD

I barely remember what happened.

VERA

Do you have to go back so soon?

Edward sighs. He has no choice.

VERA CONT.

I won't see you off. I must bring bad luck, every time I wave goodbye to someone they never come back.

EDWARD

No you're my lucky talisman, always have been. Remember?

She smiles. Sees their parents approaching.

EDWARD CONT.

Look after Victor for me.

VERA

I'm going to marry him, Edward.

EDWARD

Marry!

VERA

I've given it a lot of thought. He needs someone to look after him, and now that Roland's - It's what I want.

Edward looks at her, troubled, as their parents join them.

EXT. GARDEN, VICTOR'S HOSPITAL - DAY

Vera, carrying a small box of cakes, walks through the garden, dotted with invalid soldiers soaking up some weak sun. She sees Victor sitting on a sunchair nearby, goes over.

EXT. GARDEN, VICTOR'S HOSPITAL - A LITTLE LATER

Victor and Vera are sitting together. The cakes are beside him, untouched.

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

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

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

Victor listens, alert and very still.

VERA CONT.

(swallowing)
- well, Roland would like it.
(MORE)

VERA CONT. (cont'd)
 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 realises he's right. They sit there,
 lost together, holding hands.

INT. DORMITORY, CAMBERWELL LODGINGS - NIGHT

It's the middle of the night, 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!

INT. CORRIDOR/WARD, VICTOR'S HOSPITAL - NIGHT

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

NURSE 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.

NURSE ELIOT
 It was very quick. I'm sorry.

Vera nods, sinks into a chair by the bed. Nurse 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.

CUT TO:

EXT. SPEECH DAY, UPPINGHAM - DAY

Brief, close-up, flashing images of the proud Officers' Training Corps parade at Uppingham. The only sound, the boys' breath, the rustle and rub of their clothes as they perform their manoeuvres -

HEADMASTER'S VOICE

For if a man cannot be useful to
his country, he's better dead.

WE SEE - the field of boys, some as young as 13, standing silently in their neat rows - lambs to the slaughter.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. VICTOR'S BED, HOSPITAL - DAWN

Vera looks up, sees a small window above the bed. Instinctively, she reaches up and opens it. Outside, a tree bough sways. Vera closes her eyes, feels the cool breeze on her face.

EDWARD V.O.

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.

INT. LOUNGE, LONDON HOTEL - DAY

Vera, composed and pale, sits at a table opposite her parents.

VERA

My mind's made up.

MRS. BRITTAIN

This is terrible news!

VERA

It's as close to Edward as I can
get. I need to be there.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 But all this labour, it's
 coarsening! Goodness knows what
 it's doing to your prospects!

VERA
 (rising impatience)
 I'm going to France!

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

Mrs. Brittain sighs, she knows it's hopeless. She rummages
 in her handbag and gets out a small jar of cream, puts it
 on the table with a martyred sigh.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 Take it, for your elbows.

VERA
 My elbows...

MRS. BRITTAIN
 They're so rough, dear, I
 couldn't help noticing. Twice a
 day should do the trick.

Vera almost laughs - catches her father's eye. But her
 mother is genuinely upset.

MRS. BRITTAIN
 Look after yourself.

Vera takes the pot.

VERA
 I will.

Mr. Brittain's eyes glimmering with admiration.

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

VERA
 I don't know, Daddy.

They share a smile.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE, FRANCE - DAY

A train stops at a makeshift wooden station. Doors open,
 army personnel pour out - doctors, nurses, orderlies,
 backup staff. Vera, in her VAD uniform, is among them.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, ETAPLES - DAY

Vera walks out of the station, to her first glimpse of Etaples military base - a warren of makeshift wood and tin huts. She steps onto the unpaved road - her foot immediately sinks into the mud of Northern France.

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

Vera stands there, wondering which way to go. A line of soldiers appears, marching, singing.

MARCHING SOLDIERS

Good bye-ee, don't cry-ee, Wipe
the tear Baby dear from your eye-
ee, Though it's hard to part I
know, I'll be tickled to death to
go. Don't cry-ee, Don't sigh-ee,
There's a silver lining in the
sky-ee.....

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

VERA

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

The VAD looks at the paper.

YOUNG VAD

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

And with that, she's gone.

EXT. HUTS, ETAPLES MILITARY BASE - LATER

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

HOPE

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

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

HOPE CONT.

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

She steps aside to allow Vera to enter.

INT. HUT, ETAPLES BASE - CONTINUOUS

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.

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

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

Vera looks horrified.

HOPE CONT.

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. Hope registers her surprise.

HOPE

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

I - what about my suitcase? -

HOPE

Chuck it in a corner. You've been in charge of your own ward before, I take it?

VERA

No, never!

HOPE

(oblivious smile)

Lovely! Over to you, then.

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

HOPE

(to Vera)

See to him, will you. No idea what he's on about.

Vera is left standing there, stunned.

VERA

He says you're heartless.

INT. GERMAN WARD - LATER

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.

EXT. DISPENSING STATION - ETAPLES

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.

INT. GERMAN WARD - LATER

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.

INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY

Vera is dressing a leg wound on a German soldier. On the hut floor, lie piles of dressings saturated with blood and pus.

VERA V.O.

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. Is this what we've come to?

EXT. HILL, ETAPLES BASE - DAY

A hot day. 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. A figure walks towards her, waving - Hope.

HOPE

(as she approaches)

Miss Brittain! You're going to
give yourself heatstroke.

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

HOPE

Another no-show?

Vera nods.

HOPE

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.

