

VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE

by
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Based on the book by PAULO COHELO

EXT. DARK, COLD GARDEN - NIGHT

A YOUNG MAN (EDWARD, mid-20s) is sitting on a bench in a large empty, cold garden at night. He is very still. As if waiting.

Looking through winter trees at the wide river in the distance, his ears pick out the small sounds of the night with heightened awareness: an owl calling, an animal rustling in the undergrowth. But his eyes don't move. Despite the cold he has been sitting here for hours.

EXT. BROOKLYN BRIDGE, NEW YORK - DAY

VERONIKA (25) stands at the edge of the Brooklyn Bridge, her expression strangely blissful. Wears a multi-colored "gypsy" peasant blouse.

Magical, honey light shines straight in her eyes. The breeze plays havoc with her hair. She sees the river surging far below. No fear.

Looking up to the sky, Veronika jumps off the edge. Disappears from sight.

INT. BOARDROOM/JP MORGAN PRIVATE BANK, MANHATTAN - DAY

Veronika, the same girl, stands handing out immaculately xeroxed quarterly reports to fellow bankers.

She's dressed in a sharp expensive business suit. She is perfectly dressed for the part of a successful professional but there's a frozen feeling of panic in her eyes.

She watches the other people round the large table, talking and engaged. The windows look out onto other tall skyscrapers.

She's an accomplished, successful young woman but her soul is strangling. Without ever saying a word about it, she feels trapped.

LATER

The Bank's Office spaces are immaculate, beautifully designed and outfitted. Classy expensive art on the wall. You could almost confuse the place with an art-gallery.

Veronika's POV: A computer screen is endlessly generating account numbers. She is in a very "plush" cubicle

Next to her a suited assistant delivers snacks.

COFFEE BOY
Grande soy latte.

He thuds it down in front of Veronika on her desk. She looks at it.

She glances at colleagues, feels a million miles from them. Aren't they like mental patients who've been drugged into acquiescence?

LATER

Veronika removes an article as a computer prints it out. She draws a line under one part of the article she needs.

She adroitly uses a palette knife to cut that section of the article out. The knife slips in her hand.

Large drops of blood appear on her desk.

ART-DIRECTOR

Veronika, are you all right?

Veronika doesn't understand the question. Then notices her bleeding finger. She doesn't feel the pain from the cut.

LATER

Veronika mechanically pounds out whatever she's supposed to be doing on her computer.

CO-WORKER TWO

You going out tonight?

Veronika looks up at him as if she has no idea what he's talking about.

CUT TO:

EXT. MIDTOWN STREETS - EVENING

End of work day, pedestrian traffic on the sidewalk. Most of the snow is melting.

Veronika is lost in the crowd, one of a million.

She stops abruptly and stands still while people surge and push past her, as if having trouble making a decision. She starts on her way again, then stops, turns around and goes down into the subway.

EXT. DARK GARDEN - NIGHT

Edward is now standing up, listening to the wind riffling through trees. He shivers, but not without enjoyment.

Behind him in the large garden lines of tall sculpted hedges edge the criss-cross of light, sandy paths.

When he hears someone bang a door nearby, he starts and walks away deeper into the garden.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
(drifting across from a
building)

Edward! You have to come in now!

After a strange pause he turns, his face silhouetted.

INT. SUBWAY - NIGHT

Veronika watches the blurred reflections of people on the train.

INT. DOWNTOWN CLUB - NIGHT

Crowded, opulent, harsh, a little over-designed. Veronika navigates the crowd.

VERONIKA'S POV AS SHE MOVES: The dancing clubbers look vaguely ominous, semi-aliens.

She finds the GUY she is looking for in a chat with friends, gesturing enthusiastically. Veronika taps him on the shoulder.

He's pleased - and surprised - to see her. Hugs her. She remains unmoved.

He introduces her to the people he's talking to. She nods perfunctory greetings. They look her up and down. The two girls in the group are jealous of her looks.

A moment later her guy-friend looks past who he is listening to. His look says: 'Can we get out of here?'

INT. CLUB FRIEND'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment is stylish but cold, like the bank.

She and the guy are having sex against the wall of his apartment. Most of their clothes are still on. She avoids his eye.

VERONIKA'S POV: Over his shoulder, she can see the neighboring buildings across the street with walls of windows.

Every second takes her further away from him.

LATER

The guy is fast asleep under the covers.

Her winter coat on over her clothes, Veronika smokes a cigarette on the side of the bed. She gets up with decision.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - NIGHT

Veronika seems like the only one awake on these streets as snow falls lightly.

Walking quickly, she is working herself into a strange trance.

INT. RECREATION ROOM - NIGHT

Edward is standing alone, staring out a frosty window

He is ignoring the t.v. which is turned on to a channel that has ceased programming and is only projecting snow.

He hears footsteps coming towards him and tenses, as if bracing himself to resist.

A striking middle-aged WOMAN (MARI) stops by him. He sees who it is and relaxes. They both look out of the window.

MARI
Can't sleep either?

Edward remains strangely silent, but Mari doesn't seem to expect him to say anything.

Mari goes to a big comfy chair and picks up the remote from its arm to turn the tv to Letterman's channel.

She returns to Edward, and slips her arm into his arm, and clasps hands with him, like a slightly naughty big sister.

They sit down together in the big comfy chair.

MARI (CONT'D)
(playful whisper)
Letterman's not so bad.

Edward ignores the t.v. Still gazes out the window.

INT. GROUND FLOOR FOYER/ VERONIKA'S BROWNSTONE -NIGHT

Veronika mechanically removes and studies the day's mail, mostly junk mail, solicitations, post-card, promotions and then a colorful Bloomingdales Spring Sales Brocheure--A flashy model under the heading "Green is the New Black"

She mouths the words "Green is the New Black" and makes a frowning face.

INT. CORRIDOR TO VERONIKA'S APARTMENT--NIGHT

Veronika is walking along the corridor in an apartment block. It is long and empty, all the doors to other apartments are closed.

INT. VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

It's a clean ordinary one-bedroom without much sentimental adornment. Veronika closes the door and hangs up her coat. Outside the window she can see the Brooklyn Bridge, its lights twinkling.

Next to the coat rack hangs a calendar. It's got brightly-colored images of a pretty city and the words "LJUBLJANA, the heart of SLOVENIA".

She puts her keys down on a table next to one of those glass paperweights with a snowy scene in clear liquid.

Veronika goes to her stereo and picks up CD of a European string quartet playing Beethoven's late quartets. Puts one on.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

She walks into the kitchen which is small, and spotlessly clean.

She takes a big bottle of water out of the fridge, then opens a cupboard, gets out an unopened bottle of good whiskey and pours half a glass. Doesn't drink it yet.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

She starts the shower running.

She turns on the harsh neon light over the three-way mirror and opens the medicine cabinet. Brings out tooth brush, tooth paste, which she places on the sink, and three containers of pills. She catches sight of herself in the three-way mirror, noticing the multi-angled, infinite reflections of herself. She looks at the faint beginnings of lines on her face. She turns off the neon light; she looks beautiful again. Her eyes are dead and flat. She turns away.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

She sits at the kitchen table and opens the three containers of pills.

She makes neat little symmetrical piles of them. Straightens them. She looks up briefly at the massive bridge outside, at the water flowing far below.

INT. SHOWER - NIGHT

A few moments later, she's in the shower soaping herself up vigorously.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Veronika finishes buttoning her blouse and walks out of the bedroom through the living room area.

She sits at the kitchen table staring at the piles of pills.

She puts one pile of pills in her hands and, after a second's hesitation, swallows them with a slug of water. She has a gulp of whiskey.

She takes another, then another, steadily working her way through them. Then takes another swig of whiskey. Winces.

She leans back and looks at the clock: 3.22 am.

She flicks on the TV and hops from channel to channel. Cop shows. Reality show dysfunction. Cartoons. Pundits. 500 channels but nothing's on.

Veronika gets up and looks out the window. The Brooklyn Bridge twinkles out there.

As she walks into her living room she feels pain, nausea in her stomach. But it passes. Bored and irritated, she checks the labels on the bottles. She looks at the clock again, goes to the couch and turns up the sound on the TV. It drowns out the Beethoven.

INT. CORRIDOR TO VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The clashing sounds of the TV and Beethoven echo down the empty corridor.

INT. VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Veronika is squinting at the TV screen in bored disgust she turns it off.

Once again only the Beethoven plays. Mournful, eloquent.

She takes three more pills, finding them difficult to swallow.

VERONIKA

Now what...

Stumbling to her couch, Veronika's eye awkwardly catches the bright flashy colors of the Bloomingdale's brochure.

The bright cheery sexy model under the banner GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK is now inconceivably loathsome to Veronika.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

Idiot.

She collapses into her chair at her desk in front of her laptop. Her fingers erratically push several buttons...

VERONIKA'S POV: Her FACEBOOK page comes up.

She mutters to herself as she awkwardly types.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

Dear Facebook friends, I am writing to warn you about the latest Bloomingdale's Ad copy-- Green is not the new black. What a load of crap!

She stops.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

No... that's just RUDE.

She laughs. She types, muttering, squinting.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

Green is green and black is black. Who said we need "New" colors. Why does everything have to be so fucking "New" all the time. Bloomingdales, you destroy colors for me.

She has a sudden searing pain in her belly. There's an involuntary spasm that almost makes her vomit.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK is the kind of corrupt slogan fashion zombies flood us with, to pollute the mind of consumers, thus distracting them from things that matter. I am killing myself rather than continuing to live in this fake world they're creating.

Veronika grits her teeth and opens her eyes just enough to give the mouse one crucial click on SEND. Buzzing starts in her ears.

Again, the spasm passes.

Hearing a noise outside the window Veronika staggers up and looks out again, down at the street below:

An OLD WOMAN, rickety and frail, pushes a broken down grocery cart.

EXT. STREET OPPOSITE - NIGHT

The old woman, frail with arthritis, shivers as she moves. The cart is messily packed with rags and junk. She's pathetic, but weirdly impressive in her dreary, dogged determination. She stops and rests of a moment. She looks up in Veronika's direction.

INT. VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Veronika watches the old woman pick up her cart again and disappear into the darkness. Turning away, Veronika falls to the floor. She gets to her knees and, stumbling precariously, lands on her knees near the stereo system.

She reaches toward the buttons, but by mistake turns the sound of the Beethoven as high as it can go. She stumbles to the floor again, a glass of water tumbling with her, the glass breaking as it hits the floor. Lying on her side, trembling, a tear runs out of the corner of Veronika's eye and down the side of her face.

She runs her tongue over parched lips. She watches the water from the glass seep into the carpet. She sees a prism of herself glinting back from the broken glass.

On the nearest shelf, she glimpses the perfectly happy family portrait of Veronika hugging playfully with her parents. They are standing by a huge, beautiful lake, in Slovenia.

Veronika loses consciousness.

CUT TO:

Darkness.

O.S. Sound of knocking. Louder knocking. A key rattling in the door.

O.S. The door opens.

BACK TO:

The building's superintendent (in uniform) peers in, with a punk neighbor behind him.

Their POV: part of Veronika lying awkwardly on the floor.

The super hurries in, puts his hand on her neck, then his ear to her chest. The neighbor turns off the blaring stereo.

CUT TO:

Darkness.

*SUPERINTENDENT (O.S.)
(shouting)
Call 911.*

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY - VERONIKA'S MIND

Veronika finds herself in a row boat on the exquisite lake surrounded by mountains from the family photo. It is fabulously beautiful, heavenly. A light wind is whistling in her ears. It is strangely peaceful. She picks up the oars and starts rowing gently, looking around her in delight. Sunlight bounces off the water, blinding her.

O.S. A stretcher being pulled awkwardly down the stairway.

*PARAMEDIC TWO (O.S.)
You get her, okay?*

*PARAMEDIC ONE (O.S.)
Got her. She's cute, huh?*

Veronika starts rowing more quickly across the lake, as if away from something. She catches sight of something on the shore and looks round: far away she sees someone who looks very like her, slightly older, with a baby in her arms: it is her. Their eyes meet, recognition in both of them. Veronika is overwhelmed. She stands up in the boat, dropping the oars.

O.S. Ambulance screaming along...

*PARAMEDIC ONE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Heartbeat irregular, pulse
dropping--*

The rowing boat starts to rock violently from side to side, Veronika loses her balance, panics and looks down at the water. She sees her reflection. She's uncertain of what she's seeing.

*PARAMEDIC THREE (O.S.)
You better aspirate her...*

CUT TO:

A needle goes in her arm. A tube starts producing fluid.

BACK TO:

EXT. UNDER WATER IN LAKE - DAY - VERONIKA'S MIND

Veronika is now under water: intense blue, calm and quiet. She is peaceful again. The water holds her. She looks up, but can only see deep blue water stretching up and up. She swims up and up through the blue. Her heartbeat starts coming loud and very quick.

PARAMEDIC ONE (O.S.)
I gotta get down there.

PARAMEDIC THREE (O.S.)
(hollering)
Then just do it.

O.S. A tube feeding down her throat.

O.S. A strangled scream.

Darkness.

O.S. A machine beeping. Rustle of starched skirts.

EXT. ABOVE A HUGE LAKE - COMA VISION - BRIGHT LIGHT

Veronika is now at the top of the massive lake, the sun in her face. Then suddenly, abruptly the sun is eclipsed by drastic inexplicable darkness.

O.S. Murmuring voices.

CUT TO:

Zoom in on Veronika's face. For a few seconds it seems flooded with a kaleidoscope of colors. It could be life returning, or some unique space in between. Veronika strangely transfigured.

Darkness.

CUT TO:

Flashes of Veronika lying still, unconscious. Once, twice, three times.

Veronika's eyes open. She sees sparkling light out of the window from where she is lying, the branch of a tree bouncing and making the light dance.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRONT LAWN/ VILLETTE - WINTER DAY

CU of bark high up on a tree; a young man's finger comes in and touches it; the young man's eye watching it.

This is EDWARD, sitting on a branch in a tree, branches all around him.

O.S. Sounds of voices from far away, with the more distinct sound of wind in bare branches in the foreground.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE, VILLETTE - WINTER DAY

The rather old-fashioned office of a brilliant psychiatrist, DR. BLAKE (late 40s). A labyrinthine Escher print on the wall, a large fish tank in the corner, filing cabinets lining the room. His desk is piled high with papers, case files of patients, and pages of his uncompleted magnum opus on mental illness.

