

VonCosel Y. Hoyos: The Eternal Obsession

by  
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Based on Newspaper & Other Public Domain Accounts  
Of Actual Events

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In BLACKNESS, there is a slow and steady HEARTBEAT. Then, in a thick, German accent:

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
Breathe, por favor.

FADE-IN:

INT. DEPRESSION-ERA EXAMINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The lanky, silver-haired DR. CARL VONCOSEL listens with a stethoscope to the bare chest of ELENA HOYOS, a 22 year-old Cuban beauty whose blouse hangs open seductively.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
There she was - the young woman that had appeared to me like a ghost, at home, on the boat and in places around the world - sitting before me.

At first, she takes long, deep breaths as VonCosel listens.

In his head, VonCosel hears his own overlapping thoughts like loud whispers fading in and out of his consciousness.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
*She's here. She's really here.*

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
*It's her... It's really her. The dream. The dream was right.*

Suddenly, the breathing becomes erratic and she starts coughing.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
Though at first elated, my feelings became conflicted and mixed.

Their eyes meet as VonCosel hands Elena a tissue.

KNOCKING O.S.

NURSE (O.S.)  
Doctor VonCosel?

Startled, VonCosel looks to the NURSE standing in the doorway.

VONCOSEL  
(To Elena)  
Excuse me.

He steps away to talk privately with the Nurse.

NURSE  
Doctor Tanzler wanted me to give  
you these - Ms. Hoyos' test  
results...

VONCOSEL  
Thank you.

The Nurse lingers as VonCosel takes the CLIPBOARD and looks  
at the results.

NURSE  
Was this what you expected?

VONCOSEL  
(Mild Annoyance)  
That will be all, nurse.

With a knowing glance, the Nurse leaves.

VonCosel's eyes dart back and forth from the clipboard to  
Elena, who gazes at him with innocent anticipation.

ELENA  
Mama waits for us. She will want  
to know.

His hand moves - he wants to touch her - but stops short.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
The results are back.

INT. MARINE HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Outside the examining room, VonCosel talks with AORORA HOYOS,  
Elena's mother, who is almost in tears as she listens.

In the distance, the Nurse watches

VONCOSEL  
We've confirmed Tuberculosis. I'm  
sorry.

AORORA  
My poor girl... First, the baby,  
then Luis... both gone. Our family  
business is suffering and... now  
this.

Aorora fights back a sudden swelling of emotion and cannot  
continue.

VONCOSEL

(Sympathetic - Hesitant)

There isn't much in the way of traditional treatment, but... if you're willing, I can offer some alternative treatments - perhaps even in your home?

Just then, VonCosel and Aorora notice Elena as she steps out of the examining room, her gaze met by both.

VONCOSEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For better or worse, this family's tragic misfortune meant long-awaited opportunity for me.

Having overheard, she nods in view of the doctor and her mother.

VONCOSEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And, so...

Aorora nods, as well, and they're all in agreement.

VONCOSEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I took it.

EXT. HOYOS' HOME - LATE IN THE DAY

Elena's small family home.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

Elena's family let me care for her in her home.

INT. HOYOS' HOME

VonCosel sits in a corner of the Hoyos' crowded and smoke-filled den, where Elena's sister FLORINDA joins Aorora, ELENA'S FATHER and other FAMILY AND FRIENDS in what looks to be a jovial get-together. Most are eating and/or smoking CIGARS.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

I was included at first, reminded of the time I passed through Cuba, so I knew some of what to expect.

With some evident concern, VonCosel watches as a clearly tired Elena waits on the guests.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

Still, it pained me to watch Elena - whom I knew to be so easily tired in her condition - be forced to wait on this loud and rambunctious bunch and inhale their noxious cigar smoke.

She finally sits down next to a LARGE WINDOW, where she briefly looks over and makes eye contact with Karl. She points to a CAR passing by.

ELENA

There he goes...

VONCOSEL

Who?

ELENA

Luis... my husband, actually. But, he lives with another now.

(Hangs head)

Adios, mi amor perdido.