EXT. COASTLINE, ETAPLES - LATER

Hope and Vera are walking together along a beautiful, broad stretch of coast. 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. Give them a few minutes and they'll be in the bushes. Not my preferred location, the flora and fauna round here are quite unsuitable.

Vera looks at her in surprise.

HOPE CONT.
Do I shock you, Nurse?

VERA
(realising, with a smile)
No, 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.
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 bushes - they catch sight of two figures scampering off behind a sand dune, the man with his trousers down. Vera laughs. Hope grins at her, enjoying her prank.

EXT. RESTAURANT, CLEARING IN THE WOODS - LATER

Vera and Hope are sitting at an outdoor table in a small French restaurant in the middle of sun-dappled woods. They're eating omelette and drinking wine. A sudden, peaceful idyll.

They turn to see the limping officer and the VAD nurse enter. They immediately spot Hope and Vera, and hesitate, scowling. But the only free table is next to them, and hunger has the better of them, so they come and sit down.

Hope looks at the girl's hair - then reaches across and pulls a few thorns from it. The VAD looks round, annoyed.

HOPE

(cheerful)

Ulex europeus, common coastal shrub. Gets everywhere, absolute pest.

The VAD squirms. Vera giggles. Hope pours her some more wine.

HOPE

Drink up!

Vera drinks. A shadow passes across her face.

VERA

How weird - I feel happy.

HOPE

Of course, you're back in the thick of it. You're addicted to it, Brittain, just like the rest of us. It's what happens when it's all over that's the real worry.

Vera looks at her; for a moment, Hope's face is flooded with unspoken pain; then she battens down the hatches, raises her glass in a toast. Vera toasts back.

CUT TO:

INT. GERMAN WARD - DAY

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.

LATER - Things are calmer. Hope is by the bed of a man 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 MAN
Lieber Gott...Nicht so!

HOPE
Alright old boy...alright...

DYING MAN
(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 MAN
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 MAN
(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 MAN

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 MAN

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. As Vera did for Victor.

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, 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.

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:

A MONTAGE -

- A WARD. Vera picks up a pile of bloody, muddy khaki uniforms, sees something moving across them. She looks closer - a swarm of lice.
- OUTSIDE - Vera dumps the uniforms in an enormous bin.
- A naked, shivering Vera sits in a BATH in a SHACK, 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 V.O.

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

- In a WARD, Vera breaks icicles from the inside of the window frame -
- VERA carries a bed pan along a narrow, dark alleyway, nearly slipping on the ice.
- SPRING. 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 V.O. CONT.

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

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HUT, ETAPLES - NIGHT

Vera and Hope are sitting in a large canvas tent with other nurses and VADs, eating dinner. A harsh wind is making the canvas flap - there's subdued chatter.

A sudden BLAST makes the diners shriek, duck - the tables rock, objects clatter to the ground - a shell that felt frighteningly close. A man - a chief personnel officer - leaps up, shouts.

PERSONNEL OFFICER

Start packing, everyone! We may have to evacuate!

Everyone breaks ranks, heads for the exit, bustling out.

HOPE

(grabbing Vera)

The Huns can't win. Not after what they've put us through.

VERA

I'm sure 'the Huns' feel exactly the same way about it.

EXT. MESS HUT - CONTINUOUS

Vera and Hope emerge into dark night. The sky is lit up with a sudden, blinding flash of white, as a shell explodes with a deafening roar over the sand dunes. In the light, they see FIGURES running towards them across a field: three VADs, panting, their uniforms ragged. They collapse, exhausted, on the ground.

Vera, Hope and others, including the personnel officer, run towards them.

FLEEING VAD 1
 (panting)
 The Germans....

HOPE
 Where've you come from?

FLEEING VAD 2
 (distraught)
 Clearing station....they over ran
 us...shot the men...

They look at one another in dismay.

FLEEING VAD 1
 They're in the outskirts of
 Amiens!

The personnel officer helps one of the women up, addresses Vera and Hope.

PERSONNEL OFFICER
 They've pulled troops in from the
 eastern front, thousands
 apparently. Come on, we have to
 pack up!

Vera and Hope help the other women to get up.

EXT. ETAPLES BASE - NIGHT

Personnel load hastily-packed boxes onto the back of red cross lorries. We find Vera hard at work. Another shell explodes, this time even nearer. Hope comes running up.

HOPE
 It's getting closer! Into the
 wards, with the men!

Vera and other VADs drop what they're doing, and follow Hope to the wards.

INT. BRITISH WARD - NIGHT

Inside a dark ward, full of wounded men. Vera and Hope move from bed to bed with cups of water or tea, soothing the men. They're lit up by flashes of hard, white light from the shell fire in the sky outside. The strain shows on everyone's faces.

EXT. WARD - DAWN

Vera emerges, exhausted, from the ward, to a calm dawn. She hears a murmur, looks round.

A large field stretches to her left - and is filled to the brim, with row upon row of wounded men, lying on stretchers or on the bare ground - hundreds of them.

More stretchers are being brought in by orderlies, off-loaded directly from a train at the station, which can be seen in the distance.

EXT. FIELD OF WOUNDED, ETAPLES - SECONDS LATER

Vera walks among them. Many of them are choking, in the final stages of gas poisoning, great yellow blisters on their skin. All of them are dirty, bloodied, with raw wounds - straight from the front line.

VERA
(under her breath)
Mustard gas....

Many voices call out to her.

VOICES OF MEN
There's 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 fetches water from a tank outside a tent. Brings it back to the dying man. A cheery voice calls out from nearby.

CHEERY SOLDIER O.S.
Hey Miss! You're wanted!

Vera barely glances in his direction.

VERA
One minute -

CHEERY SOLDIER O.S.
Boy along here says he knows you!