He gets up from his desk and walks to his window.

After watching a moment, he switches on the intercom.

BLAKE
Tell them to bring in my 9:15.

EXT. FRONT LAWN/ VILLETTE

Edward is looking out, apparently blankly.

EDWARD'S POV (BRIEF FLASHES)

-- the ornate old fashioned spikes on the fence surrounding the grounds.

-- an empty bench near the end of driveway

-- the bare branches of trees at end-of-winter in a small wood behind the building.

Mari is below the tree, pleasantly dressed in a very middle-class winter coat. She calls up to him:

MARI
Time to come in, Edward.

Behind Mari stands a neo-classical mansion. Coming down the lawn, approaching the spot where Mari stands and Edward sits, are two men: muscular, perfunctory, professional, with bunches of keys jangling from their uniforms.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Blake, from behind his desk, studies Edward, who is sitting strangely still in his chair, obedient, withdrawn.

DR. BLAKE
I wanted to tell you that your father's annual visit is scheduled for the end of this week.

Blake watches Edward for any discernible response, but there is none.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
He'll ask if you've made any progress... have you made any progress, Ed?

The last was asked with dry, self-critical irony.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
I haven't been able to do anything for you here.

He tries moving closer, still not expecting a response. Edward is not making eye contact with the doctor. He is looking at a pile of papers on Blake's desk.

Blake starts pacing.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
Villette works for the great majority who come here...

He shoots another look straight at Edward.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
The last two times he came I suggested he bring you home, but... Well. I am certain he believes your being here is for the best.

He squeezes Edward's shoulder gently.

Edward seems barely aware of his presence, his attention fixed somewhere else entirely.

Blake sighs and looks toward the doorway where the nurses stand. He nods to them.

EXT. VILLETTE DRIVEWAY - DAY

On a grey wintry day, the gates of Villette open slowly and an ambulance driving at a sedate pace takes a long winding path that snakes up to the main entrance.

EXT. VILLETTE ENTRANCE - DAY

There are some dignified-looking steps to the entrance. Off to the side of the steps is a bench.

Seated on the bench is Edward. Silent.

Next to him, an excitable patient. The excitable guy jumps up and looks attentively at the ambulance coming to a full stop.

Edward, resolutely staring at the ground, hears the ambulance doors, slamming shut. He winces.

AMBULANCE DRIVER (O.S.)
Careful!

Edward turns around and notices that a young woman is being helped into a wheelchair. NURSE BLANCA and two others are pushing her into the building.

She is limp but conscious.

Edward catches sight of the girl's arm as it drapes over the side of the chair, her long hair brushing the cold metal.

INT. RECREATION AREA - DAY

Mari sees Veronika being wheeled through to the infirmary.

CUT TO:

INT. VILLETTE ASYLUM INFIRMARY - DAY

Through the curtain O.S. Veronika's eyes blink.

A distant machine buzzes. Veronika can't see anyone. She hears someone cry and groan, voices whispering in calm, technical tones. She drifts in and out of consciousness.

O.S. Voices murmur.

In a gap in the curtains she sees a female patient sitting on a bed with her back to her.

Nearby Nurse Josephina, a plump, Hispanic, middle-aged woman pushes a medicine trolley.

A couple of tears roll down the side of Veronika's face and slide into her ear. She tries to say something but her voice is like sand paper.

The nurse smiles condescendingly.

NURSE JOSEPHINA
Relax. We're going to take good care of you.

Veronika becomes aware that needles are stuck all over her body, wires connected to the area around her heart and her arms.

Her face becomes a mask of terror and horror.

VERONIKA
No!

She desperately tries to pull herself free of the restraints.

NURSE JOSEPHINA
We'll have to sedate you.

Nurse Josephina produces a long hypodermic.

CUT TO:

Darkness.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM - DUSK

Edward enters his room, quietly.

He locks his door. He goes to his desk and takes a butter knife from it.

He sits on the floor of his room and unscrews one of the floorboards.

In the little compartment under the floorboards are a mess of papers, notebooks, a glass weight with a snow scene, and a few other objects precious to him.

He takes out one of the notebooks.

Rapidly turning pages of the notebook: scrawled words, clever, endless drawings of different scenes and characters from Villette life, more visionary ones too (he has talent and a free imagination), a battered Polaroid of a young black woman smiling radiantly into the camera, an intimate snap. There is another one of him and her together. He rubs it. Puts it carefully back into the book.

He finds what he was looking for in another notebook: a drawing he did of a girl in a chair, long hair falling against the metal, her hand draping over the side. The impression is strikingly similar to Veronika arriving at Villette.

INT. INFIRMARY - MORNING

Veronika, with some difficulty, is trying to sit up in bed.

DR. THOMPSON (O.S.)
You were in a coma in intensive care for two weeks before being well enough to be with us here.

Groggy and disoriented, she finds herself facing two visitors who are pulling their Rolling chairs nearer her bed. Josephina pulls shut the curtain around her bed, but it doesn't close all the way.

DR. THOMPSON, around thirty four, energetic, smart, sits facing Veronika head on.

Next to him is Dr. Blake who lets Thompson have the floor for the moment.

VERONIKA
Where am I now?

DR. THOMPSON
Villette.

VERONIKA
Villette?

DR THOMPSON
A privately-funded psychiatric hospital on the Hudson River. Our director, Dr. Blake...

He gestures towards the senior man, who nods, slightly patronizingly.

DR. THOMPSON
... has taken an interest in your case.

VERONIKA
Shrinks, huh?

They both nod. Veronika is disoriented, suspicious. Still half out of it.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Why am I here? Who sent me?

DR. THOMPSON
Your parents approved it.

VERONIKA
They're paying for this?

DR. THOMPSON
Well, yes.

Veronika winces.

DR. THOMPSON (CONT'D)
Can I ask you a few questions?

Veronika nods.

DR. THOMPSON (CONT'D)
Your date of birth?

CUT TO:

INT. DARKENED, CANDLELIT ROOM - VERONIKA'S MIND

These visions are in bright, vivid colors.

Six year-old Veronika wearing a paper crown, blowing out candles at a birthday party with other nice kids. Happy, sweet. Her parents behind her smiling with love.

VERONIKA
December 24th, 2000 -- no-- I mean, 1983.

BACK TO:

DR. THOMPSON
Your address.

Veronika tries to focus.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LONG CORRIDOR OF THE APARTMENT BLOCK - NIGHT

The corridor is dark, her door open, a brilliant light coming from it, Veronika is silhouetted in the doorway.

BACK TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - MORNING

Veronika is looking confused.

DR. THOMPSON
Place of employment?

VERONIKA
JP Morgan Private Bank Inc.

CUT TO:

INT. VERONIKA'S OFFICE - VERONIKA'S MIND

Veronika adroitly using the palette knife. Cutting her finger. Blood.

BACK TO:

Veronika looks down at her finger, at the small scar where she cut herself.

DR. THOMAS
Your position?

VERONIKA
Assistant Office Manager. Sixty three thousand a year with additional health benefits included.

DR. THOMAS
The color of your mother's hair?

Veronika pauses. Emotion catches her by surprise.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE LAKE FROM THE FAMILY PHOTO--VERONIKA'S MIND

Nine year old Veronika's POV: She's walking by the familiar lake behind her Mom whose head and hair color are obscured by a wide hat. Her dad comes into view, shouting, upset.

Veronika blinks, a tear rolling down her face. What she is about to say feels oddly funny.

VERONIKA
I can't remember.

DR. THOMPSON
The color of my hair?

She looks at his dark brown hair.

VERONIKA
Blond.

Dr. Thompson is concerned; writes a note. Dr Blake notices the glint in Veronika's eye.

DR. THOMPSON
Are you sure?

CUT TO:

TV SCREEN. Outside a TV office building.

REPORTER
Today, a spokesman for Bloomingdales scrambled to react as 25 year-old Veronika Deklava's suicide e-mail posted on Facebook sparked a massive online debate.

INT. RECREATION AREA - DAY

OLD FRED jabs Mari.

FRED
That's the one they wheeled in yesterday...

MARI
Deal a card, Fred.

BACK TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

DR. BLAKE
So 'Deklava' is Slovenian? Your parents -

VERONIKA
They left Slovenia before I was born. I get along with them just fine if that's what you're wondering.

Blake looks up at her.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
I know where this is going.

DR. BLAKE
And where is that?

VERONIKA
After you decide that I've been depressed or whatever, you'll put me on meds, smooth out my moods. I know a million people on anti-depressants and they're all right as rain now.

She pauses. Her tone is almost pleasant.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
I'll go back to work, and I'll be fine. Really. I'll have dinner with my parents and persuade them I'm back to being the normal one that never gives anyone any trouble.

She trembles a little. We see a tiny bit of that panic that was in her eyes at the job.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
One day some guy will ask me to marry him. He'll be nice enough and it'll make my parents happy. The first year we'll make love a lot, and then in the second and third, less and less. But just when we're getting sick of each other I'll get pregnant. Taking care of kids, holding onto jobs, paying mortgages, will keep things on an even keel for awhile.

Thompson and Blake exchange glances.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Ten years into it my husband will have an affair, because I'm too tired and busy to. I'll find out, threaten to kill him, his mistress, myself... but we'll get past it. A few years later he'll have a new affair. This time I'll pretend I don't know because kicking up another fuss just won't seem worth the trouble.

Now, without her being aware of it, her smile has become quite angry.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
And I'll wait out the rest of my life, sometimes wishing my kids could have the life I missed having, other times secretly pleased that they're turning into repeats of me.

From some room at the other end of the facility, a patient can be heard, yelling and wailing.

DR. BLAKE
Sounds like confinement in a maximum security prison. The incidence of attempted suicide is very high there, too.

VERONIKA
I'm fine. I really am.

DR. BLAKE
At least we don't have to find out why you tried to kill yourself.

VERONIKA
But that's not -

But Veronika turns her face away from the doctors' prying eyes. Hot shame.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
How long do I have to stay here?

Dr. Thompson shifts around.

DR. THOMPSON
Unfortunately, we have some difficult news... in that regard.

VERONIKA
Really?

Thompson pulls Blake to one side and has an urgent hushed conversation with him. Thompson defers to Blake, of whom he is clearly in awe.

Through the crack in the curtain Veronika notices two nurses, a man and a woman.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Can someone just tell me what's going on?

Thompson walks to Veronika's bed and presents her with an x-ray to look at.

DR. BLAKE
(gesturing to the x-rays)
Yours.

VERONIKA
Oh.

She looks at the x-rays, at her black-and-white insides.

DR. THOMPSON
The overdose of barbiturates you took has caused necrosis of the ventricles...in layman's terms you have damaged the mechanism that pumps blood into the heart which has done irreversible damage to it. To your heart. It means that at some point your heart will fail.

VERONIKA
Are you sure?

DR. THOMPSON
Well we can be sure that there is nothing we can do about the damage already done.

VERONIKA
So what does it mean?

Dr. Blake looks at Dr. Thompson for him to continue.

DR. THOMPSON
If your heart stops beating, then it can mean only one thing.

Veronika struggles to take this in.

VERONIKA
So I'm going to die after all?

Tense silence.

DR. THOMPSON
(looking nervously at Blake)
I'm afraid so.

VERONIKA
How long...do I have?... Months? Years?

DR. THOMPSON
Exact estimates are impossible.
Not years.

VERONIKA
--So, six months? One month?

Dr. Thompson looks to Dr. Blake to help him out.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Tell me how long.

DR. THOMPSON
It won't be more than two weeks,
probably more like one.

Thompson looks devastated.

VERONIKA
Well is it one or is it two? Make
your mind up.

DR. THOMPSON
More like one.

Veronika's eyes glimmer with resolve and tears.

VERONIKA
I have to wait that long?

DR. THOMPSON
Well...

VERONIKA
So if I succeeded why don't you
just kill me now?

DR. THOMPSON
This might be too much for you to
take in.

DR. BLAKE
Yes.

Dr. Blake stands up abruptly.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
That's enough for now. We think
this is the best place for you.
We will be giving you regular
shots for your heart that may
make you feel tired. But we will
do everything we can to make your
last days as pleasant as
possible.

Veronika is dazed, exhausted.

VERONIKA
My parents know?

DR. BLAKE
Well, not yet. No.

VERONIKA
You can't tell them. It would
kill them.

Silence.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
I've already left everything
behind.

DR. BLAKE
I think we've said enough for
now. Josephina, would you
please...

Veronika watches as they leave.

Making soothing noises, Nurse Josephina prepares a needle.

But as the needle comes towards her, Veronika starts to
panic. Suddenly frantic, she leaps out of the bed, knocking
over various bits of monitoring equipment next to her bed.
Dizzy and unstable.

VERONIKA
I don't want to wait. I don't
want to wait!

The two nurses move in to assist Josephina.

CUT TO:

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM - DAY

Edward is given a glass of water, and several pills to take
which he swallows amicably, by NURSE WHITE, a nice modest
white woman of about forty.

INT. HALLWAY/RECREATION ROOM - DAY

Edward walks the hallway. He turns and enters the MAIN
RECREATION ROOM like a sleepwalker.

At that point he sees a nurse pushing Veronika in a
wheelchair. She is still frantic.

Their eyes meet for a second as Veronika is pushed past
him.

This is noted by Mari, who is in her big comfy chair.

And not noted by CLAIRE, a curly haired young woman of about 30, who compulsively plays with something in the palm of her hand. Something that can't be seen.

E.C.U. On black pepper grinds filling the creases in her palm. She counts the grinds to herself.

CLAIRE
621, 622, 623....

INT. LIBRARY IN VILLETTE - DAY

Edward turns into the library. The librarian hardly even looks up as Edward picks a familiar book from the shelf and sits down with it, opening it at a familiar page: the visionary painting by Bruegel, 'The Fall of the Rebel Angel'. Doing something he clearly does regularly, Edward loses himself in its tumble of life, the struggle of good against evil.

INT. VERONIKA AND CLAIRE'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Nurse Josephina bustles round as two nurses wrestle the flailing Veronika to the bed. She injects her with sedative.

Veronika's eyes droop shut despite herself.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. OUTSIDE VILLETTE - EVENING

The woods creak and groan out in the late winter evening. The wind whispers through the branches. Below the forest ripples the surface of the deep, wide river.

