

RUSSIAN VINE

Screenplay by
Bryan H. Bell

based on the short story by
Simon Ings

Revised Final Draft
July 25, 2004
Copyright © 2004 Seattle Film Institute

FADE IN:

1 EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

It is a quaint building near an apple orchard.

2 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

REBECCA lies in bed. She is a white-skinned woman with a fold of hair that always hangs down over one eye. She is listening intently.

In bed next to her, reading aloud, is CONNIE, a man with light-blue skin.

Connie closes the book.

Rebecca pulls a battered paperback from a stack of books on the nightstand and hands it to Connie.

REBECCA

Now from this one, Connie.

CONNIE

Aren't you tired?

Rebecca shakes her head.

CONNIE

You're insatiable. Very well.

He looks at the book.

CONNIE

Gogol. Ah, your Russian comic.
Laughter through tears. Nice
choice.

Rebecca smiles. Connie reaches toward her and tenderly pushes the fold of hair out of her face. The hair springs back.

CONNIE

Well, how about "The Overcoat"?
(reading)
Once, in a department...

The page Connie is reading falls out of the book and lands on Rebecca. She picks it up and studies it a moment. Connie notices that she is holding it upside down.

CONNIE

Rebecca...

She hands him the page.

3 EXT. OUTDOOR TABLE AT A CAFÉ - DAY

Rebecca and Connie sit at a table, drinking tea, while he reads a book to her.

CONNIE

(reading)

"And do you really ask us to believe," Sir Wilfrid was saying, "that you have discovered a means for instructing animals in the art of human speech, and that dear old cat Tobermory has proved your first successful pupil?"

A TALL MAN with piercing eyes stops on the sidewalk outside the café and begins reciting aloud to passersby, occasionally stabbing at Connie with his gaze.

TALL MAN

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book...

Connie looks up from his book and listens for a moment. So does Rebecca.

TALL MAN

...a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

Connie returns to his book, but notices that Rebecca is no longer paying attention to him. The man raises his voice.

TALL MAN

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

Connie rises and drops some money on the table. He stands there, waiting for Rebecca to join him. She doesn't move.

TALL MAN

And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

Connie touches Rebecca's arm. Her gaze still upon the man, she rises.

TALL MAN

And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

On their way out of the café, Connie stops near the man and regards him. Without pausing, the man turns to face Connie.

TALL MAN

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

The man is inches from Connie's face. Connie bows his head, takes Rebecca's hand, and leaves.

4 EXT. APPLE ORCHARD - DAY

Rebecca trails behind Connie as he walks among the trees.

CONNIE

The gardener treads a fine line between husbandry and cruelty; between control and disfigurement.

Connie stops to prune a branch.

CONNIE

Over the eons, as my people have tried to preserve peace, we have had to make many hard decisions about where to prune.

He stops at another tree and stoops to pick something from the base of its trunk. He holds it out in front of Rebecca.

REBECCA

What a pretty flower!

CONNIE

We Puscha have a saying: a flower is simply a domesticated weed.

Rebecca takes the flower from Connie.

CONNIE

Humans call that a Russian Vine. If left untended, it would grow over this tree, this whole orchard, and choke it to death.

Connie pulls a spray bottle from his belt.

CONNIE

Language is the same way.

Connie kneels at the base of the tree and begins to spray the Russian Vine that remains.

CONNIE

Eliminating literacy is one of the stronger weedkillers we use. Had we not used it here on Earth, human society would have long since wiped itself off the planet.

Connie rises and turns to Rebecca.

CONNIE

We Puscha are not evil, Rebecca.

She twirls the flower in her fingers. Connie touches it.

CONNIE

We are gardeners.

Rebecca jerks the flower away and wanders out of Connie's sight. Softly, she begins to sing.

REBECCA
(singing)
I love you. I love you. Sleep now.
Dream now.

Connie swings around to look at Rebecca. When he sees her, he relaxes a bit. Then he closes his eyes against a sudden, searing melancholy.