Vera gets up. The cheery tommy, lying on a stretcher on the ground with a minor leg wound, points down the line.

VERA
Who?

He shrugs amiably. Another soldier, further along, gesticulates to her.

OTHER SOLDIER
Over here Nurse!

Vera moves towards him - he gestures along the line, she carries on, as several more tommies gesture to her -

Then she sees him, looking at her, on a stretcher, gaunt, muddy - EDWARD.

Vera gasps, runs over to him, falls to her knees. Immediately anxious, looking him over -

VERA
Gas?

EDWARD
(weak)
Just the arm...

She takes in his arm, the uniform is ripped by a raw bullet wound.

VERA
You're sure?

EDWARD
Bullet's out...only minor...

VERA
Nothing else?

Edward shakes his head again. Vera exhales with relief - both of them amazed at the miracle of this reunion.

INT. WARD, ETAPLES - NIGHT

Deepest night. Vera leans over Edward, who is sweating with a fever. She's wiping his brow with a cloth, trying to cool him. His bed is surrounded by other wounded men, even on the floor, using every inch of space.

Vera's about to withdraw when he seizes her hand. His eyes gleam with fever.

EDWARD
That day at Melrose - all of us,
Victor, Roland - we walked -

VERA
Yes, I remember! We found that
squirrel -

She stops herself.

EDWARD

Rats, there were rats!

He sits up, frantic, feverish. She calms him.

VERA

No, no rats, Edward, I promise you, it was talk. We wondered if squirrels and rats went to heaven with us, that's all.

He stares at her, haunted.

EDWARD

Hell's full of them, full of rats Vera...I've seen it.

She smooths his brow, trying to calm him.

EXT. WARD, ETAPLES - DAY

A bright day. Vera, carrying a gramophone player, walks towards a ward tent.

INT. WARD, ETAPLES - LATER

Vera places a record on the gramophone player, which she has set up on a table in Edward's crowded ward. She glances at him - he's sitting up in bed, much better. She plays the music; a classical violin piece, one of Edward's favourites.

She goes and sits on his bed.

EDWARD

I'm told we're going into Italy.

VERA

Italy! That's better, isn't it? The fighting's quite light.

EDWARD

Tell mother and father. They'll be pleased.

VERA

I'll write to them today. Any news of Geoffrey?

Edward reaches for a letter on the floor - Vera helps him.

EDWARD

I got this letter from him just before the push. He was further up the line.

Edward opens the letter.

EDWARD

(reading)

We walked back to barracks last night, all of us thoroughly exhausted.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WESTERN FRONT - EVENING

A vast expanse of mud. Geoffrey is one in a line of battle-weary men, trudging their way back from the front line.

GEOFFREY V.O.

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 V.O.

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 V.O.

- with a river of gold, and purple clouds fleeting in the sky-

MOVE CLOSE - on Geoffrey's face.

GEOFFREY'S V.O.

And I felt a presence there, greater than all this...such peace, Edward.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION HUT, ETAPLES - DAY

Vera is in the reception hut, as a male orderly hands her 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:

EXT. WESTERN FRONT - EVENING

Geoffrey gives the scene one last look, then turns back to join his battalion.

GEOFFREY V.O.
I thought of you, dear friend,
and I knew I'd see you again...

CUT TO:

INT. WARD, ETAPLES - DAY

Edward sits there, reading the letter to himself, smiling.

EDWARD V.O.
...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.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM, ETAPLES - DAY

Vera stands with Edward on the wooden platform of Etaples military base, waiting for a train. A heaviness hangs over them.

EDWARD
No longer superstitious about
good byes...?

VERA
Italy will keep you safe. It
better.

She takes his hands in hers.

VERA CONT.
When it's over we'll 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, become
the writer you always wanted to
be.

VERA
If this War ever ends.

EDWARD
It will.

VERA
I can't imagine that anymore.

EDWARD
Do it.

His tone, a certain finality to it, unnerves her -

VERA
Only if you come too -

Edward suddenly hugs her, very tight. A distant hoot, and his train chugs into sight. He pulls away, gives her his best cheery smile.

EXT. ETAPLES BASE - MINUTES LATER

Vera is standing on a muddy road, watching the train as it chugs out of view. A sound makes her turn -

Marching towards her, are soldiers. But not the usual weary tommies in khaki. These men are spruce, fresh, in gleaming uniforms and virgin health - untainted by warfare.

Vera, and other passers-by, stop to watch as the men march past - dozens upon dozens of them.

BYSTANDER
The Americans.....!

A few people break into applause. Vera just watches. The Americans grin at them.

EXT. CANVAS HUTS, ETAPLES - DAY

A furious Vera, clutching a telegram, marches between the tents of Etaples.

MR. BRITTAIN V.O.
Return home immediately. Mother
in serious condition. Must resume
family duties.

INT. VERA'S SHACK, ETAPLES - DAY

Vera marches into the shack she shares with Hope to find her sitting there writing a letter. She marches up and throws the telegram down before her.

Hope glances at it, gives her a sympathetic look.

INT. HALLWAY, MELROSE - DAY

We're inside the large, staid hallway. A grandfather clock ticks. The sudden domesticity should be 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.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM, MELROSE - LATER

Vera walks in to find her mother sitting up in bed reading a magazine.

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, you know! And you can't get anything in the shops anymore! We haven't eaten butter for six months!

VERA
I thought you'd had a break down...

MRS. BRITTAIN
I've been in bed for a week! Nothing's been done in the house. It's all quite dreadful.

Vera doesn't know what to say.