INT. VERONIKA/CLAIRE'S ROOM - EVENING

Veronika wakes up, disoriented. The wind is rattling the window panes. A nurse passes by the door, keys clinking on her hip.

CLAIRE is sitting on her bed on the other side of the room holding a pack of cigarettes. Her other hand clutches the pepper grinds. You can tell.

CLAIRE
There you are. Better?

Claire holds out the pack of cigarettes to Veronika. Veronika shakes her head no.

Veronika watches Claire for a moment, trying to figure her out. Claire looks up at her with a knowing smile.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
This place isn't so bad, you know. They have really good drugs. I'm leaving any day now, but not till I have one more round of coma therapy.

On feeble legs Veronika walks to the door and looks out.

Claire stares at her.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
You're really pretty.

Veronika turns and responds in a cool unemotional way.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
What difference does that make?

She sees a patient at the far end of the corridor arguing with a nurse, who is doing her best to calm him down.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
I'm going to tell you the trick to this place. It's a story.

Veronika turns and smiles at Claire warily. Claire is compulsively fiddling with the peppercorns in her hand.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Once upon a time there was a powerful wizard who wanted to destroy an entire kingdom. To do this he poured a magic potion into the well from which all the citizens drank. Whoever tasted it would go mad.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EVENING

CLAIRE (V.O.)
Everyone drank from the well and changed completely without even noticing it, except for the king and his family who had their own water. When the king saw his people so changed he was terrified and tried to control the population by issuing a series of edicts governing security and public health.

Dr. Blake frantically scribbles on his lined sheets of paper, a new chapter for his book on mental illness: "The Will to Die".

BACK TO:

INT. VERONIKA/CLAIRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Veronika listens, amused, to Claire.

CLAIRE
But the police, the doctors, the shopkeepers had all drunk the water so they thought the king's decisions were absurd and refused to obey.

CLAIRE's eyes become more manic.

CUT TO:

INT. RECREATION AREA - EVENING/ NIGHT

Mari and the old guys watch the news on TV.

CLAIRE (O.S.)
The citizens were convinced the king had lost his mind. They marched on the castle and demanded his abdication. The king was in despair, preparing to leave the city but the queen stopped him saying. "Let us drink from the communal well, we'll be the same as they are."

BACK TO:

INT. VERONIKA/CLAIRE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Veronika looks out of the window and sees shapes moving out there in the garden. She can't quite make out what, or who, they are.

CLAIRE
So they drank from the well of madness and immediately became as insane as their subjects. And so the king was allowed continue ruling in peace until the end of his days.

Claire looks at Veronika expectantly.

VERONIKA
So -?

CLAIRE
So, learn to think as those around you think and you can pass yourself off as anything. You think outsiders are any less crazy than us?

VERONIKA
I'm not crazy.

But Claire has already changed track.

CLAIRE
Are you really going to die?

VERONIKA
Who told you that?

CLAIRE
You know. The talk. Talk, talk. Blah, blah, talk, talk.

VERONIKA
I don't want to wait.

Veronika steps closer to her, controlling her desperation.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
How could I get my hands on the pills I need to-- you know--?

CLAIRE
Really?

VERONIKA
I can't just sit here and wait.

Claire studies Veronika unself-consciously.

CUT TO:

From Claire's perspective we see Veronika, scared, her face strange in the half-light.

BACK TO:

A nurse passes by outside their room. Claire lowers her voice and holds up the pack of cigarettes:

CLAIRE
Come out with me to the garden. But put a coat on. You don't want them to think you're crazy.

EXT. GARDEN - EVENING/ NIGHT

The garden is walled, and accessed through a small archway. There are pathways and little empty ponds. An air of ghostliness hangs about it.

At the other end of the garden Edward sits staring down at the ground.

Mari is talking amiably with one of the nurses, enjoying herself. She is too far away for us to hear what she is saying.

CLAIRE
Ask Mari.

VERONIKA
What about?

Claire makes a 'how can you be so stupid' face.

CLAIRE
The pills?

Veronika looks over at Mari with interest.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Her clique have the best deal here... they don't have to take meds unless they feel like it and they get to go off the grounds and go to town once a week, see movies if they like.

VERONIKA
What a wonderful life. Who is she?

CLAIRE
She was a lawyer on the outside, and married to one too. But she lost her job, had a breakdown and ended up here. And her marriage is over too. Here today, gone tomorrow. She knows your situation.

VERONIKA
What did she say?

CLAIRE
I don't know. But if she doesn't want to talk to you she won't.

Edward glimpses Veronika at the other end of the garden.

Veronika is a little spooked by the intensity of Edward's glance. It's strong yet without any meaning she can identify. He changes his gaze so he is looking just behind her. She looks behind her, but there is no one there. When she looks back, Edward is looking down at the ground again, blankly.

Claire puts her arm through Veronika's. Veronika gently removes it.

VERONIKA
What about him?

Claire looks over and rolls her eyes.

CLAIRE
Ed. I know. He's gorgeous, but you can't actually talk to him. Mari has a way with him, but no one else.

Claire lights her cigarette.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
He was dumped here a few years ago.

VERONIKA
Years??

CLAIRE
That's what happens. The story was that he had an accident but when he was fixed he'd stopped talking.

VERONIKA
What do they say's wrong--

CLAIRE
Oh god, it changes all the time - catatonia, schizo - lots of names. No point getting interested in him. He doesn't care about anyone.

VERONIKA
I'm not interested in anyone either.

But she looks over at Edward who is staring at the ground.

CLAIRE
Not even me?

Veronika manages a slight smile, a little dash of conspiratorial girl-fun in it.

VERONIKA
You're different. You're the
only one who knows enough to
show me the ropes around here.

Veronika's half-flattering her to cover up her previous
moment of honesty and half-totally serious.

Claire brightens at the notion that she's an "expert" who
can assist Veronika.

CLAIRE
Absolutely. I can do that.

She nods quite excited.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
Do you know what astral travel
is?

VERONIKA
No.

CLAIRE
It's leaving your body, to fly
huge distances. I do it on my
coma treatments...

Edward is frowning into the ground ahead of him.

CUT TO:

Despite the apparent blankness of his gaze, he is in fact
absorbing the shape of leaves ground into the dirt, the
hidden beauty in them. He vaguely hears the voices
murmuring at the other end of the garden.

BACK TO:

Veronika resumes listening to Claire pointing to the moon.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
... I haven't gotten to the moon
yet.

VERONIKA
(irritated)
Where?

CLAIRE
The moon, via astral travel. But
I'll get there. Bet on it.

Veronika shoots one more look at Edward, bothered by him
without knowing why. She gets up abruptly.

VERONIKA
I'm freezing.

They exit, disappearing into the darkness.

Mari approaches and squeezes Edward gently, protectively,
on the shoulder.

She looks up and watches Veronika and Claire disappear into
darkness, somewhat wary of them.

INT. VERONIKA/CLAIRE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Veronika sits underneath her blankets, half astonished,
half terrified.

She opens a drawer. It's got her wallet with ID, and a
watch. And mobile phone, which is switched off.

She listens to the watch's second hand tick. She
noiselessly counts the numbers.

Somewhere around thirty she cries out-

VERONIKA
(whispering)
It's so slow!

She throws her head back on the pillow. She wants to cry
but she's too scared to. She curls up in the foetal
position.

CUT TO:

Surveillance screen watching Veronika from above, curled up
in bed.

CUT TO:

INT. RECREATION ROOM - NIGHT

Edward watches TV on a dead channel. This time he is
transfixed by the specks flickering and dancing across the
screen, lost in them.

INT. VERONIKA'S ROOM/ HALLWAYS OF VILLETTE - MORNING

Veronika receives a shot from Nurse Josephina, this time
without protest.

NURSE JOSEPHINA
You're free to go.

Veronika ventures out of her room and down the stairs.

She passes a janitor going into a room with a covered baby grand piano. She stops for a moment and looks at it until he closes the door.

INT. CAFETERIA--DAY

Veronika eats.

Claire comes up from behind, takes Veronika's arm and pulls her out of her chair and along with her. Veronika is both alarmed and amused.

CLAIRE

It's my last treatment. You promised you'd come.

VERONIKA

I did?

Jospehina joins them.

JOSEPHINA

Claire, this isn't a show for your little friends.

CLAIRE

She's hardly seen anything. Please, let her come.

Veronika notices the faces of the other patients in the cafeteria, each sitting in private silence, apparently locked in their worlds.

FLASHBACK--VERONIKA'S OFFICE

The sterile elegant immaculately designed workspace of the bank, with all the employees sitting in their own private silence too.

BACK TO:

VERONIKA

No, I don't want to.

Claire shrugs and marches on ahead. But Veronika follows behind, curious despite herself.

INT. CORRIDOR--DAY

On the corridor walls, Veronika notices pictures of happy patients and happy doctors, art done by the patients; documents certifying Villette's legitimacy as an institution.

Claire looks back and sees that Veronika is keeping up with her as she walks with Nurse Josephina.

INT. CORRIDOR/TREATMENT ROOM - MORNING

Without the nurses seeing, Veronika watches through the window in the door. She feels her breath coming quicker.

It is a treatment table in a featureless room of all white tile except for a metal drainage grate in the center of the floor.

Claire lies down on the table. A second nurse straps Claire to the table attaching machines and wires.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDER WATER - VERONIKA'S MIND

Veronika is swimming frantically up through the never-ending blue water.

BACK TO:

Veronika starts to find this procedure upsetting, but is grimly fascinated. She notices a surveillance camera in the corner by the ceiling.

She watches Blanca carefully prepare the contents of a syringe.

Veronika feels weak and panicky. Claire spots her and waves regally at her through the window.

Veronika waves back, tries to smile.

CLAIRE
(mouthing, from the
table)

Goodbye.

VERONIKA
Where are you going?

Veronika watches Blanca inject the hypodermic into a vein in Claire's arm. She winces and covers her ears.

Claire's eyes roll back till she looks horrifying. She starts to dribble out of the corner of her mouth.

CUT TO:

FLASH of Veronika losing consciousness in her flat.

BACK TO:

Veronika turns and flees down the corridor.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - MORNING

A surveillance screen of Veronika running down the corridor. The camera flicks to a different image from the hospital.

Blake, looking at the screen and rolling two heavy metal balls through his fingers, is speaking to someone from behind his desk.

DR. BLAKE
The reality of death is something she truly has started to experience as something beyond her control. And -

Sitting relaxed in the patient's chair is Mari.

MARI
Edward's noticed her.

DR. BLAKE
Whatever that means with Ed.

MARI
Have you grown so attached to your guilt about the fix you're in with Edward that you can't see yourself living without it?

DR. BLAKE
Is it because you're so close to leaving that you want to construct a happy ending for Ed to match yours?

MARI
I don't think Edward being interested in a suicidal girl with a few days to live is much of a happy ending.

Dr. Blake leans back in his chair.

DR. BLAKE
Perhaps you're a little jealous.

Mari rolls her eyes.

MARI
You mean "a little counter transference".

DR. BLAKE
Just because it's a cliché doesn't mean it isn't true.

He permits himself a small smile at her.

MARI
Anyway, who says I'm ready to go?

Blake gets up and wanders to the window.

DR. BLAKE
In order to lose someone you must first experience authentic attachment. If Ed could recover normal affect to the point where he'd be capable of genuine loss, I'd call it my finest hour as a doctor.

INT. CORRIDOR - MORNING

Veronika, still traumatized by what she has seen, passes the janitor going into the music room. She stops to watch, and sees a covered grand piano inside it.

She turns to look into the recreation room, where a group of older patients, together with Mari, are watching TV. They are amused by something.

INT. RECREATION AREA - MORNING

On the endless run of cable news channels, experts are commenting pro-and-con on the 'human interest story' of Veronika's Facebook suicide note

Veronika walks in quietly. Watches, noticing the others watching. For a moment she's fascinated.

ON TV SCREEN:

PRO--PUNDIT
I see Veronica Declava's Facebook e-mail as a generational cry of protest, a desperate heartfelt demand for meaning in an increasingly meaningless world.

Veronika, frozen, feels a million miles from the person they're responding to.

She casts hopeful looks in Mari's direction but gets no response and hasn't quite the nerve to initiate a conversation when everyone is so absorbed.

ANTI-PUNDIT

I'm sorry. Bottom line? The fashion industry suffers these attacks all the time, and meanwhile the sales numbers for haute couture, cosmetics, and specialty retail giants like Bloomingdales just keep going up and up.

Old Fred hearing this, guffaws at Veronika.

OLD FRED

He got you pretty good

Veronika flushes with anger and humiliation.

ON TV: INTERVIEW WITH TWO WORK COLLEAGUES

WORK COLLEAGUE

(enjoying the attention)
We had no idea Fashion was such a big issue with her.

2ND WORK COLLEAGUE

She dressed...you know...really nicely.

Old Fred turns, keeps glaring at Veronika and carries on laughing.

OLD FRED

"Nutty as a fruitcake!" Ha ha ha.

Edward, sitting away from the group, is intent on his book, gripping the cover tightly. But he isn't turning the pages.

Others of the old crowd in front watching the TV are laughing too. Mari turns round to look and, infected by the hysteria, starts laughing too, despite herself.

Veronika runs out of the room, tears filling her eyes.

INT/ EXT. CORRIDOR/ ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Outside in the corridor Veronika can still hear them all laughing. Her breath is coming hard.

She runs to the entrance to the building, feeling weak suddenly. She pulls opens the front door, feebly. The sharp air whips her face, startling her.

She looks up and sees the huge bare trees in frosty gardens, still and intensely beautiful.

Veronika takes a deep breath. Anger rises up in her. She turns back into the building.

INT. RECREATION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Veronika, simmering, walks over to Fred, who starts laughing again when she stands in front of him.

OLD FRED

Nutty as a fruitcake!

Taking herself by surprise, she slaps him hard across the face.

She looks dizzy. She blushes a deep red.

A moment of awkward, disconcerted silence comes over everyone in the room.

VERONIKA

Aren't you going to react?

Fred, soothing his face with his palm, glares stonily at Veronika.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

Aren't you going to do anything?

OLD FRED

No. You won't be with us much longer, little one.

Veronika looks up at Mari, her eyes blazing. Mari doesn't say anything.