For the next few moments, VonCosel just watches Elena from a distance, meeting eyes with her across the room when she glances towards him and smiles now and again.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

In the eyes of the law, I knew she belonged to another, but did I not also belong to another, too, at one time? I knew full well - we came from different worlds - yet we understood one another in ways that had nothing to do with where either of us came from. What could possibly be more important?

After a moment, Elena suddenly perks up again when beckoned back to wait on her family and guests.

VonCosel stops Elena as she passes him, talking just above a whisper so as not to alert the others.

VONCOSEL

Elena, I admire you for trying, but... all this running around, this noise and excitement.

VonCosel doesn't seem to know how to say what he wants.

VONCOSEL (CONT'D)  
 No offense, but... your condition.  
 I'm... concerned. Estoy preocupada.

Elena looks at him tenderly.

ELENA  
 I'm okay, doctor. After all,  
 they're my family. What can I do?  
 (Beat)  
 Don't worry. I can rest later.

VONCOSEL  
 But...

Suddenly, Elena puts a tender, yet firm hand on VonCosel's shoulder.

ELENA  
 Please, Doctor. Understand... and  
 suffer this for me.  
 (Smiles softly)  
 Por favor.

Before VonCosel can react, Elena darts off again to continue waiting on people.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)  
 And so I did, suffering for her the  
 present... yet anxious about the  
 future.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ELENA'S HOME

As Elena lies on an OTTOMAN, VonCosel readies a HYPODERMIC NEEDLE and SYRINGE, presumably to draw blood.

In Elena's lap is a HANDKERCHIEF with specks of BLOOD on it - in the floor next to her, a SMALL DOG lies dutifully at her side.

From a few feet away, Elena eyes a small VIAL of a strange liquid solution as if she knows what it is, but doesn't speak or otherwise react.

ELENA  
 How long must we continue the  
 treatments?

VONCOSEL

I told you. There's no cure.  
Knowing that, well... it's up to  
you.

Elena starts toying with the NECKLACE around her neck.

VONCOSEL (CONT'D)

Do you like the gifts?

ELENA

I like them very much.

(Beat)

Do you think this can ever be  
cured?

VONCOSEL

The others say no, but medicine is  
science, and science is in constant  
flux. I believe we are stymied  
only by our fear of the unknown and  
of failure. The others run from  
aggressive treatment because they  
are afraid.

ELENA

(Half To Herself)

Like Luis...

VONCOSEL

I, however, am not afraid.

(Beat - looks at Elena)

But... are you?

ELENA

I was at first.

(Bows Head)

I see how much you do, Doctor.

'How much you seem to care.

(Looks at VonCosel)

'And how you look at me sometimes.

For a moment, she puts her hand gently on VonCosel's, but  
then slowly pulls it back.

ELENA (CONT'D)

I wonder how you must see me, and  
all I can think is... I have not  
always been so good. I think... if  
I do not recover...

(Beat)

Will I go to hell?

VONCOSEL

My dear, beautiful girl, I cannot  
even imagine such a thing.

Their eyes meet as Elena smiles warmly at VonCosel, who readies his needle. At the last moment, WE SEE that rather than drawing blood, he is injecting her with the solution from the vial!

Elena's eyes weaken and flutter as the solution is injected. Then:

In the BLACKNESS... a mournful cry.

AURORA (V.O.)

Elena? Elena? No!

A moment of silence - drawn out. Then, the heartbeat! Again!

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

It was meant to be. It was all...  
meant to be.

For a second, the heartbeat quickens and grows louder before WE...

CUT TO:

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM

VonCosel stands at the foot of his bed where lay Elena, awakening as if from a deep sleep. Disoriented at first, she then gazes at VonCosel with an inquisitive smile.

VONCOSEL

(Smiling)

We did it, my love. We're free.

Elena smiles wryly and looks VonCosel in the eye.

ELENA

Danke, herr doktor. Danke.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

In unexpected tranquility, Elena and VonCosel talk as they walk along the shoreline.

ELENA

So what was it?

VONCOSEL

Tetraodontoxin from the puffer fish - mixed with a sedative. It's usually found in the Pacific and is a strong paralytic - deadly, even. But, in small doses, it merely simulates death and can last anywhere from a few hours to a few days. The sedative was to keep you from having to be conscious for it all.