CUT TO:

VERA -

- Sleeves rolled up, furiously shovelling coal into the kitchen Aga -

- stirring a boiling pot at the stove, hair wild about her face, concentrating.

INT. DINING ROOM, MELROSE - EVENING

Vera and her mother and father are sitting at the dining table sampling her soup. Her father picks up a spoonful, pours it back in the bowl. It's thin like water.

Vera looks at her own bowl of warm brown water.

VERA

Right. Time to find a cook.

INT. KITCHEN, MELROSE - DAY

Vera is instructing the new girl, a 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 basket of ironing on the table.

NEW COOK

(reluctant)

I have to go at five. (Off Vera's look) I've a dance.

Vera impatiently pushes the ironing towards her.

VERA

Well, I'm sure you'll fit it in.

INT. LIVING ROOM, MELROSE - DAY

Vera is arranging flowers in a vase as her father sits nearby reading a paper. He looks up at her.

MR. BRITTAIN

Beautiful, dear.

Vera smiles. Her eye happens to glance at the window. She sees something in the distance - on a visible stretch of the white winding road, a boy on a red bike seems to be cycling towards them -

Vera is frozen to the spot - almost stops breathing. Palms sweat, heart races. The boy disappears from view.

INT. UPSTAIRS WINDOW, MELROSE - SECONDS LATER

Vera hurries up the stairs and across the landing, to a big window. She looks out, craning. 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.

INT. KITCHEN, MELROSE - SECONDS LATER

Vera, a picture of fury, marches into the kitchen, sees the new maid ironing some socks. She snatches them off her.

VERA

You don't iron socks, bloody fool!

She grabs the basket of laundry, with a cry HURLS it across the room. The girl bursts into tears. Vera storms out.

EXT. HILLSIDE, OUTSIDE BUXTON - DAY

Vera is climbing the familiar hill, pushing herself to the limit, RAGING against fate -

She glimpses behind - the same green countryside, of her youth, of her shared dream with Roland -

A wave of MUD is rising, low, fast, and moving across it, engulfing everything, pursuing her -

Vera cries out, climbs faster -

EXT. HILLSIDE, BUXTON - LATER

Vera scrambles to the top, panting, turns -

To see, behind her, an ocean of mud. She looks down - the last patch of green disappears beneath the thick brown slime, as it sucks round her feet.

CUT TO:

AN EMPTY CORRIDOR -

In the 1st London General. 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, looks straight ahead.

An image of complete aloneness.

INT. ANNEXE, 1ST LONDON GENERAL - DAY

Vera is in a small annexe, carefully arranging surgical instruments on a silver tray. The loud boom of cannon fire sounds. Vera doesn't even flinch.

There's a sound of shouting in the corridor, peals of laughter, running footsteps. Vera looks out into the corridor. Two young nurses, faces flushed, are 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.

EXT. LONDON STREET, ARMISTICE DAY - DUSK

Vera, in her VAD uniform, is pushed along by the jostling crowd as it slows, and stops. People shout, cheer, wave rattles, but the sound cuts in and out, Vera can't connect with it.

Faces turn upwards as, with a ripple, the street lights overhead switch on.

EXT. THE CROWD, ARMISTICE DAY - LATER

In muffled silence, Vera is being whirled round and round by a jubilant soldier. She catches a FLASH of the Hag's face -

Another flash, and another - Vera breaks free -

EXT. LONDON STREET - A MINUTE LATER

Vera sees the steps of St. Paul's ahead of her, stumbles and pushes her way through the crowd towards them.

INT. ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL - MOMENTS LATER

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. In her mind - a faint, rhythmic whispering, like the distant chugging of steam engine wheels -

A rich oil painting looms up and seems to leap out at her - the image of Hagar in the desert.

The rhythmic chugging merges into whispers now - the low, desperate whispers of women in prayer - woman after woman after woman.

Vera puts her hands over her ears to block the sounds - then sinks into a pew. After a moment, she clasps her hands together, as though in prayer.

VERA V.O.

Roland, Edward, Victor, Geoffrey.
They'll want to forget you,
they'll want me to forget you.
But I can't - I won't let your
footsteps fade, or your places be
taken.

EXT. MAIN QUAD, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Brilliant sunshine. An Oxford quad.

Muffled silence. Students walk past, smiling, chatting, laughing. As though nothing has changed.

Vera steps into frame, holding a small suitcase.

VERA V.O. CONT.

This is my promise to you now.

INT. VERA'S NEW ROOM, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Vera is standing at her bed unpacking. She's in a large room with a big mirror on the wall.

She glances at a desk by the window. On it, a pen and a pad of writing paper. Open, blank, ready. But no one to write to. She turns, catches her reflection - the hag looks back at her. Vera gasps, looks away.

INT. CORRIDOR, SOMERVILLE ROOMS - CONTINUOUS

Two students walk past, one of them a tall, flamboyantly dressed girl with an open, enthusiastic face and blonde hair that's impossible to tame - WINIFRED. They hear a banging sound coming from Vera's room.

WINIFRED

That must be the new girl.

COMPANION

Not new exactly. She left to nurse in the war. Apparently she was at the Front.

Winifred is interested.

INT. VERA'S NEW ROOM - SAME TIME

Vera is finishing banging nails either side of the large mirror. She picks up a piece of cloth and hangs it across, hiding the mirror from view.

EXT. DINING HALL, SOMERVILLE - EVENING

Vera is among students heading for the dining hall doors. She sees Miss Lorimer.

MISS LORIMER

Miss Brittain! Back at last.

VERA

Yes.

She waits, hoping for some acknowledgement of intervening experiences.

MISS LORIMER

So, it's the nineteenth century
this term. You've certainly got a
lot of catching up to do!