Veronika then notices Edward looking at her, expressionless but intense. But as she looks at him, he abruptly turns his back and looks out of the window at the chilly, overcast day.

The sounds of the t.v. Voices continue.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY - VERONIKA'S MIND

The light is transformed: golden, beautiful, shining in her eyes. Veronika is walking in the garden with Edward, talking very animatedly, but no sound issues from her mouth. Then she stops. It's puzzling that her words cause no response in him. She wants him to talk back to her

Extreme Close Up: Veronika shrieks at Edward to talk to her. He has no reaction. The T.V. Sounds are absent, a clue that we're in her head.

BACK TO:

INT. RECREATION ROOM - MORNING

The sound of the t.v. Voices resumes telling us we've returned to reality.

Confused, Veronika turns away from Edward *and hurries out of the room.*

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Veronika is walking down the corridor very agitated and confused, her cheeks pink.

MARI (O.S.)

The good thing about being in a crazy hospital is that you can get away with stuff like slapping Fred.

Veronika whips round to see Mari right behind her. Veronika speaks to her in a fierce, desperate whisper.

VERONIKA

You're Mari-- Claire said you're--

MARI

- someone who can help you?

VERONIKA

How can I get pills?

Mari hesitates.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

Please help me.

Mari scrutinizes Veronika.

CUT TO:

Mari's POV of Veronika: in a tumult, shimmering with life and energy, a force to be reckoned with, incredibly beautiful.

BACK TO:

She makes a decision.

She nods up the hall to where the two male nurses are deeply absorbed, playing video games on their hand held game-boy DS.

MARI

When those two geniuses switch off on shifts at the end of the day, around dinner time, there's usually at least a brief second or two where that door just beyond this room is unwatched.

VERONIKA

What's that room?

MARI

The medicine closet.

A nurse comes up behind Veronika, who looks round at her.

NURSE

Dr. Blake wants to see you.

The nurse lightly takes her arm.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER - DAY

DR. BLAKE (O.S.)

How are you?

Veronika sits facing him, dazed by everything that has happened to her in the last 24 hours.

VERONIKA

I don't want to be here.

Blake glances at his watch, then up at Veronika.

DR. BLAKE

Your parents are waiting outside.

VERONIKA

No!

Veronika jumps up to the door.

DR. BLAKE

Tell them to take you home.

VERONIKA

I can't see them.

She cries out louder.

VERONIKA

I won't see them.

INTERCUT

INT. CORRIDOR/NEXT TO BLAKE'S OFFICE--DAY

Veronika's parents, Slovenian immigrants in their fifties, but a little older looking from the wear-and-tear of their lives, hear this.

INTERCUT

DR. BLAKE
They want to see you. They've
come all this way - And anyway,
you can't leave here unless they
sign you out.

She puts a hand to her heart, feeling weak and overcome.

VERONIKA
Did you-- did you tell them?

He shakes his head gently.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Why not?

DR. BLAKE
You asked me not to. I thought
I'd leave that up to you.

Her mind races.

VERONIKA
But how can I tell them? --I
can't--

DR. BLAKE
I think you should see them.

Veronika is silent. She slowly sits down.

Blake pushes a button on his intercom.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
Send Mr. And Mrs. Deklava in.

The door to the office opens and in come Veronika's
parents.

They all stand there, Veronika not making the first move to
hug them. In the moment of awkwardness, Blake ushers them
all into seats.

They came to America as fully formed adults. They speak
with discernible Balkan accents.

MOM
It's okay, sweetheart.

DAD
Mir, mir, Veronishka.

Blake smiles pleasantly.

DR. BLAKE
What does 'mir' mean.

MOM
It means 'calm'.

Blake tries to keep up the congenial manner.

DR. BLAKE
Calm is good.

It is clear that Veronika's parents are trying to control
fear and anger behind brave faces. Mrs. Dekleva twirls a
tissue through her fingers nervously.

DAD
The main thing is you're safe.

Under her chair Veronika is squeezing her hands together so
hard they go red. But her expression gives little away.

Blake notes down Veronika's silence.

MOM
Veronika always got good grades
at school, made friends with nice
people, and had good-paying jobs.

DAD
Never had a speck of trouble with
her. You always make us proud.

Her father is suddenly tearful.

Veronika ducks her head, closing her eyes. *This is awful.*

MOM
Doctor, how do you make her get
better-- I mean --back to normal?

DAD
He's a good Doctor--

Blake smiles patiently.

DR. BLAKE
Your daughter tried to kill
herself. It is nothing for you to
be ashamed of.

Veronika's parents are clearly deeply ashamed. They can't look at Veronika.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
In our society we feel we must be happy, and if we're not than we feel hopeless. We feel like failures.

But he sees he is alarming them and becomes kind and gentle again.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
The plan is to talk with Veronika, mostly. Encourage her to relax, get rested, get proper exercise and diet, and let herself... feel what she's feeling.

MOM
Talk?

Then she adds, in private anger, in Slovenian (*subtitled*):

MOM (CONT'D)
We should have gone back. Why wouldn't you listen?

Veronika's dad sighs wearily. Veronika is embarrassed. Blake wonders what is going on.

VERONIKA
What are they charging you for this, Dad?

DAD
Nothing. Forget it. Your health is the most important thing. If you could rest at home with us to save money, it would be great-- but--

DR. BLAKE
Sometimes, being away from everyone, even loved ones, helps people to get calm, 'mir.'

He smiles. Dad nods. He turns to his wife.

DAD
This place is worth it.

He smiles in Veronika's direction.

DAD (CONT'D)
We even saw, on our way in, they had a nice piano.

Dr. Blake shifts his glance directly to Veronika.

DR. BLAKE
Do you play piano?

VERONIKA
No.

DAD
What? But-- Doctor, she used to -

MOM
- used to play lovely Mozart, Chopin, Bach even Debussy.

DAD
Her teachers always said she had a gift!

VERONIKA
It's not important. I don't play anymore. It's nothing.

MOM
She even got a scholarship from the Juilliard. But she agreed it was better to go to a proper school--

DAD
--So she would never be lacking in a good-paying job.

VERONIKA
--Mom, can we just not talk about it? Please.

The sudden violence in Veronika's voice scares even her.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Can we just drop it? Does everyone want to humiliate me or what--

MOM
--We just want you to be happy.

VERONIKA
(yells)
RIGHT NOW, WHAT WOULD MAKE ME HAPPY IS IF EVERYBODY WOULD LEAVE ME ALONE. I CAN'T DO THIS.

There's an awkward moment or two of silence.

VERONIKA

I'm sorry. Mom, Dad. That was wrong of me. I'm sorry.

DAD

It's okay, sweetheart.

DR. BLAKE

Veronika, there's nothing else you want to say to your parents while they're here?

She shoots Blake a look of panic. She looks at her parents, overwhelmed with sadness. She shakes her head.

VERONIKA

No. Mom, Dad: Forgive me; okay? Please?

Swallowing the terrible thing she can't say: Goodbye.

MOM

Oh Veronika! You were always a treasure, to us.

Blake interrupts. This isn't going to go anywhere.

DR. BLAKE

Well. It's a long drive back to Brooklyn. You'll want to beat the rush hour traffic.

The parents are confused by this abrupt ending, but they acquiesce.

DAD

Yeah..., the traffic back to Brooklyn can be horrible, 'round this hour.

Veronika watches her parents awkwardly rise to their feet. Pity overwhelms her. With a surge of emotion she moves toward them and hugs them.

Her Dad feels momentarily comfortable in the role of the comforter, having no clue about the intensity of her grief.

DAD (CONT'D)

When Dr. Blake says it's okay, you'll come home and spend some time with us.

Veronika is crying.

Her parents pat and console their daughter. She's holding them more fervently than they can bear.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE BLAKE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Veronika watches their backs as they go down the hall, her mother putting on a warm hat that conceals her hair.

Blake and she are alone in the doorway. She looks at him, emotions churning.

AND THEN SUDDENLY SHE runs away in the other direction way down the corridor.

Blake watches her disappear round the corner.

Around the corner, Veronika, gasping, slowing down-- feels her heart fluttering wildly in her chest. She is light-headed, begins to panic. Her vision blurs.

VERONIKA

This is it!

She takes a couple of uncertain, shaky, steps, and then SHE FAINTS.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. INFIRMARY--DAY

VERONIKA'S POV--Blake frowning, discusses in whispers her situation with Dr. Thomas and Nurse Josephina.

NURSE JOSEPHINA

(a prim smile)

There she is...you gave us a start, young lady.

VERONIKA

I'm so useless.

DR. THOMAS

Can you speak up--

VERONIKA

--I can't kill myself, I can't have a quick painless fatal heart attack--this is taking forever--

Dr. Blake's expression indicates he disapproves of such sentiments. He squints, thoughtfully.

DR. BLAKE

We're going to try adjusting the dosage on your medication, but you'd do better in future, not running the hundred-yard dash down our corridors.

He smiles a chilly smile. Nods to her. Then his colleagues.

They all three exit past two nurses who stand watch by the door.

One of the nurses is chatting on his cell phone, the other is listening to music on his i-tunes condtraption.

Veronika sits on the infirmary-bed, boiling with irritation.

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY--VERONICA'S IMAGINATION

She's seated in the bed but notices to her mild surprise that the nurse with the phone and the one with the i-tunes have disappeared.

Suddenly she feels something, the physical presence of someone, in her bed.

VERONIKA

What--

Edward appears, wriggling next to her under the blanket, so close it almost seems as if he's grown straight out of her back or her shoulder or her armpit.

For a split second they're bumping into each other, competing for space on the bed.

She addresses him in an urgent whisper

VERONIKA

Come on. You know you're not supposed to be here.

Edward teasingly bumps her on purpose--like a contentious, playful little brother. She's half furious--half-finding-it-hilarious.

VERONIKA

Would you stop it? We'll get in trouble--

The humor of him being there gets the better of her, but she keeps trying to protest and say the 'proper' thing.

VERONIKA

(grinning)

Please stop it--they'll think we're crazy.

BACK TO:

Veronika is alone in the bed again. Frowning. The two nurses are back in guard position. The bizarre vision is finished.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Veronika is alone, hiding behind a hedge.

Then she looks out at the river flowing, massive and eternal. The sunlight at the end of the day catching the tops of the trees, pink light. Her breathing calms down.

She hears a distant church clock strike 5 times.

MOMENTS LATER

She turns the corner and sees Edward in a far corner of the garden. She instinctively takes a step back away from him.

He is crouched down looking intently at something on the ground.

She takes another step back.

He is intensely still and focused but apparently vacant.

Something draws her over to look at him more closely.

She discovers that he is in fact looking intently at an army of bugs crawling over and sinking into an abandoned chocolate dessert, the plastic plate face-down in the dirt.

Veronika looks over his shoulder, keeping her distance. She can't tell whether he has noticed her there or not.

EDWARD'S POV: The bugs teeming across his line of vision.

Edward continues to focus intently on the ground, seemingly unaware of Veronika behind him.

VERONIKA

Why are you looking at bugs?

Edward freezes.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

(urgently)

I don't understand.

Tension is rising in Veronika. His non-response is intensely frustrating for her. That she doesn't quite know why only makes it more so.

VERONIKA
Just leave me alone!

She hurries away.

Edward stays staring down at the ground. His breath is coming quicker.

NURSE WHITE (O.S.)
Edward! Time for your treatment.

Edward looks up at the nurse coming through the garden with a sudden instant of dread.

She routinely takes his hand.

He pulls his hand abruptly away from her.

The nurse frowns. Edward stands there rigidly.

The nurse is getting impatient.

INT. RECREATION AREA - DAY/LATE AFTERNOON

Veronika stands with her eye on the door to the medicine closet. The clock says 6 pm.

A male nurse calls out to the patients in this area.

NURSE
Dinner time!

Veronika shivers. Soon there is nobody in the area but her.

A nurse passes, holding an older patient by the hand.

Veronika moves toward the medicine closet.

CUT TO:

CCTV footage of Veronika going to the medicine closet.

BACK TO:

INT. MEDICINE CLOSET - LATE AFTERNOON

The shelves have dozens of plastic bottles. She can't figure out what they are. She is distracted, can't focus.

She pulls down one bottle of Amobarbital tablets and one bottle of Phenobarbital tablets. She empties them, in a mess on one of the shelf, dozens of pills.

Then she stands there for a second. In the distance, she can hear the sound of patients eating dinner. O.S. Someone laughs manically.

Veronika freezes, unsure.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Blake is rolling two small heavy metal balls between the fingers of his left hand, slowly and meditatively, watching the silent CCTV monitor on his desk flick from angle to angle. It surveys the wards and corridors of the hospital.

BACK TO:

Suddenly, Veronika gulps a handful of pills.

She goes to the nearest sink, turns on the tap and puts her head under it at an awkward slant. Water spills over her face and hair.

CUT TO:

Blake watches her doing this with an intense expression of sadness and disappointment.

He goes and presses the intercom.

DR. BLAKE
Who's on duty?

BACK TO:

Veronika clutches her stomach.

Suddenly the door swings open. Two nurses grab Veronika, pulling her out of the medicine closet.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EARLY EVENING

Veronika sits on the patient's chair while Dr. Blake finishes writing something. She is furious, in severe discomfort, getting totally worked up.

He briefly looks up at Veronika and addresses her calmly.

DR. BLAKE
My bathroom's over there. The
water pills you just swallowed
won't do you any other harm.

He points. She seethes.

VERONIKA
I'm fine.

He shrugs and goes back to his writing. But after a few
seconds she jumps up from her chair. He waits. Listens.

O.S. The toilet flushing.

Veronika reappears, sitting back in the chair facing him.
Furious and emotional.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
So you've got cameras watching
all of us all the time.

DR. BLAKE
Someone paid to have them
installed, so I'm obliged to look
at them now and again.

VERONIKA
You're a shit.

Blake continues shifting papers. Her statement doesn't faze
him.

DR. BLAKE
Because I won't cooperate in you
killing yourself?

VERONIKA
Because you love playing with
people's souls.

He is unmoved, but studies her.

Veronika looks away, down at the floor.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
I hate you.

DR. BLAKE
Really. Tell me about that.

Suddenly, the dam is open.