REBECCA
(singing)
Remember the stories. You'll sing
them someday...

Rebecca trails off.

CONNIE
Have I ever told you, dear, how
much human singing resembles
Puscha weeping?

The slightest smile crosses Rebecca's lips.

REBECCA
Yes, Connie. Many times.

She begins to sing again as she walks away.

REBECCA
(singing)
I love you. I love you...

5 EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Connie and Rebecca walk to the porch. Across the front door, someone has painted a sign:

**Qi_t
ea^ht**

REBECCA
What does it say?

CONNIE
It says, "Quit Earth".

He scratches at the paint with his finger. The paint doesn't come off.

6 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca listens while Connie reads to her. Connie's voice is thick and slow.

CONNIE
(reading)
Rudin spoke intelligently,
passionately, and effectively; he
exhibited much knowledge, a great
deal of reading...

Connie stops. His eyes are closed.

REBECCA
You've already read me this story.

Connie starts.

REBECCA
It goes "No one had expected to
find him a remarkable man. To all
of them it seemed strange how
someone so intelligent could pop
up suddenly in the provinces."

Connie's eyes widen. He drops the book. He turns out the light.

REBECCA
(continuing)
"He spoke masterfully, and
entertainingly, but not entirely
lucidly, yet this very vagueness
lent particular charm to his
speech."

CONNIE
Why don't we go to sleep, dear?

REBECCA
Do you remember that man from the
café? Well, he remembers the
entire Bible. Every verse. Every
word. He recites it like that
every day in town. People admire
him.

CONNIE

Do you admire him?

REBECCA

They say he paints symbols. Like
the one on your door.

CONNIE

I don't want to hear this.

REBECCA

They say he's hiding near. On our
land. Among the apple trees.

7 EXT. APPLE ORCHARD - DAY

Connie is scanning the trees. He stops. There is a dark
shape moving behind one of the trees. He rushes over. He
rounds the tree to see a bush blowing in the breeze. He
kicks it.

8 INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Rebecca sings to herself as she waters a pot in which she
has planted the Russian Vine.

REBECCA

(singing)

I love you. I love you. Sleep now.
Dream now.

The tall man creeps past the window.

Rebecca stops singing. She watches him cross the backyard.

When he is out of sight, she draws with her finger in the
pot's dirt and begins to sing again.

REBECCA

(singing)

Remember the stories. You'll sing
them someday.

VOICE (O.S.)

What's the matter? Why are you
crying?

Rebecca spins around. Connie is standing in the doorway.

REBECCA

I was singing, Connie.

CONNIE

You're always singing that. What is it?

She turns back around and smoothes the dirt in the pot.

REBECCA

It's a lullaby my mother used to sing.

Connie sighs and drops into a chair.

CONNIE

I've been looking for a week. I don't think he's here anymore.

Rebecca moves as if to speak but then stops herself. Instead, she crosses the kitchen to Connie and gently strokes his cheek.

REBECCA

Let's go for a walk tomorrow.

CONNIE

Where would you like to go?

REBECCA

To the lake.

9 EXT. LAKE - DAY

Rebecca and Connie walk through the grass. Connie stops and settles under a tree. Rebecca takes off her shoes, lifts the edge of her dress, and unrolls her stockings. She walks toward the water.

CONNIE

You shouldn't go off alone. It's dangerous.

She ignores him. At the edge of the lake, she stops and traces her toe through the mud. Then she continues walking slowly along, swishing her feet, until she is out of sight.

Connie walks to the water's edge and studies the thing she has drawn in the mud:

**Qit
eaht**

A rifle shot rings out. Connie is hit full in the chest, but he doesn't fall. He doesn't even stagger. All is still.

He watches the tall man, holding a rifle, leap from cover behind an old ruined wall and disappear between the reeds.

Connie chokes, and then falls backward.

Rebecca arrives. She puts her arms around Connie and cries.

REBECCA

(singing)

I hate you. I hate you. Sleep now.

Dream now...

Connie's eyes close.

FADE OUT.