Vera just looks at her...Miss Lorimer, overcome with awkwardness, walks on. Vera stands there frozen, as the women flow by.

INT. DINING HALL - LATER

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.

INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - NIGHT

Vera lies awake in bed. She hears a scratching sound, like a rat. She leaps out of bed, turns the light on and checks under the bed. Nothing. Across the floor - all clear.

She sits down. The sound rises again - loud, in her own mind. Frightened, shivering, she puts her hands over her ears.

INT. LIBRARY, SOMERVILLE - DAY

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 CONT.

Winifred Holtby, we're tutorial
partners this term!

Vera manages a tight smile.

WINIFRED CONT.

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 - brandishing the papers in her hand.

WINIFRED CONT.

I've been having a try at a short story. Do you write? Most of us literature lot do.

Vera's grip on her pen tightens.

WINIFRED CONT.

You must have stories to tell. I heard you were in France. I was there too.

VERA

(suddenly interested)
What, nursing?

WINIFRED

No, no - just for the last few months.

Vera sighs, returning pointedly to her book.

WINIFRED CONT.

But I'd love to talk to you about it, if-

VERA

(cutting in)
Look, if you don't mind I really must get on.

A pause. Winifred gently accepts this.

WINIFRED

Of course.

She walks away. Vera tries to concentrate on her book.

EXT. GARDENS, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Vera is walking through the gardens when she sees a group of female undergraduates enjoying a merry picnic on the lawn. Winifred is among them. She looks up, sees Vera, who hurries past as quickly as she can, anxious to keep a low profile. Winifred watches her solitary figure disappear.

EXT. RIVER CHERWELL, OXFORD - DAY

Vera sits on a bench, staring at the flowing waters. She's aware of carefree laughter coming from a group of women passing behind her.

A few seconds later, someone quietly approaches. She looks up to see Winifred. Something in Vera's expression gives her the confidence to approach.

WINIFRED

I was hoping to bump into you!
I'm running the debating society
this term, we're having trouble
finding speakers.

She holds out a paper leaflet. Vera takes it, reads.

VERA

Life experience is a better
education than academic study.
(Looks up) That sounds up my
street.

WINIFRED

(beaming)
Will you do it?

INT. DEBATING ROOM, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Vera is on her feet, in mid-flow before a roomful of students, mainly women but some men. Winifred is on the podium too, a chairwoman seated between them.

VERA

(heated)
It's obvious to anyone that
experience of life teaches far
more than any number of books!

A student calls out.

STUDENT IN AUDIENCE 1

What're you doing here, then?

VERA

I'm not saying study's pointless,
just that you might understand
the textbooks better after some
experience of the real thing!

Mutterings from the audience, who don't like her tone.

VERA CONT.

During my time at the front I
learnt things that -

Vera is drowned out by sudden groans, even a few boos.

STUDENT 2

Does everything have to be about
the War?!

VERA

- Yes!

STUDENT 1

We're sick of it!

Vera rounds fiercely on her.

VERA

Sick of it?! How so?

STUDENT 1

We've had four years of nothing but!

STUDENT 3

Surely we're allowed to think of something else?

Vera stays on Student 1.

VERA

(fierce)

And what were you doing for the duration?

STUDENT 1

I was at school.

VERA

(losing it)

How taxing for you! You obviously don't care that an entire generation made the ultimate sacrifice -

Loud BOOS - Winifred winces at her tone.

VERA CONT.

- the ultimate sacrifice, so that you could come here in safety to hold picnics and declare yourselves sick of it!

Uproar in the room. Vera realises her mistake. Winifred leaps in.

WINIFRED

I'd say the proof is in the pudding! My honourable opponent clearly has many experiences to her name but none of them appear to have made her in the least bit satisfied or happy! I'll chose study over experience any day!

Cries of delight, "Hear Hear!", cheers from the crowd. The chair bangs her gavel.

CHAIR WOMAN

All those in favour of the
proposal!

Silence. Not a hand goes up. On Vera - as she realises the whole room is against her.

CHAIR WOMAN CONT.

All those against!

Every single hand in the room goes up. Cheering erupts, Someone holds up Winifred's arm in a gesture of triumph, but her eyes follow Vera, who pushes her way out.

INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - MINUTES LATER

Vera storms into her room and slams the door behind her. She covers her face with her hands, overcome with embarrassment and confusion.

She goes over to her bed, pulls a trunk out from underneath it, and gets out Roland's stained poems. She spreads them out, trying to read them, but the words blur.

EXT. BOAR'S HILL, OUTSIDE OXFORD - DAY

A feverish Vera marches fast along a white path cut into a bleak hillside, under a grey, threatening sky.

VERA

(muttering)

Down the long white road...we
walked together...down between
the grey hills....

On Vera - as she walks, looking down. Beside her, on the periphery of her vision, men walk with her, four pairs of legs in uniform, keeping perfect rhythm.

VERA

Between the grey hills...

She peters out, unable to continue, shivering.

In a LONG SHOT, we see Vera, alone on the windswept hill.

INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - NIGHT

Vera is in bed, tossing with delirium. The loud scratching noise looms in her mind, louder than ever, mixed with the strange voices of fever. Frightened, she staggers to her feet and towards the door.

INT. CORRIDOR, SOMERVILLE ROOMS - LATER

Winifred is walking back to her room when she sees a figure slumped on the floor. As she approaches, she sees it's Vera, trembling, barely conscious.

WINIFRED

Vera?

Vera opens her eyes - Winifred's concerned face swims before her, distorted; her voice sounds strange.

WINIFRED

Are you alright?

Vera groans - and loses consciousness.