VERONIKA
I hate your stupid desk and your
ugly ties. I hate everyone locked
up in this place.
(MORE)

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
And I hate my parents for
spending their last penny to keep
me in this zoo. God forbid they
should ever, for one moment,
really live their own lives. Is
this what they came here for? To
try and be the same as everyone
else? And I hate the jerks in my
office who think the money they
earn makes them 'the shit' and
'all that', and the zombies on
the subway who've forgotten all
their dreams or that they ever
had any.

There is a strange exuberant energy in her tone.

DR. BLAKE
I have some terrifying news for
you.

VERONIKA
What could be more terrifying
than *this*?

DR. BLAKE
You sound like you might be
feeling better.

Veronika is incensed.

VERONIKA
What good's that going to do me
now?!

DR. BLAKE
Answer me honestly, please.

VERONIKA
I hate you.

DR. BLAKE
Doesn't it feel better to feel
better?

She won't answer him.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
Have you heard the story of the
king and the poisoned well?

VERONIKA
What--you mean--?

DR. BLAKE
You thought Claire invented it?

He smiles a smile that says, "I don't think so."

VERONIKA
(acidic)
So, Doctor, is that your
brilliant take on reality?

Dr. Blake leans back in his chair, beginning to enjoy himself.

DR. BLAKE
Reality is what the majority deem
it to be. Not necessarily the
best or most logical, but it's
the one that has become adapted
to the desires of society as a
whole.

He sees Veronika is listening.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
Some things are governed by
common sense, but some have
become fixed till more and more
people believe that's what they
should be. Like the Qwerty
keyboard.

VERONIKA
(irritated)
The what?

DR. BLAKE
The way they arrange keys on a
keyboard. Do you know why they're
like that.

VERONIKA
I've never thought about it.

DR. BLAKE
It's because when keyboards were
first invented for typewriters,
if a person typed too fast the
keys got jammed, so this man
Scholes designed the Qwerty
keyboard that would oblige people
to *type more slowly*.

VERONIKA
I don't believe it.

DR. BLAKE
But it's true.

VERONIKA
You are batshit crazy! You sell
the patients here on this
optimistic belief that they're no
different from the people on the
outside, because they're no
different from YOU!

DR. BLAKE
I consider that a simple matter
of fact. And only a truly crazy
person would call it in any way
optimistic or reassuring. And
incidentally, aren't you the one
who accused the fashion industry
of foisting pathological,
dehumanizing values on our
society?

Veronika barely suppresses a sense of the absurdity of what she did.

VERONIKA
I was high when I wrote that.

DR. BLAKE
Then I take it Bloomingdales' new
Ad copy wasn't your real reason
for trying to kill yourself.

VERONIKA
I did have a point.

Blake points.

DR. BLAKE
You nearly laughed. Another sign
of improvement.

Veronika goes white at that remark.

VERONIKA
Fuck you.

She gets up so abruptly that she knocks the chair over on her way out of the room.

INT. CORRIDORS - NIGHT

Veronika stalking down the empty corridors, not sure where she's going. Shimmering with pent-up emotion.

INT. INFIRMARY/NURSES STATION - NIGHT

It's late. Dr. Thompson leans on the counter as Nurse White completes inputting the day's treatments in the computer.

DR. THOMPSON
That Veronika's a strange one.

NURSE WHITE
(yawning)
Which of them isn't?

DR. THOMPSON
Doesn't her case remind you of that girl that was here three years ago? She came in with a heavy heroin habit. Blake tried to clean her up but she ended up ODing. Susan... Borowitz. There was such a stink with State Health Services...

NURSE WHITE
I remember now, poor girl. So skinny. About twenty seven?

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Veronika, after a second's hesitation, walks to the closed door of the music room and looks through the window at the covered grand piano. Inside, the moonlight is creating silver shadows. She looks at the covered piano. After a moment she tries the door. It is open.

Veronika goes in, uncovers the grand piano and sits down at it. She opens the lid, brings her hands up and thuds them down on the keys. A terrible, jangling sound.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM - NIGHT

The sound of the banging chords seems to awaken Edward from a trance. He has his drawing book open on his lap. Again and again the sound comes, each time more distressing and angry.

He responds to the sound.

INT. NURSES STATION - NIGHT

Dr. Thompson and Nurse White continue to talk.

DR. THOMPSON
The autopsy showed that Susan had been suffering from necrosis of the ventricles.

NURSE WHITE
Is that right? I never knew that.

DR. THOMPSON
Do our printed records go back that far? Can I see her file?

NURSE WHITE
Sure.

The discordant sound from the music room can be heard vaguely in the distance.

NURSE WHITE (CONT'D)
What's that awful sound?

INTERCUT

Veronika pounds indiscriminately on the keys again and again with all her might, releasing all the terrible emotions inside her, almost like letting out a shriek.

Till she is spent. The last notes echo through the room. Peace floods through her.

She brings her hands up to the keys again. But this time she brings them down very gently, beginning a beautiful sonata: the second movement of Brahms Sonata no. 3. It isn't perfect, but that makes it more touching. It is clear that she used to play a lot and must have been very good. This is real talent.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

As Veronika plays, and without her realizing, someone is out in the garden, watching Veronika play through the closed window. We hear the person's breath. He comes closer to the window.

INT. MUSIC ROOM--NIGHT

The fluidity and beauty of Veronika's playing continues to increase.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM--VERONIKA'S MIND

Edward sits scribbling in his notebook (as Veronika's seen him do many times.) He looks up.

Veronika stands in the doorway. Eying him directly. There's a candid sexual interest in her look.

He looks back, directly responsive in a fashion that is more alert, more "normal" than we've seen him be capable of. (This is Edward as Veronika is coming to realize she needs him to be.) The music is of course no longer playing--

Veronika traces a line with one finger, from her chin to her neck, as if she was about to remove the top button of her blouse. In the same moment, she starts to move toward him, but before she makes progress--

BACK TO:

As she continues playing, Veronika permits herself to smile with direct spontaneous pleasure, something we've never seen her do before.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE--NIGHT

Blake's reading of Wittgenstein's little volume "On Certainty" is interrupted by his hearing the music.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

From where Veronika is sitting and playing she looks up at the moon shining through the branches of the trees. It is powerfully beautiful.

CUT TO:

INT. MARI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Mari, sitting up in bed, hearing the faint strains of the music in her comfy well-furnished room that looks like it has been hers for years, gets up and pulls down a box from the top of the cupboard. Inside are photos from her past.

CUT TO:

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Veronika keeps playing with fluency and joy. She looks up from the keys as she plays and sees the figure out in the garden.

It is Edward. He looks directly at her, his face softened and changed by the music.

She is startled, but then continues playing.

She finishes the piece and looks up again at him. Edward's expression changes and he smiles at her. She smiles back.

Edward darts away from her and out of sight. Veronika turns back to the piano and smiles. Entranced.

EXT. THE FOREST AND RIVER BY VILLETTE - NIGHT

The nighttime forest is alive; the trees sway; a fox disappears into the undergrowth.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Blake and a thirty year-old suit-and-tie wearing, sharp-eyed man, ERIC GRAFTON, are shaking hands. Dr. Blake looks wary and irritated.

ERIC

Eric Grafton, Consumer relations director, for Bloomingdale's. A pleasure to meet you Doctor Blake. Here's my card.

Dr. Thompson sits off to the side.

ERIC (CONT'D)

So how is everything up here in Villette?

Blake's expression becomes one of pseudo-puzzlement.

DR. BLAKE

Fine, thank you.

ERIC

As you know, a patient of yours, Veronika Deklava, has gotten considerable media-play for some rather unfair accusations she's made against part of our advertising campaign. Naturally, our first concern is with the young lady's well-being.

DR. BLAKE

Now that she's a patient undergoing active treatment here, the details of her condition are confidential.

Eric smiles.

ERIC

But she's well enough for a well-wisher to pay his respects?

DR. BLAKE

Bloomington--?

ERIC

(interrupting enthusiastically)
--along with our friends at Facebook--

DR. BLAKE

You want to put Veronika in some dog-and-pony show for the cable news shows? That's not going to happen.

ERIC

We're under a great deal of pressure over this matter, as I'm sure you can imagine.

DR. BLAKE

I'm sorry, she's not available to be put on display.

Eric, tight-lipped, gets a folder from his briefcase.

ERIC

We've made some enquiries to the state department of health--that issues you your license to operate--

Blake's face is tight with anger.

ERIC (CONT'D)

We understand you are under investigation. Apparently three years ago a patient here died of a drug overdose-- Some families of other patients complain about "irregular" methods of therapy.

DR. BLAKE

What the families of patients complain about, by and large, is that not every mentally-ill person can be cured.

He smiles at Eric in a way that doesn't try to conceal disdain.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)

What exactly do you want from me?

Thomas signals to Blake, leaning toward him.

DR. THOMPSON

Ed Durant...

ERIC

Who?

DR. BLAKE

A patient. Ed Durant's father is Gabriel Durant a generous financial supporter of ours--and, isn't this right? - He's one of the biggest share holders in Facebook and I wouldn't be surprised if he's friendly with the board of directors of Bloomington... I don't think he'd take it kindly if the care he's so happy with, were interrupted. Right, Dr. Thompson?

Dr. Thompson nods. The blood drains from Eric's face; he wasn't expecting this. He gets up from his chair, flustered.

ERIC

I'll have to talk with the head of my department about this.

DR. BLAKE

You do that. Now if you don't mind I've got patients to look after.

Blake has a triumphant glint in his eye.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLETTE - DAY

The lawn and the grounds and the adjoining woods seem as if they are vibrating. A bit of sunlight is peaking through the early March rain-clouds.

INT/ EXT. BY THE ENTRANCE - DAY

Veronika stops to look at an old photo of Ljubljana at the turn of the 20th century, at the men and women in it; in her heightened state she closely observes their expressions.

She then notices that Claire is standing just outside the entrance to the building, in her overcoat, with luggage at her feet. She must be waiting for someone to take her home. Veronika is about to go up to her when she sees two nurses appear, taking Claire gently by the arms and leading her back into the building. Veronika is confused, saddened.

Veronika feels a man's strong but gentle touch on her arm. Goosebumps shiver up her arm. She looks up. It is Edward.

He gently (but definitely) tries to pull her to the piano room. But she slips her arm out of his.

VERONIKA

Not now, Edward. I don't want to play right now.

Edward's expression doesn't change. Veronika is getting impatient.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

It's not a good idea for you to get used to me playing for you.

Edward doesn't move off. A potent energy is growing between them. His presence is almost confrontational; the fact of his not speaking is strangely exciting to Veronika. She turns and walks off down the corridor, her heart beating fast.

She trips over a small Hello Kitty doll on the floor. She looks back at Edward, who is standing there looking at her. She can't tell whether he is smiling or not. She laughs and goes on her way.

EXT. PATH LEADING TO GYM/SWIMMING POOL - DAY

A nurse leads a straggling line of patients clutching swimsuits and towels. The wind is up and blows a man's towel away. He just watches it go.

Everyone glimmers in the weak sunlight.

Veronika joins the line.

VERONIKA

What do you do if you don't have a swimsuit?

PATIENT

You use one of the extras.

The line troops into the building, passing the janitor who is washing one of the windows.

INT. GYM/WOMEN'S CHANGING ROOM - DAY

The changing room is tiled, echoing, with lots of mirror everywhere so you can't escape your reflection.

Women of all shapes, sizes and ages are in various states of nakedness. In the midst of it, Veronika is at first overwhelmed, but she gives in to it. There is something newly light about her, a freshness and eagerness.

The noisy, smelly, wet texture of everything is irresistibly lively.

Seeing Mari, Veronika turns away from her and hurries through the shower room with its many mirrors, all showing different angles of her. A prism. She is confused by the different reflections and steadies herself for a second with a hand on the wall.

In a corner, Mari notices with approval Veronika's beautiful body struggling into a modest swim suit.

O.S. Muffled music is coming from a room nearby.

INT. THE SHOWER ROOM - DAY

Veronika stays under the shower, cramped by all the women jostling for space. Their voices reverberate around in the steam.

MARI

I lied to you. I'm sorry.

Veronika turns, surprised.

MARI (CONT'D)

A dirty job but somebody would have done it.

She notices that in her swimsuit Mari has a kind of confidence that she can't help but be moved by.

VERONIKA

You told Blake.

MARI

And here you are: alive to tell the tale.

Mari shakes her hair with unself-conscious pleasure at the hot water pouring down over it and her body.

INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

The loud speakers are now blaring out "A Few of my Favorite Things".

Veronika watches Mari dive in to the crowded pool, unself-conscious.

Emboldened, Veronika dive bombs in. She swims down the pool ploughing through the others, who don't take offence.

The din of canned music and splashing shouting patients is intense.

A lifeguard is calling from the edge to control the anarchy, though no one takes much notice.

Veronika takes a deep breath and swims down to the bottom. She keeps herself there, watching everyone else from below. Peace, quiet, womb-like enclosure.

She hears her pulse throbbing in her ears, getting faster the longer she stays down there. She is getting light-headed; the blue becomes more intensely blue. Moment of panic and elation.

Seeing Mari's legs at the other end, she swims underwater down the pool before surfacing with a loud gasp right in front of her.

This time it is Mari who is a little disconcerted. Veronika laughs at having caught her by surprise, but then has a moment of weakness, her heart fluttering in her chest again.

MARI

Are you okay? You should be careful.

VERONIKA

Why? It doesn't matter any more, does it?

Mari flips onto her back to look at Veronika and notices a new light in her eyes.

MARI

We have an expert in Sufi spiritual teaching speaking tonight in the library. Some people find Sufi spirituality very beautiful and helpful. Some don't.

VERONIKA

Last night I realized my life could have been anything I wanted- if --

She stops.

MARI

If what?

VERONIKA

If I had more time.

Mari heaves herself up out of the pool and sits on the edge.

MARI

I don't think you should leave this life without knowing how far you can go.

Veronika smiles, turns and swims off down the pool. Dripping wet, confused by the exchange, Mari watches her go.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Veronika is seated next to Mari. Listening. Restless.

LECTURER

Then Nasrudin the great master of the Sufi tradition was invited to give a lecture, in a major urban center...

The lecturer is bald, plump, wears glasses. He looks and sounds quite erudite, but there's something a little glib and too-comfortable in his manner that's annoying.

LECTURER (CONT'D)

... It looked to be a great success. Thousands crowded the lecture hall and hundreds stood outside. At the scheduled hour, an assistant came on stage, saying that for unavoidable reasons the lecture would begin late. When two hours went by many got up indignantly, asked for their money back and left.