ELENA

You must be skilled. I feel fine.

(Beat)

Though I can't help but worry about mi familia... mama, my sisters.

VONCOSEL

Tuberculosis kills, Helen. It's a harsh reality, but one they knew to prepare for.

EXT. OUTDOOR CAFE - DAY / CONTINUOUS

As if no time has passed, VonCosel and Elena continue their conversation across from one another at a SMALL TABLE. While VonCosel's clothes have changed, Elena's have not since she was seen, lying on the ottoman... dying.

ELENA

Still, they're hurting, Carl.

VONCOSEL

The whole world is hurting, my dear. My home country has suffered for decades, though I fear the worst is yet to come for the fatherland.

Just then:

WAITRESS (O.S.)

Was this what you wanted?

Elena looks at a small menu as VonCosel glances up at the Waitress.

WAITRESS (O.S.)(CONT'D)

Doctor?

Though the glance at the Waitress is quick, there is something instantly familiar about her!

Before he can dwell on it, though, Elena touches VonCosel's hand to get his attention back.

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM

Rain gently pelts the bedroom window as VonCosel and Elena lay together on his bed, cuddling. Yet, he now seems distracted. On the bedside table next to them is the small vial/bottle of Tetraodontoxin.

VONCOSEL

How is your cold? Better?

ELENA

I told you, I feel fine. Besides, I'm with you, aren't I? We fooled them, didn't we?

(Cuddles up to him)

Relax, my love. We're together now.

After a moment, VonCosel can resist no more.

VONCOSEL

Forgive me, Helen, but I must ask. Would you ever leave me?

ELENA

(Serious tone)

Why would you ask such a thing?

VONCOSEL

Please. The hard part is over. It's just that... well, you're so young still. I just have to hear it. Whatever you say, I'll believe you. Just tell me.

ELENA

I couldn't leave you, Carl. You know that.

VONCOSEL

What do you mean?

Elena is quick to cuddle back up to him.

ELENA

Please, no more questions.

VonCosel drapes his arm around her shoulders, noticing the rain coming down harder now.

VONCOSEL  
Elena, if you love me, you'll  
answer me true.

ELENA  
But I did - you already know.

VONCOSEL  
You can't leave me. You already  
said that, but...

Elena sits, tears in her eyes.

ELENA  
You already know, beloved. I can't  
leave.

VONCOSEL  
(Mildly irritated)  
You can't? Why can't you? Why do  
you keep saying that? What does it  
even... mean?

Suddenly, a terrible dawning creeps over VonCosel's face.

VONCOSEL (CONT'D)  
Why are you crying?  
(Beat)  
Elena? Why - can't - you - leave?

ELENA  
(Hesitant)  
Because...

Suddenly, VonCosel's own eyelids become heavy.

VONCOSEL  
What...?

Taken aback, his eyes slowly close as he tries to shake it  
off, but can't.

ELENA  
Because, I...

VonCosel keeps shaking his head as if to stay awake, but  
finally, his eyelids slam shut with a THUNDEROUS CLAP!

ELENA (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
(Loud whisper)  
I was never here.

Quickly, VonCosel's eyes open and he discovers himself in  
bed... alone!

Desperately, he looks to his bedside table.

Instead of the vial (of Tetraodontoxin), he sees the bloody handkerchief - the handkerchief that Elena used the last time he saw her... right before she died!

Glancing at the wall, he SEES his own diploma from the University of Leipzig, which reads, "Karl Tanzler" - NOT "Count Carl VonCosel!"

He remembers now!

In quick succession, WE SEE VonCosel's new recollection of events.

INT. ELENA'S HOME - VONCOSEL'S MEMORY

VonCosel draws blood.

Elena starts violently coughing into the handkerchief, which quickly becomes covered in blood!

In a state of stoic horror, VonCosel stands and backs away from Elena as Aorora comes running in, kneeling at her daughter's side even as the small dog starts barking.

Elena's sister FLORINDA runs into the room to see what's going on, but stands at a distance, horrified and afraid.

EXT. CEETERY - VONCOSEL'S MEMORY

VonCosel - walking amidst the tombstones with FLOWERS in hand.