INT. VERA'S ROOM - DAYS LATER

Vera is lying on her side, in bed. The fever has gone but her expression is blank, without hope. Behind her stands Winifred, feeling a little awkward, 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.

Did you manage to read the last ones?

She sees a pile of books on the floor, they look untouched.

Vera turns round to face her.

VERA

Where were you in France? You said you were there, in the War.

WINIFRED

(surprised by the question)

(MORE)

WINIFRED (cont'd)
 Yes, near Abbeville, at a signals
 unit. I also worked at the local
 clearing station, when I had
 time.

A moment -

VERA
 I can imagine what that must've
 been like.

A beat.

WINIFRED
 Look, I'm sorry about the debate,
 I didn't realise...

VERA
 ...What, that I was such a mess?

Winifred looks uncomfortable, but Vera smiles.

VERA CONT.
 It's not your fault. I do a good
 job of disguising it. I've been
 trying very hard - to be normal.
 I just - don't know what that is
 anymore.

She looks vulnerable, afraid. Winifred's face is full of
 kindness.

WINIFRED
 When in doubt, start at the
 beginning. Get up, get dressed.
 Eat.

Vera smiles at her - a lifeline.

INT. WINIFRED'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - LATER

The two women are at Winifred's wardrobe as Winifred
 removes a red velvet cape, and holds it up.

WINIFRED
 How about this?

She drapes it round Vera, whose smaller frame is
 immediately swamped. Vera looks doubtful.

VERA
 Something of the vampire,
 perhaps.

WINIFRED
 Nonsense. Have a look.

She gestures to the mirror, but Vera resists.

WINIFRED

It looks fabulous with this -

She pulls out a long, loudly-patterned skirt.

WINIFRED CONT.

We'd have to take it up of course, but it's guaranteed to dispel a grim mood.

VERA

And deliver a migraine instead.

WINIFRED

(reacting)

Ah, we're feeling better!

They laugh. Vera sobers.

VERA

I don't like mirrors much these days, they tend to hold all kinds of unpleasant surprises...

Winifred doesn't fully understand, but she sees her anxiety. She holds out a hand. Vera is puzzled at first, then, a little stiffly, places her hand in hers.

Gently, Winifred leads her over to the mirror.

They stand there together, looking in. Just their reflections.

WINIFRED

There, you see?

Vera smiles - immensely relieved.

EXT. RIVER CHERWELL, OXFORD - DAY

Vera and Winifred walk along the river together, talking animatedly. Vera seems light-hearted.

INT. MISS LORIMER'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - DAY

Miss Lorimer is sitting at her desk when there's a knock at the door.

MISS LORIMER

Not now, thank you!

She hears a noise, looks up in irritation to see Vera standing there. Her expression briefly softens.

MISS LORIMER
Miss Brittain. What is it?

Vera approaches.

VERA
I'm sorry to disturb you, but -
Vera, words tumbling, struggles to express herself.

VERA CONT.
I'd like to change to history -
She sees Miss Lorimer's expression.

VERA CONT.
I realise it's unorthodox and I -

MISS LORIMER
(interrupting)
You were admitted to read English-

VERA
But I can read books anytime!
(Realising, steadying herself) I
want to study War, the reasons it
comes about, and, is there
anything we can do to stop it?

Miss Lorimer's face reveals nothing.

VERA CONT.
You've been so kind, keeping my
place open for me, and yes...this
is a reaction to the last four
years, I don't deny it, but it's
the only thing that makes any
sense!

A pause. Vera braces herself, waiting...Miss Lorimer picks up her pen.

MISS LORIMER
I'll see what I can do.

VERA
Oh! Thank you.

She turns to head for the door.

MISS LORIMER
Miss Brittain!

Vera turns round.

MISS LORIMER
 (a sudden, rare smile)
 Good to have you back.

Vera smiles.

EXT. STREET, OXFORD - EVENING

Vera is walking along with some shopping when the sound of a speaker's voice attracts her attention. She stops, notices a hall with a poster outside which reads: "War Reparations - Should Germany Pay?" She hesitates, then goes inside.

INT. OXFORD HALL - A LITTLE LATER

Vera is pushing her way to the front of a small crowd, watching a bullish speaker on stage. The hall is large.

MALE SPEAKER
 Unlike the previous speaker on this platform tonight I am a patriot, and I believe Germany needs to be shown! These War reparations do not go far enough! She needs to be pounded and pounded until she'll never get back on her knees!

Cheers, cries of support.

MALE SPEAKER CONT.
 It's the only way to honour our dead!

Vera, at the front now, finds herself shouting out:

VERA
 Not my dead!

MALE SPEAKER
 Ah, a young lady at the front has something interesting to say!

People look at Vera.

MALE SPEAKER CONT.
 Come on up, little Miss! Don't be afraid, we won't bite!

Some laughter.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
 Not unless you're German!

Vera, irritated, finds herself climbing onto the stage and looking out at the sea of faces.

VERA
 (anger and nerves)
 This is -! You ought to be -!

She catches herself - remembering her previous outburst.

VERA
 I mean -

A tumult of feelings choke her. The audience waits.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
 We haven't got all day!

Vera looks at their faces, takes a breath - and speaks.

VERA
 During the War I was a nurse at the front. For a time I was in charge of a hut of German soldiers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
 Hope you gave it to them good, Miss!

Some laughter.

VERA
 I remember one of them, I never knew his name, but he was a brave man - I held his hand as he was dying. He called out for a woman he loved, Klara. Over and over, he faced the end by asking for her forgiveness.

The audience don't like this at all.

AUDIENCE MEMBER
 The Germans killed my three sons!

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER
 And my fiance! Shame on you!