Veronika is increasingly impatient. Two male nurses stand nearby, yawning.

LECTURER (CONT'D)
 When Nasrudin finally turned up
 the crowd had dwindled to less
 than a hundred. He was drunk and
 began to flirt with a pretty girl
 in the front row and this made
 the remaining people more
 indignant, and many stormed out.

Veronika whispers to Mari.

VERONIKA
 Does this guy ever get to the
 point?

LECTURER
 Finally there were only nine
 people left in the hall.
 Nasrudin suddenly turned totally
 sober, his eyes glowed and he had
 an air of great authority and
 wisdom. Those of you who have
 stayed are the ones who will hear
 me' he said-- 'You have passed
 through the two hardest tests on
 the spiritual road-- the patience
 to wait for the right moment and
 the courage not to be
 disappointed with what you
 encounter. It is you I will
 teach.' Let's take a short break
 now and then we'll do our
 meditation...

Veronika pushes through the crowd of patients now devouring
 the juice and cookies on the table, the nurses on crowd
 control.

INT. VILLETTE CORRIDORS - NIGHT

Veronika through the deserted, quiet corridors, wind
 snaking through the building. She sees the door to the
 music room is open.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Veronika turns into the music room.

Edward is standing in the dip of the grand piano, patient.
 As if he has been there for hours. Veronika gasps. He looks
 up at her.

CUT TO:

*We look at Veronika through Edward's eyes (Veronika like an
 animal alive in the night forest), and hear her through his
 ears (everything is being received very strongly and
 precisely). Amazing clarity.*

BACK TO:

Edward puts his hand on the piano. Veronika walks towards
 it and sits down.

A window in another room bangs loudly. Both of them look up
 and then back at each other. She can't read his expression
 but is under the spell of his intensity and stillness.

She starts playing, watching his response.

Edward is absorbed in this beginning moment of her music as
 if it was the beginning of the world.

She is playing a Chopin Sonata. It starts tentatively but
 gains in confidence and passion.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Over the sound of the piano music continuing, the Lecturer
 continues. All listen intently to his words, except Mari,
 who hears the music being made. He hesitates, but then
 carries on.

Mari turns her head to the music.

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

Some of the kitchen staff pause to listen.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Blake pauses as he scribbles at his desk. Hears the music.
 He looks at the surveillance screens flicking from one view
 to the next. He catches sight of two patients dancing
 together in a darkened ward.

He closes his eyes and leans back in his chair.

INTERCUT

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Veronika plays on.

INTERCUT

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Now Mari is hearing Veronika's piano music with complete clarity. She has tears in her eyes, is overwhelmed.

She looks down at her hands which are shaking. She turns them over and sees the veins and lines in her hand, the passage of time. She closes her hands up.

INTERCUT

Veronika finishes the piece.

Edward is entranced by it and he stands motionless, in thrall. He looks to Veronika as if to ask for more music.

When she looks at him it's clear something else has been released by the playing.

Edward's hands tighten their grip on the side of the piano. The room is quiet, just the faint drifting voice of the lecturer from far away.

Returning Edward's look, Veronika takes off her sweater and moves closer to him. He takes a step back. She then pulls down her jeans, her heart beating faster.

She takes off the rest of her clothes and stands in front of Edward bare naked. He looks at her with a complete acceptance and simultaneous lack of engagement.

Veronika takes his hand. Edward moves it gently away.

But his eyes are still with hers, holding them calmly. Standing face to face with him, she feels emboldened and excited.

Breathing faster and already turned on, she slides her hand down and touches herself. She gasps, her eyes lost in Edward's. He is asking nothing of her.

She is losing herself in the moment, no brakes on, no thoughts inhibiting the rush of pleasure.

VERONIKA'S MIND

EXPLOSIVE FRAGMENTARY IMAGES-- Edward's hand touching her arm, goose bumps appearing, hairs erect in close-up; his voices whispering unheard endearments, his lips on her breast, her eyes widening in delight, his head between her thighs.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Veronika is in the water, Edward is holding her, closer, wet, slippery, ecstatic.

INTERCUT

The Sufi lecturer is doing his best stuff:

LECTURER

Insanity is the inability to communicate our ideas so all of us are to one degree or another insane. But don't confuse insanity with a loss of control. You have two choices: To control your mind or to let your mind control you. You know the latter experience, being swept along by fears, neuroses, insecurity. We all have those self-destructive tendencies.

INTERCUT

Mari (unseen) is looking through the window of the door at Edward and Veronika. Unshocked, possibly moved, after a few seconds she turns away again. Her back leaning against the corridor wall, she is caught between the faint droning voice of the lecturer and the ecstatic sounds of Veronika. She is realizing something about her own life.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Edward watches Veronika almost as an animal might: gentle and intense, responding to the heat and seat coming off her.

CUT TO:

Edward's impressions of Veronika: her hair falling, her pupils dilating, lips quivering, toes curling, sweat appearing, her mouth is moving as she gasps, calls out, but no sounds are heard; the transformation of Veronika, a shining light behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

The Sufi lecturer is keeping everyone fascinated. But one patient has nodded off. The nurse tries (unsuccessfully) to nudge him awake.

LECTURER

All the Sufi masters have been seen as madmen. Stay mad, but behave like normal people. Run the risk of being different but learn to do so without attracting attention, and allow the real "I" to reveal itself. The real "I" is what you are-- not what others make of you.

BACK TO:

Edward watches Veronika on the floor. She is still now. His breath is coming faster; he is curious and alive but makes no move towards her.

VERONIKA

I could fall in love with you right now and I know you're far away and I know you won't say anything to me but that's fine too.

The wind forces the double door open. It backs against the wall and the curtains flutter.

Edward moves away from her and abruptly leaves the room.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Edward walks down the corridor, hardly aware of what he is doing.

OS applause from the lecture room.

Patients straggle out of the lecture room. Edward walks through them without even looking at them.

INT. PIANO ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Veronika, alone in the room, doesn't really know how to respond. Then she laughs to herself.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We follow Edward into his room, where he doesn't know what to do with himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MOUNTAINS - DAWN

Rosy dawn is creeping over the hills on the other side of the river, the sun just appearing. The beginning of a beautiful, cold day. A snowdrop flower twists up out of the ground. An icicle drips, a prism of the surrounding forest caught in its globe before trembling and falling, disappearing into the soil.

INT. CORRIDOR NEXT TO DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Blake walks toward his office.

To his surprise, Veronika is sitting on the hard chair by the door. As if she's been there a while.

Though a bit dishevelled and tired, she looks properly alive, transformed from the terrified creature who arrived four days earlier.

DR. BLAKE

I'm afraid I can't see you now.

VERONIKA

I need your help.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Veronika sits facing Dr. Blake. There is quiet resolve in her eyes.

VERONIKA

I need to ask you something.

Blake's habit of rearranging documents now seems defensive, as if he is buying time to gather his thoughts. By contrast Veronika is calm and gentle.

DR. BLAKE

You didn't have your injection last night.

VERONIKA

But I'm feeling much better.

DR. BLAKE

You don't look it.

Dr. Blake takes his stethoscope and listens to her heart.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)

And if you want to make the most of the time you have left you'll do as I say.

VERONIKA

That's why I'm here. I do want to. And I need to know how much time I have left.

Blake checks her eyes.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

You can tell me. I'm not afraid or anything.

DR. BLAKE

I've told you that we can't be sure. Everything is happening as I anticipated.

Veronika takes a breath and steadies herself.

VERONIKA

I need you to do two things for me. One is to give me something-- a shot or something-- to stay awake and be conscious of every moment. I've got so much to do.

DR. BLAKE

What's the other thing?

VERONIKA

I want to leave here.

DR. BLAKE

I can't just let you go. You're not well enough and you're under my care.

VERONIKA

But -

DR. BLAKE

You're looking very pale. Come back when you've had a rest.

VERONIKA

I'm tired, that's all. If I've got so little time left there's so much I could do. I want to have a gooey slice of pizza at this joint on the corner of Bleecker and sixth, and I want to feel what it feels like to walk in the snow without an overcoat -- I was so scared of catching cold-- and I want to walk into an Irish bar and order a Guinness-- See my mother, really talk to her -

DR. BLAKE

Go back and sleep and come back at midday. We'll talk more then.

VERONIKA

Last night I - I went to places I never thought I could do. And I knew I had to live.

Dr. Blake busies himself at his desk.

Veronika looks at him, then slightly beyond him.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)

There are so many things I didn't know about myself. I didn't know there were other Veronikas inside me.

Moment of laden silence.

DR. BLAKE

Desire contradicts fear, and these days most human beings have replaced almost all their emotions with fear.

He looks up at Veronika. His tone has changed. Real feeling has entered in.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)

When everyone has dreams but only a few realize them, it makes cowards of the rest of us.

VERONIKA

Even if the few are right?

DR. BLAKE

Particularly then.

They look at each other for a moment.

CUT TO:

Dr. Blake's POV of Veronika: her standing in front of him, brave and calm. Ready to live.

BACK TO:

Blake looks away, unsettled by what he has seen.

DR. BLAKE

Veronika, please, go and rest. I have other patients to see.

He goes back to his papers.

DR BLAKE (CONT'D)
I'll see what I can do about your
second request.

Veronika kisses him on the cheek as she leaves his room.

VERONIKA
Thank you Doctor Blake.

Blake looks up at Veronika's back as she goes towards the
door.

DR BLAKE
If everyone realized their dreams
this place would be empty.

Veronika looks back for at Blake for a moment:

CUT TO:

*Veronika's impression of Blake in this moment: isolated,
lonely, regretful.*

BACK TO:

Once she has gone, Dr Blake turns to his CCTV monitor. As
it flicks from camera to camera, he gets flashes of
Veronika working her way through the building.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Patients are shuffling out. Dr. Thompson has put his lunch
tray away, when Nurse White calls out from where she's
finishing her lunch.

NURSE WHITE
Doctor Thompson, that file you
asked for--

DR. THOMPSON
-- What?

She rolls her eyes. The self-absorption of doctors!

NURSE WHITE
Susan Borowitz? Necrosis of the
ventricles?

DR. THOMPSON
Oh yes-yes.

She gets up and hands it to him.

NURSE WHITE
Took me half a day to locate but--

He's so engrossed in the file that he walks away without
hearing her.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Blake is pacing. He is rolling two heavy metal balls
through his fingers.

MARI
I recall you telling me that
panic attacks aren't fatal, even
if they feel like they are.

DR. BLAKE
'Positive Compassion'. All that
text book stuff's starting to
sound a little old to me.

MARI
Maybe it's time for you to leave
this place.

Dr. Blake tenses.

DR. BLAKE
Don't be ridiculous. I do help
people, unless you haven't
noticed.

MARI
Helping people? Like Veronika?

DR. BLAKE
Ed's benefitting isn't he?

MARI
Yes. He is. But to get that
benefit you're torturing a dying
girl-- making her recover her
will to live, just when it's too
late to do her any good! All in
the name of research?

DR. BLAKE
Okay. It's not a perfect science
Though just about everyone seems
to need me to lie and say it is.
And when will you finally drop
those tedious notions of right
and wrong, you've never really
believed in to begin with?

His tone gets more sarcastic.

DR. BLAKE (CONT'D)
Or have I got you wrong? Are you still a lawyer at heart with fantasies about truth and justice? If Veronika can help Ed by giving him the illusion he's helping her,--through "love"--then her life-- and death-- won't have been completely meaningless.

MARI
My God. That's the only consolation you can manage?

Mari looks out the window.

MARI (CONT'D)
Anyway, I made a few phone calls and I've found a nice Legal Aid office on West End Avenue in Manhattan.

Blake looks up at her sharply. Mari is looking resolutely out of the window.

MARI (CONT'D)
No billionaire corporate clients. Just needy defendants without a pot to piss in.

Blake places the balls carefully back onto the desk. He is stunned. But then again, maybe not really.

MARI (CONT'D)
Across the street's a decent take-out deli. I can bring my lunch to the park. Who knows? Maybe I'll even phone up my ex-husband... see how he's keeping.

DR. BLAKE
It all sounds pretty normal.

MARI
It's time I got away from you-- I mean-- from here.

DR. BLAKE
As I have been saying, for I don't know how many years now.

They exchange uneasy smiles.

She takes out of her pocket a card she has written on.

MARI
That's my office address. I'll be living at my sister's till I can find a place-- I'll get you a number when I have one.

He takes it. Their fingers touch.

DR. BLAKE
Thanks.

MARI
You could come sit with me in the park one day.

He puts the card down on his desk.

DR. BLAKE
If my schedule lets up-- maybe--

He tries to smile and be normal-friendly but he's out of practice.

MARI
Don't hide here forever, Daniel. It'd be a waste.

She's an inch, or a moment, from kissing him but doesn't. She exits.

INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Edward dives into the deserted pool. Just the sounds of his breathing, and the water churning under his body's movement. Powerful. Urgent. Fighting something inside himself.

CUT TO:

INT. MARI'S ROOM - DAY

Mari is packing up. She's removing the last things. Veronika is in the doorway, but then steps in to help.

Veronika is shy about having access to details of Mari's life. She takes clothes off hangers.

VERONIKA
Where do you want these?

Mari points to an open suitcase on the floor.

MARI
On that suitcase.

She kneels near the drawers at her little work desk and pulls out files and papers she has collected.

She addresses Veronika without looking at her directly.

MARI (CONT'D)
You know, I heard you last night,
playing the piano in a way I've
rarely heard before.

Veronika continues bringing out more clothes.

MARI (CONT'D)
I recognized that you played with
so much soul because you know
you're going to die. I thought,
'I'm going to die someday.
Where's my soul?' I lost it in a
house and a job and a husband I
never had the courage to leave.

She smiles, ruefully.

MARI (CONT'D)
Now, today... I feel it again.

Veronika sits on the bed.

VERONIKA
I wasn't myself... only maybe I
really was.

She catches Mari's glance, smiles at her, oddly relaxed.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Nothing makes any sense...

Mari comes closer and takes Veronika's hand in her hands.

MARI
There are people who spend their
entire lives searching for a
moment like the one you had and
never achieve it.

INT. RECREATION AREA - DAY

In one corner Claire is playing cards with Old Fred.

Looking out through the window Veronika watches Mari saying
goodbye to Edward.

VERONIKA'S POV: Mari and Edward are standing next to the
tree where Edward sat at the beginning.

EXT. FRONT LAWN OF VILLETTE - DAY

Mari is wiping a tear from her eye.

They embrace.

MARI
(fiercely, into his ear)
This is your time.

Edward looks terrified, exhilarated.

Mari picks up two pieces of luggage and passes through the
entrance gates.

Over her shoulder Mari pauses, seeing Edward scaling the
tree.

She waves and resumes her departure out the gates.

Edward climbs into the same position as when we first met
him.

EDWARD'S POV: In a few seconds, Mari is on the street
outside the grounds, getting into the waiting cab.

INT. RECREATION AREA - DAY/AFTERNOON

VERONIKA'S POV: Through the window she can see Edward up in
the tree.

Fred looks over her shoulder, trying to provoke her.

FRED
Sittin' in trees, hnh? Some
people are *beyond* hope.

Veronika simply ignores the remark; he doesn't bother her
any more. Then she exits. Old Fred is disappointed.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM - DAY

With great urgency, Edward draws in his notebook.

EDWARD POV--He's working on a drawing of Veronika.

The shadow of a visitor to his room, falls over the page.
Edward looks up.

It's Nurse White:

NURSE WHITE
What are you working on their,
Ed.

He puts his hand over it. Then she moves toward him. Slightly pushes his hand away so she can see it.

NURSE WHITE
Oh. Veronika. Very nice likeness.

He's not pleased with one of the staff looking at his work.

NURSE WHITE
Okay. Time for medication.

For a split-second he seems as if he's weighing alternatives, contemplating not going along the way he almost always does. But it's as if he can't conceive of any alternative.

Edward snaps the book closed and stands up, adopting the same silent listless manner he's used to presenting.

Just as he does this, Veronika enters.

VERONIKA
Oh I'm sorry--I just wanted to--

NURSE WHITE
That's okay. It's time for Edward's medication. You two can see each other later in the recreation room.

And she leads Edward past Veronika.

Edward gives her a split second glance saying that he contemplated some alternative to this. But then hangs his head as if ashamed that he's back in his harness.

INT. CORRIDOR/ NEAR EDWARD'S ROOM--DAY

Edward is lets himself go passively as he has hundreds of time previously; like a lamb to the slaughter.

They move along down the corridor in silence. Edward seems to have resumed the habit of complacent listlessness.

BUT SUDDENLY this time is different: He stops and stands still.

Nurse White looks at him, perplexed.

He gives her a new look, urgent, direct.

IT'S AN EDWARD WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

EDWARD
I have to leave Villette.

NURSE WHITE
You're talking!

EDWARD
I want to leave.

His voice sounds strange, strained, hesitant. Excited.

Nurse White produces an intercom and speaks into it.

NURSE WHITE
Assistance with 633

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM--DAY

Veronika, desolate, eyes the notebook, but decides against examining it. She's fiercely disappointed. As with when she couldn't make head or tail of the bugs only worse. It seems certain that the impact he's had on her has not been reciprocal. Only now, does she fully realize how she's longing to have the same impact on him.

INT. FURTHER DOWN THE CORRIDOR--DAY

Two male nurses meet Nurse White and Edward. Nods toward Edward.

The nurses move toward him. Edward backs away.

NURSE 1
Hey Eddie, everything okay?

EDWARD
I need to talk to Dr. Blake.

NURSE 1
Wow. You're talking up a storm there.

EDWARD
I have to leave Villette!

He coughs. The nurses exchange looks. One produces a bottle of barbiturates.

NURSE 2
Why don't you take a few of these, calm down a little. We'll see what we can do.

NURSE 1
Are you gonna make it some whole big deal?

One nurse produces a bottle of water, and the other pours two pills in his hand. Edward bats them away; they fall to the ground.

The nurses are now getting disconcerted.

INT. EDWARD'S ROOM/CORRIDOR--DAY

The disconsolate Veronika shuts the door to Edward's behind her.

SUDDENLY SHE HEARS THE SOUND OF VOICES DOWN THE CORRIDOR. WITHOUT KNOWING IT, SHE INTUITS THAT EDWARD HAS RESISTED. HER EYES LIGHT UP WITH SUDDEN INTENSE HOPE.

INT. FURTHER DOWN THE CORRIDOR--DAY

Nurse White is getting more alarmed.

NURSE 1 (CONT'D)
Call Thompson will you.

NURSE 2
Come on, Ed.

They put their hands on Edward and lead him along.

INT. CORRIDOR/ RECREATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Edward pulls away from them. He starts struggling, his eyes alive and excited.

NURSE 2
Where's Blake?

Nurse 1 shrugs.

NURSE 1
Off the grounds, appointment in the city. You can talk to him the minute he gets back, promise, scouts honor.

They put their hands on Edward.

NURSE 1 (CONT'D)
You're just having a little crisis. We'll take care of you.

EDWARD
(louder, angrier)
No.

NURSE 1
It's time for your treatment.

Dr. Thompson joins them.

DR. THOMPSON
What's going on?

NURSE 1
He talks.

NURSE 2
He's a regular chatty Cathy.

DR. THOMPSON
Ed, that's wonderful.

They're joined in the corridor by other patients, who are picking up on the energy, getting worked up. Things are getting out of control.

PATIENT ONE
Leave him alone, he's a sick man.

Edward is now resisting the nurses with unexpected strength.

SUDDENLY Veronika appears round the corner, sees the nurses restraining Edward.

VERONIKA
What are you doing to him?

DR. THOMPSON
Come on Edward, let's get you out of the hall.

EDWARD
Veronika!

Edward's voice reverberates along the corridor.

Veronika is astonished.

She makes a move towards him, but is held back by another nurse.

DR. THOMAS
Veronika, get out of the way. You won't make this easier.

Veronika shakes off the nurse.

VERONIKA
Get your freaking hands off me.

The other patients are also making more and more noise.

EDWARD
Veronika!

He breaks free of the nurses but instead of running away just stands in front of Veronika, motionless.

The nurses hold him back.

PATIENT
Dead girl!

A nurse comes towards Edward slowly.

Edward holds his hand up to him, his eyes all the time fixed on Veronika.

VERONIKA
You just talked. You're here.
You're really here.

EDWARD
Yes. I am.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Veronika, I...

OLD FRED
The dead girl's walking! And the
psycho's talking.

The patients clamor is rising.

Edward comes up close to Veronika. She is very confused.

EDWARD
(in her ear)
I think... I think you're -
important to me.

Veronika takes Edward's hand gently as tears spring to her eyes.

VERONIKA
Where are they taking you?

Dr. Thomas separates their hands.

DR. THOMPSON
He needs treatment.

The nurses take Edward by the arms.

DR. THOMPSON (CONT'D)
Follow me.

NURSE 1
Do you think Blake will be okay
with this?

In the background the patients' clamoring continues.

DR. THOMPSON
He's disturbing the other
patients. This could get out of
control.

Veronika catches up to them as they pull him.

VERONIKA
I'm coming with you.

DR. THOMPSON
I don't think so.

She slips her hand into Edward's and he immediately relaxes.

EDWARD
Don't be scared. It doesn't hurt.

Veronika looks up at the tender, alive expression in Edward's eyes.

VERONIKA
I'm coming with him.

She won't let herself be separated from him. Dr. Thompson sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - DAY

Edward keeps his eyes on Veronika as they put a piece of rubber in his mouth and regulate the machine.

NURSE 1
This will be fine.

The nurse injects Edward with a muscle relaxant and sedative as Edward's eyes glaze over he looks up at Veronika.

CUT TO:

We see with Edward's eye: a multitude of Veronikas looking at him, and then the prism of Veronikas becoming one.

BACK TO:

Edward's eyes close, a smile on his lips.

Nurse 1 regards the machinery.

NURSE 2
All set?

Dr. Thompson presses a button and Edward's whole body convulses. Veronika can't bear it.

VERONIKA
Stop! Please--

NURSE 1
--We already have.

Edward continues to writhe; the two male nurses have to hold him still.

Veronika hates this but now won't look away.

NURSE 2
He'll settle down pretty quick.
It looks worse than it is.

Edward's body stills.

A LITTLE LATER

Dr. Thomas has gone. The nurses are getting ready to quit for the evening. Everything's quiet again.

VERONIKA
Could he forget what just happened?

Nurse 2 shrugs, heading toward the door.

NURSE 2
That sometimes happens.

VERONIKA
Can I just stay with him?

NURSE 2
Suit yourself--

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TREATMENT ROOM - DUSK

Humming idly, Claire appears, licking an ice-bar and grinding the peppercorns in her other hand.

Nurse Josephina is asleep in her chair. Veronika, her face drawn and tense sits, waiting, looking at Edward unconscious on the bed.

CLAIRE
When he wakes up, if he kinda looks like 'Night of the Living Dead', don't be too upset. He might not recognise you.

Veronika looks up at her warily.

VERONIKA
Why should he recognize me when I don't recognize myself?

CLAIRE
I'd say that if someone with a short time to live decides to spend it watching a man sleeping, that must be love.

VERONIKA
I've never really loved anyone before. Maybe that was part of my problem.

CLAIRE
Maybe.

VERONIKA
But how can I be in love with a man who lives in another world?

CLAIRE
Don't we all? Who else is there?

Claire shrugs, licks her iced-bar and wanders off.

Veronika turns back to watch Edward, anxious.

LATER

Gently she kisses Edward's forehead.

Edward opens his eyes. Veronika leans over him, love in her eyes. He looks back without recognition, slightly alarmed.

Veronika strokes his hair, feeling like her heart might give out right here and now.

VERONIKA
Are you back?

Edward looks confused, blank.

CUT TO:

EDWARD'S POV: Veronika is seen as if from the wrong end of a telescope, somehow far, far away while being next to him on the bed.

BACK TO:

Edward's blank expression persists.

Disappointment clouds Veronika's face. She can't bear it.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Don't you remember?

Nurse Josephina steps in.

NURSE JOSEPHINA
Back in the land of the living,
Ed? Let's check your pulse.

She holds his wrist.

NURSE JOSEPHINA (CONT'D)
Not bad. We'll be checking in on
you. Congratulations on the
talking.

Nurse Josephina glances at Veronika as she exits.

Edward has his gaze fixed on Veronika's worried face.

CUT TO:

Edward'S POV of Veronika, now SUPER CLOSE UP, the light and love in her eyes.

BACK TO:

Edward's expression melts, is charged with recognition, love.

EDWARD
(whispering)
Veronika.

Veronika lights up. A blush creeps across her face.

EXT. GARDEN - DUSK

Edward and Veronika are walking together but not touching. Then Edward stops and looks up at Veronika, a clarity and certainty in him.

VERONIKA
There's so much I want to know.

EDWARD
I don't know where to...

Edward speaks softly, gently.

VERONIKA
Wherever you want.

His intonation is a little strange, as if he has rehearsed this speech in his head but it's coming out wrong:

EDWARD
I was nineteen, studying--
(apologetically) law. I fell in
love.

He pauses, overcome that he is telling this story. Veronika takes his hand. Edward, dizzy, looks back at her with that intense, still look she realizes she has fallen in love with.

VERONIKA
It's okay. You don't have to tell
me.

EDWARD
I need to.

EXT. GARDEN - A LITTLE LATER - NIGHT

They are sitting on the bench.

EDWARD
She was very wild. Totally
different from anyone I'd ever
met before. We loved each other.

VERONIKA
You were young.

Edward shrugs, smiles, nods.

CUT TO:

The young black woman, laughing into the camera (the one we saw in the photo in Edward's room). She pulls Edward into the frame with her. He is laughing too.

EDWARD (V.O.)
But my father disapproved of her.
And when he realized I was
serious about her...

BACK TO:

EDWARD (CONT'D)
He made it very hard for us. He thought I was going to ruin everything. And then I did.

CUT TO:

INT. SPORTS CAR - NIGHT

A sports car driving very fast and recklessly.

BACK TO:

Edward is looking down at the ground.

EDWARD
I decided we had to leave. I thought I had no choice. We were - she was - pregnant.

Veronika smiles disbelievingly.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I stole my father's car and I was going to drive us west.

Edward ducks his head into his chest.

CUT TO:

Impression of speed, rain, confusion, light flaring in the darkness.

EDWARD (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And then in the darkness I ran into a truck. She died. Instantly.

BACK TO:

Edward blinks for a few seconds. He shakes his head.

Veronika wraps her hands round his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY/ NIGHT - EDWARD'S MIND

Edward on a hospital bed, as if paralysed. Light changing all around him at high speed.

EDWARD (V.O.)
I couldn't bring myself back. Even when I was better, I couldn't move.

VERONIKA (V.O.)
For how long?

BACK TO:

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

EDWARD
I don't know. A long time. Then they sent me home, but I didn't talk, I didn't eat. I couldn't do anything. And my father found this place.

He pauses.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
They say that what doesn't destroy you makes you stronger... but what if it leaves you so weak that it feels wrong not to be destroyed?

He stops, suddenly overwhelmed.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Now I've been here so long they don't think I can ever leave.

He looks up at her.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
But then you arrived.

She smiles, tears rolling down her face.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Veronika.

He runs his fingertip along the scar on her finger. She shivers.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Tell me one thing.

VERONIKA
I'm not sure there's anything you don't know.

She smiles ruefully. Edward frowns, as if protective of her already. There is a pause.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Last night is what my whole life should have been... only--

He SUDDENLY stops her, takes her face in his hands and kisses her. The first kiss.

Veronika has a beautiful glow about her.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
I'm not asking you for anything.
I - I could play for you -

He drops his gaze, drops his hands out of hers and turns away, looking out across the river.

Veronika is afraid again. *Has she lost him?*

EDWARD
If you want to leave, I can take you. I know how.

Veronika is amazed, delighted.

VERONIKA
Now?

EDWARD
I think so.

She takes his hand again.

VERONIKA
I don't have long. You know that don't you?

EDWARD
Do you know what lasts long?
This.

He points to the walls of Villette.

VERONIKA
This Hell. Here. It goes on and on forever.

She shivers. Now his eyes are so fiery they warm her insides. He kisses her more deeply. He breaks off abruptly.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Do you speak Slovenian?