VERA
 I lost my fiance too! And there was no final message for him, no time for memories, just terrible pain and a fight to keep breathing, but when I held that German's hand it was his hand too that I was holding!

The woman in the audience gets up and walks out -

VERA CONT.

- their pain was the same pain,
their blood the same blood! My
grief is the grief of hundreds of
thousands of German women and
men!

Other people get up and leave.

VERA

Of course we're angry! We're
confused! The experience of these
past years has done terrible
things to us. But a humiliated
Germany will only rise stronger
and more intent on revenge! We
honour our dead by doing
everything in our power to break
the cycle and stop a calamity
like this from happening again!

Vera gazes out. The hall is almost empty. Just a half dozen
people remain.

VERA CONT.

(quieter now)

The war is over. But the peace
might yet be ours.

Vera ends. Takes a moment to catch her breath, and realise
what just happened -

The six or so people still there start to clap.

Vera gazes at them with a sudden, quiet elation - her eyes
come to rest on one among them, who is looking at her with
some surprise.

It's George, the young officer who told her of Roland's
death.

As the remaining few disperse, Vera climbs down off the
podium. George approaches her, they shake hands.

GEORGE

Miss Brittain!

VERA

Officer!

GEORGE

Mr., now. That is, George.

VERA

You're studying here too?

GEORGE
Yes. Politics.

VERA
Well!

A pause.

GEORGE
I've...often wondered how you
were. I never forgot our meeting.

Vera looks at him softly - and smiles.

CUT TO:

A MONTAGE -

- Vera and George walk down an Oxford street, talking animatedly together.

- Vera and George are boating down the river Cherwell, it's a beautiful summer's day. She seems happy.

- Vera stands on a podium in a village hall, speaking to a full audience. A banner behind her reads "League Of Nations Union". Winifred and George both watch her with pride.

- Vera and George walk to the entrance to Somerville together. As they say goodbye, he takes her hand, but she pulls it gently away, a shadow across her face.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM, OXFORD - DAY

A bustling train platform, as a steam train pulls in and groans to a halt. It's months later - a cold Autumn day.

Sitting on a bench, we find Vera and George. He's dressed for travel and has suitcases with him.

GEORGE
I can still change my mind.

VERA
You must go, nobody turns down a
job at Cornell.

GEORGE
America seems such a long way.

VERA
(false cheer)
It is.

(MORE)

VERA (cont'd)
Do write from time to time and
let me know how you're getting
on!

GEORGE
(low)
Vera, please...

A pause.

GEORGE CONT.
I'm a realist, I know what you've
been through, the love you've
felt. I know a part of you is
gone and will never come back.

He looks at her. Vera looks down, saying nothing, shivering slightly.

GEORGE CONT.
But can you and I live, and work
and - love together? Haven't
these past few months proved it?
I offer you everything it's in my
power to give.

The guard's whistle hoots, there's a scurry for the train.
They get to their feet. He takes his scarf off, and puts it
round her neck.

GEORGE CONT.
I'm coming back.

He sees on her face - her exhaustion with hoping, with
waiting.

GEORGE CONT.
I'll send you the day and time of
my return. If you're not there to
meet me, I promise I won't
trouble you again.

She holds out a hand, her face tormented.

VERA
Goodbye George, good luck.

He takes her hand, a quick shake, and she turns and walks
away. He stands watching, but she won't turn round again.

INT. WINIFRED'S ROOM - NIGHT

Vera is pacing as Winifred finishes reading some pages. She
looks up. Vera waits for her reaction.

WINIFRED

I feel sure you're meant to write, Vera, and technically it's very impressive.

VERA

But...?

WINIFRED

I can't find you in it. Shouldn't you be writing about things that matter to you? Like George, for example!

VERA

He doesn't matter to me!

WINIFRED

Oh Vera! Why can't you let it develop?

VERA

Isn't it obvious?

Winifred looks at her in puzzlement.

VERA CONT.

I'd be betraying Roland! And Edward, and the others. I can't just swan off and forget about them.

WINIFRED

Is that what you'd be doing?

VERA

That's how it feels!

Winifred speaks with care.

WINIFRED

You want to honour their memory, of course. But by shutting down your own life?

She puts the sheaf of papers down on the table.

WINIFRED CONT.

Is that really the best way?

Vera looks at the written pages - confused, her mind whirring.

INT. VERA'S ROOM, SOMERVILLE - NIGHT

Vera places a framed photo of Edward on her desk, to join others of Roland, Victor, Geoffrey. She goes and pulls the trunk out from under her bed, opens it, and lifts out letters, diaries, poems - all from the War.

LATER - she's at her desk reading a letter, surrounded by papers. She's been there for hours.

She finishes, looks up. Then, picks up her pen -

CUT TO:

VERA's booted feet - running -

BACK TO:

VERA in her room; she takes a deep breath, and starts to write - the opening lines of her book.

VERA V.O.

"When the Great War broke out, it came to me not as a superlative tragedy, but as an interruption of the most exasperating kind to my personal plans..."

As WE SEE - Vera in 1914, her face full of youthful energy, as she runs down the white country road, holding onto her hat, long skirts flapping.

EXT./INT. CORRIDOR/VERA'S ROOM - MORNING

Winifred knocks, then pokes her head round the door to see Vera slumped asleep across her desk. She steps quietly over to her - sees she's written pages of text.

INT. SHELDONIAN THEATRE, OXFORD - DAY

Vera, in her graduation cap and gown, walks onto a stage to accept her degree from a Don. We FIND Winifred in a row of other graduates, waiting, applauding her.