VERONIKA
Yeah. I mean, a bit - I don't really speak it much but -

EDWARD
What's the word for 'tomorrow' in Slovenian?

Veronika laughs.

VERONIKA
Jutri.

EDWARD
Come on. Let's go.

Veronika is taken aback.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Crazy people do crazy things.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFETERIA - EARLY MORNING

Everyone is eating breakfast, quiet and spaced-out, back to normal.

Edward and Veronika walk through the cafeteria, jackets on. They are going slowly so as not to arouse suspicion.

Picking up quickly on the strange atmosphere, some of the patients look up at them.

As Veronika and Edward leave the hall and go faster through the corridors, the patients start making more noise, excited.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Dr Blake is arriving in his office. He glances at the surveillance screens, checking notes left on his desk about the night before. He catches sight on the screens of Edward and Veronika sneaking out of the building. He presses the intercom button. But then hesitates.

After a few moments he takes his finger off the button and watches the screens in wonder.

EXT. THE GARDEN - MORNING

Edward and Veronika, creep through the garden, keeping close to the walls, eyes peeled for nurses or guards.

EXT. BY THE SIDE DOOR - MORNING

Edward leads Veronika to a small, hidden side door out of the walled garden. He heaves his weight against it and it finally bursts open, leading out to a large forest.

When Edward takes Veronika's hand in his, she turns to look at him and gives a little gasp: in silhouette, the sun flaring out behind him, he looks just like the man who appeared to her during her coma.

Veronika looks different from the beginning of the film - wilder, freer, more relaxed. Happy.

EXT. FOREST LEADING AWAY FROM VILLETTE - DAY

Hand-in-hand, Veronika and Edward pick their way through the winter forest: sounds, rustling bare branches, the wet ivy brushing against their cheeks.

They are both intensely alive to the beauty all around: spiders webs forming patterns, branches of trees, cloud formations.

Standing at the edge of the forest, they look out over the wide, still Hudson River. They hear a train in the distance. Edward nudges Veronika and points down at the train track below.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr Blake is writing a letter at his desk. Writing quickly and with great concentration.

INT. METRO NORTH TRAIN INTO MANHATTAN - DAY

The landscape whizzes by them. Edward is high on his first glimpse of outside life for years. Veronika is finding his glee infectious.

She notices an older couple, the man pointing something out to his elderly wife.

A young couple where the pregnant wife leans on her young husband for support as he soothingly jogs their stroller with their first born.

A young guy at the other end of the carriage is arguing ardently with his girlfriend and they're both gesturing intensely because they're so involved with each other.

Veronika absorbs it all.

EXT. UNION SQUARE - DAY

Veronika and Edward come up from the 14th Street/Union Square subway station exit, into the busy activity of Union Square.

It's a crowded multi-ethnic area. Tons of fruit stalls are crammed with produce. Vendors selling every thing from Yankee baseball caps to bootleg Chinese kung fu videos. Intense, chaotic life all around.

Edward's eyes are wide with astonishment at all this busy life he's been excluded from for so long. His astonishment includes some wariness at the sheer unfamiliarity.

EXT. PIZZA STAND BLEECKER & 6TH AVE - DAY

Veronika and Edward, ravenously hungry gobble down gooey slices of pizza that have never tasted better.

Splodges of cheese and tomato get all over both their faces.

EDWARD

How are you feeling?

VERONIKA

Like I could live forever.

A moment of seriousness. Then they burst out laughing.

EDWARD

I have an idea!

He takes her hand and starts walking. She starts to run, pulling him after her.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Blake, at the window, drumming his fingers.

BLAKE'S POV: through the window he sees a limo pull up and a powerful man in his fifties exit, met by Dr. Thompson.

Blake goes to his desk, opens a drawer, and picks up the card Mari wrote on.

LATER

GABRIEL DURANT, the powerful man in his fifties, and Edward's father, is ranting at Dr. Blake.

DURANT

How would you prefer me to react to the news that you have 'lost' my son?!

Blake remains strangely calm.

DURANT (CONT'D)

How can you can sit there with a straight face and tell me that my son has disappeared - has run off with a suicidal girl suffering from terminal heart condition?

DR. BLAKE

Isn't this the moment where you throw up your hands and say "What kind of an operation are you running here?"

DURANT

Is that supposed to be funny?

DR. BLAKE

In my professional opinion, Edward's departure is a good thing. The best thing for him, in fact. Villette wasn't helping him to get better, even if you found keeping him here convenient. I was unable to get through to you on this.

DURANT

Your views concerning what's good for my son or any patient at Villette mean nothing now. I'm going to make sure you're relieved of your responsibilities just as soon as humanly possible, and I'll see to it that you aren't allowed to treat mentally ill patients anywhere, ever again.

Blake smiles a secret smile to himself.

INT. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY

Veronika stands transfixed, Edward next to her, also looks carefully but studies her reaction.

It's a black-and-white "all over" drip painting by Jackson Pollock.

VERONIKA

I have absolutely no idea what it means except--

EDWARD

Why does it have to mean anything?

It looks like the bugs Edward was watching teeming across the earth in Villette's garden.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

When you look at it you know you're alive.

VERONIKA

Alive--dying-- and everything else, all at once.

EDWARD

Just the way things are.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Dr. Blake puts the letter he was writing in an envelope and addressed it to Dr. Thompson. He leaves it in the middle of the desk. He picks up the sheaf of papers that make up his book. At the door he turns and looks at the room, at the empty chairs. He switches off the light.

Outside he looks at the chair where Veronika was waiting for him the morning before. He walks away.

INT. IN FRONT OF VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Veronika comes up to the front door of her apartment building, followed closely by Edward. She tries to open it. It's locked of course.

VERONIKA

Shit. The one thing I didn't have with me was my keys.

They're both standing there, shivering, hoping someone will arrive to open it for them.

EDWARD

Christ, I'm freezing! Aren't you?

VERONIKA

I know what--

She takes his hand and starts pulling him to walk with her.

EXT. BACK OF APARTMENT ALLEY/ FIRE ESCAPE- LATE AFTERNOON

They are staring up at the fire escape. They check with each other.

VERONIKA
I got broken into three times in
two years. They came in this
way.

EDWARD
(glancing up)
--What about your heart?

VERONIKA
Don't worry! Come on!

They start climbing.

EXT. FIFTH FLOOR FIRE ESCAPE LANDING - LATE AFTERNOON

Veronika, panting and out of breath, is able to push up the
window from the outside.

INT. VERONIKA'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Not much has been altered since Veronika was in it last,
although it has been tidied and cleaned.

They stand close, almost leaning on each other. Veronika
glances at the clock, feeling weak and strange. She looks
round the room, silenced.

VERONIKA
Do you want a cup of tea?

She is terribly awkward, slightly paralysed.

Edward shakes his head slowly, smiling. He makes her laugh.

He drops to his knees as she stands in front of him. He
undoes her jeans and pulls her body to him. She shudders.

LATER

It's as if they're welded together. Drenched in sweat.

As they make love, with extreme close ups of Veronika's
face, Edward's face, we watch the changes in them as they
are seeing them in each other: moments of them looking like
children, then as they are now, then looking old, and back
to the silky skin of youth. Their whole lives captured in
this intense shared experience. She climaxes. He climaxes.

LATER

They lie, prone, spent, Veronika on top of Edward. He is
asleep.

But she is awake: her eyes alert, over-bright. Her mind is
racing.

LATER

Loud music is playing. Edward lies in the bed watching
Veronika on the phone.

VERONIKA
An order of dumplings, pork...
steamy... An order of fish soup,
sweet and sour. An order of your
mu...duck and a six-pack of diet
coke.

LATER

Making pigs of themselves, eating, giggling, playing.

CUT TO:

INT. IRISH PUB - NIGHT

They enter a place that has a small bar, a few tables for
people eating, a jukebox and a tiny space for dancing.

They slide onto two bar stools. The young BARTENDER
approaches. He looks at Veronika curiously.

VERONIKA
I'll have a Guinness? You?

EDWARD
Champagne.

Veronika smiles. The bartender hands him a small menu.

BARTENDER
Here's what we have by the glass.
Excuse me, are you that girl from
the internet? The GREEN IS THE
NEW BLACK 'fashion zombies'
protest? I signed that petition!

Veronika exchanges a look with Edward, both of them amused.

VERONIKA
I think that must have been
someone else.

Veronika slides off her stool and checks out the jukebox.
She finds a song she likes. She grabs Edward.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
Come on.

They start dancing to the song she picked. Their movements are incredibly graceful and in synch.

Then their dancing turns wild and crazy: Veronika, laughing, incandescent with life and joy.

BARTENDER (O.S.)
(shouting over the music)
Four A.M. Folks. Gotta take it on out of here.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - PRE-DAWN

Dr. Thompson enters the empty office. The desk is bare except for a letter addressed "Dr. Thompson".

Thompson opens it and sees underneath a file with medical x-rays inside. He starts reading the letter.

DR. BLAKE
Dr. Thomas... Greetings. This office, and Villette, are now in your care. I hope you will conduct yourself wisely as I've tried to do. I know you've been "investigating" my handling of Veronika-- remember, I can see everything in here-- I want to bring you up to speed on a few things, clear up a few matters.

Thompson shakes his head, amazed.

CUT TO:

INT. SUBWAY OUT TO CONEY ISLAND, EMPTY - -PRE-DAWN

The carriage is empty apart from one sleeping down-and-out at the other end from Edward and Veronika. It is loud and fast.

She notices Edward's bag at his feet. Sticking out of it is his notebook. She reaches for it, and pulls it up to take a look.

He observes this. Has no problem with it.

VERONIKA'S POV: THE PAGES OF THE NOTEBOOK--

--DRAWINGS OF HIS LOST LOVE,

--LETTERS TO HER, DRIED BLOODSTAINS ON THE PAGES

--DRAWINGS OF BLAKE AND NURSES THAT MAKE THEM LOOK HORRIFIC.

Veronika winces slightly at the disturbing content. She eyes Edward. He gives a little shrug that's almost like a confession "I was crazy there, for awhile."

She continues turning the page.

VERONIKA'S POV: THE PAGES CONTINUE TURNING

-- MARI IS DRAWN SYMPATHETICALLY

--THE PICTURE OF VERONIKA AS YET INCOMPLETE.

She looks up from the book with a concerned expression.

VERONIKA
(trembles)
It's... not finished.

EDWARD
It will be. I promise.

Edward looks at her.

CUT TO:

Edward's POV of Veronika's face: more alive than she has ever been. So beautiful.

VERONIKA
... I thought I'd never find another one like me.

BACK TO:

Edward takes her hand and kisses it.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - PRE-DAWN

Grey pre-dawn light. The boardwalk is deserted, except a few of the sleeping homeless. The sea is dark. Veronika and Edward, huddled together on a bench, are desperately trying to stay awake.

EDWARD
It's like you're part of me now, you're inside of me--

VERONIKA
So then, take good care of me.

Edward laughs. Then is concerned.

EDWARD
It's too cold for you here.

VERONIKA
I've got to see the sun rise.

Veronika stifles a yawn. She looks pale and weak.

LATER

They are even more out of it.

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
'Things we said Today'?

EDWARD
It's on Beatles 65. George wrote
it and sang lead - I think.

Edward starts singing, shaking off his own fatigue.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
'You say you will love me/ If I
have to go/ You'll be thinking of
me/ Somehow I will know--

Edward, singing to Veronika, looking out to the horizon,
watching the dawn just beginning.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Oh-yeah- right... Someday when
we're dreaming/ deep in love/ not
a lot to say/ then we will
remember/ things we said today.

Edward turns to her.

Veronika's eyes are closed, her head is lolling. Edward's
face pales in shock.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
Veronika!

He lets out a roar of pain.

A seedy homeless guy stirs, wondering at the commotion.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
No!

Edward shakes her limp body.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Thompson pauses, fidgets nervously, then reads on.

DR. BLAKE (V.O.)
You saw that Veronika's x-rays
didn't only resemble a previous
patient's who had succumbed to
necrosis of the ventricles. They
were identical. That's because
they WERE that patient's x-rays--
with Veronika's name added. True
pictures of Veronika's heart,
accompany this letter.

Dr. Thompson studies the x-rays with Veronika's name now
labelled appropriately on the file.

His eyes widen in quiet, astonished shock.

DR. THOMPSON
(awe-struck whisper)
Her heart function is... normal.

He keeps reading.

DR. BLAKE (V.O.)
In a few more days I'd
anticipated telling Veronika that
our injections had cured her
heart condition. But in light of
her unscheduled departure from
Villette, my telling that
particular lie won't be required.
I don't recommend lying to
patients. In all but extreme
cases, the truth is preferable.
Try to remember that...

Dr. Thompson goes to the window, looks, ponders, as Blake
did.

DR. BLAKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The majority of suicides repeat
their attempts till they succeed.
I took a risk in lying to her
about her condition... I decided
to test the only remedy I've come
to have any faith in: awareness
of life. Everything depended on
the innate strength of Veronika's
desire to survive.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - EARLY MORNING

On a bench near the entrance to the park Mari sits sipping
a container of hot coffee, contentedly glancing at the
morning paper.

She looks up. Dr. Blake stands very close. He is smiling at her.

He stands there with two pieces of luggage a bit like an visitor from another planet. Mari smiles back at him.

DR. BLAKE (V.O.)
Veronika will probably not die
for fifty or sixty years. Even
then it's unlikely the cause will
be a heart attack.

Mari makes room for him to sit near her on the bench.

INT. DR. BLAKE'S OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Thompson sits in Blake's chair, dumbstruck.

DR. BLAKE (V.O.)
Until she finds out from some
other doctor that she's perfectly
healthy she'll consider each day
a miracle. Which in my view it
is.

EXT. CONEY ISLAND - EARLY MORNING

Edward's continued vigorous shaking wakes Veronika. She struggles up.

VERONIKA
Hey--you--"mir'.

She's blinking, awake, alive. Magical, honey light shines straight into her eyes from the horizon.

Edward is lit up with surprise, relief. He laughs at her. Smiling, she points. *This is what she was waiting for.*

VERONIKA (CONT'D)
The sun.

EDWARD
Jutri!

They both burst out laughing.

Moments later, laughing like crazy things, Veronika and Edward run along the sidewalk and onto the pier towards the rising sun, over the blue ocean, hand in hand, right to the end. Enjoying the moment.

THE END