INT. BLOOMSBURY STUDIO, LONDON - DAY

Vera and Winifred are unpacking in their new, tiny London studio flat, surrounded by mess, exhilarated by their independence. Winifred, sorting through piles of papers on a table, picks out several letters for Vera and hands them to her.

Vera sees American postage - on the back, the same name written on all of them - George Catlin, and a Cornell address.

INT. VERA'S STUDIO ROOM, BLOOMSBURY - LATER

Vera, holding George's letters, is at the desk in her new, small room, untidy with unpacking. She opens a drawer and slips in the letters, still unopened. They join dozens of others already in there, all unread.

She sits down, picks up her pen, opens her manuscript - and continues to write.

INT. BLOOMSBURY STUDIO - NIGHT

Vera sits with the big manuscript on her lap, sorting the pages. On the cover, is a title: "Youth's Calvary."

She strikes it out, and instead writes the words: "Testament of Youth". She looks at it with satisfaction.

CUT TO:

A PRINTING PRESS -

Rolling out page after page of print.

CUT TO:

A FACTORY FLOOR -

WORKERS pack up boxes of Vera's book "Testament of Youth".

INT. SHOP WINDOW, LONDON - DAY

A hand places a book in the front window, on prominent display. "Testament of Youth" by Vera Brittain.

INT. BOOK SHOP, LONDON - DAY

Vera sits at a desk signing copies of her book, as a long queue of people wait, holding copies. A man steps forward. Vera opens the front cover, and signs her name. She hears her own voice, from the past.

VERA V.O.

You really - don't think me
ridiculous?

ROLAND V.O.

No.

VERA V.O.

What if I told you I want to
write for a living?

CUT TO:

A STONE PLOPS INTO A POOL OF WATER.

We lift up to discover the younger Vera, with Roland
nearby, in the wooded glen near Melrose.

VERA

And even achieve renown for it!

She looks at Roland.

ROLAND

Don't you need some experience
first?

VERA

Of course!

He smiles at her.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. BOOK SHOP, LONDON - DAY

Vera gazes into space, haunted by the memory. The customer
clears his throat, bringing her back to reality. She closes
the book, hands it back to him with a small smile.

INT. BLOOMSBURY APARTMENT - DAY

Vera walks through the front door in her hat and coat to
find Winifred in the lounge, she holds something out to
her. A telegram.

WINIFRED

For you.

Vera takes it and opens it.

WINIFRED

George?

Vera nods.

WINIFRED

He's persistent, I'll give him that.

VERA

(reading)

May 16th, Charing Cross. Four o'clock.

Winifred sees her trepidation.

WINIFRED

(gently)

What would Roland say if he was here now? What would he tell you to do?

Vera just looks at her.

EXT. UPPINGHAM SCHOOL - DAY

It's a beautiful Spring day. Vera is walking across the green lawn of Uppingham school. She stops - ahead, is the green hedge surrounding the rose garden. She moves towards it.

EXT. ROSE GARDEN, UPPINGHAM - A MINUTE LATER

Vera enters the rose garden, where roses are in bloom. Beautiful, foaming roses, as they always were.

A FLASH of - her hand in Roland's as he pulls her along.

Vera makes her way towards the bower where they first kissed.

A FLASH of - Roland's cheek as he kisses her, seen through half-closed lids -

Back on Vera. The bower is not there anymore. In its place, a war memorial, with brass plaques on it of the school's fallen. A statue of a boy soldier towers above.

VERA'S FINGER traces the names Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Victor Richardson.

She hears a sound, turns - looks straight into sunlight. There they are, silhouetted against the light, the four of them - laughing, walking together; strong-limbed, young, beautiful.

Vera smiles, tears in her eyes. The breeze blows. And they're gone. All is silent. She takes out a piece of paper, unfolds it.

It's one of Roland's poems from the front - stained, dirty from the trenches. She starts to read.

VERA'S VOICE

*The sunshine on the long white
road
That ribboned down the hill,*

EXT. MELROSE - DAY

Vera stands on the long white road weaving its way across the gentle Buxton hills.

VERA'S VOICE

*The velvet clematis that clung
Around your window sill
Are waiting for you still.*

EXT. WOODED GLEN, BUXTON - DAY

Vera stands by the pool of water where she and Roland talked. Now his voice takes over.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Again the shadowed pool shall
break
In dimples at your feet,
And when the thrush sings in your
wood,*

EXT. PLATFORM, CHARING CROSS STATION - DAY

A train is stopped at a platform, its doors open, spilling out passengers who are greeted by family and friends.

ROLAND'S VOICE

*Unknowing, you may meet
Another stranger, sweet.*

Waiting in the crowd, we find Vera. She's peering at the train doors, searching for George, but she can't see him.

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 -*

Couples and groups pass her, chatting, hauling luggage, happy to be reunited. The crowds start to clear. Vera, on the platform, looks suddenly isolated.

ROLAND'S VOICE
*And daisies are truer than
passion flowers:*

A pause, then -

ROLAND'S VOICE
It will be better so.

Then, at the far end of the platform, through a chug of smoke, she sees him, standing there. George. Hat on his head, luggage on the ground beside him.

Vera walks towards him. He turns, sees her. His face lights up.

CUT TO:

A PRINTING PRESS -

Churning out 'Testament of Youth' in German, in French, in Spanish, Dutch, Chinese, Italian....

AS, ON-SCREEN, THE FOLLOWING WORDS APPEAR:

Vera Brittain became a life-long campaigner for peace and women's rights, and a successful novelist and journalist.

During the Second World War she spoke out strongly against the allied bombing of German cities.

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.

"Testament of Youth" was a publishing sensation on its release, and remains in print to this day.

The End.