LIGHTNING reflects off the PANEL on a small MAUSOLEUM which reads, in part, "Maria Elena Millagro "Helen" Hoyos - 1909-1931."

INT. ELENA'S MAUSOLEUM - VONCOSEL'S MEMORY

VonCosel - sitting in a WOODEN CHAIR next to the coffin, in darkness save for a LANTERN, a straight, yet almost glazed expression on his face.

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUED

Now, he realizes the truth.

FINAL IMAGES FLASH BEFORE US - of the Nurse, then the Waitress... the same woman! But who? Why?

Awake now, as if from an all-too-real dream, VonCosel is truly and excessively alone - forced to listen to the rain pounding his window so hard now that it seems on the verge of shattering.

His senses heightened, waking up from his blissful delusion is almost more than he can bear as he practically gasps for breath, his own carnal need visibly overwhelming him... suffocating him.

He lies there, alone, in agony, paralyzed by his desperation, listening to the torrential rain.

And then... silence! The rain is gone, and in its place, a whisper in the air.

ELENA (V.O.)  
*Come to me!*

EXT. CEMETERY / MAUSOLEUM - DUSK - CONTINUOUS

VonCosel walks up to the mausoleum and enters, TOOLS and CROWBAR in hand.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

VonCosel pulls a WAGON out of the mausoleum with Elena's coffin on top, struggling to pull it around stones and through the yard until he eventually has to stop.

Frustrated, but undeterred, VonCosel looks up to see the pale and ghostly figure of Elena standing before him, guiding and urging him on.

EXT. VONCOSEL'S SEASIDE HOME - NIGHT

VonCosel carries Elena's draped corpse up the steps and across the threshold.

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM

Surrounded by CRUDE MACHINERY, CHEMICALS and ELECTRICAL GADGETS reminiscent of a FRANKENSTEIN set, VonCosel gently sets Elena onto his bed.

VonCosel looks down at Elena's discolored face, still partially shrouded, yet moist and half-decomposed.

He reaches down and rips open the simple dress in which Elena was buried (O.S.). For a moment, he looks... disturbed.

For a moment, only his gaunt face and his moving shoulders & arms are visible as he toils away.

Then, he takes wet pieces of SILK and puts them on Elena's face, which currently faces away from the doctor.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

Nature is cruel, beloved, and time is not without its ravages, but your cries for rescue have not gone unheard.

A CONTAINER sits atop a PUMP with some weird-colored CHEMICAL... likely formaldehyde.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

And so, I restore you, my love - my child bride - to the beauty that once was a boyhood dream brought to life. Where before you died for the devil's pleasure, now... Live for me!

A SHORT WHILE LATER...

The image borders on monstrous. What now passes for Elena lies in the bed, dressed in a wedding dress, but with most of her skin covered in a sort of off-white, gray-ish PLASTER. She also sports GLASS EYES that forever stare up at the ceiling.

LOUD THUNDER CRACKS and an ORGAN is struck.

EXT. VONCOSEL'S SEASIDE HOME - NIGHT / CONTINUOUS

A LIGHT shines through VonCosel's single BEDROOM WINDOW.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. VONCOSEL'S SEASIDE HOME - MORNING

SUPER-IMPOSE: *Years Later...*

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM

It's early in the morning and the SOUND of WAVES can just be heard through the window. A mere shadow of his former self, the older, gaunt, unkempt VonCosel is slumped over, asleep in a chair beside the bed on which still lies his creation.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

There, we stayed for years. Happy. Content. Away from the eyes of those that would not understand. And yet, the world outside refused to leave my beloved Elena and I alone.

Suddenly, he is awakened by what sounds like frantic KNOCKING from downstairs.

INT. VONCOSEL'S SEASIDE HOME

VonCosel opens his front door to find a very frustrated Florinda, standing there, eyes flaring.

FLORINDA

Is it true? Are the rumors true?

VONCOSEL

Please calm down.

FLORINDA

No! You said you'd help. Now, people wonder if my sister is even in her tomb. I demand you take me to her, Karl... now!

VonCosel hesitates, yet clearly knows he's been caught.

VONCOSEL

Very well.

He lets her in and leads her upstairs.

INT. VONCOSEL'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Though she can scarcely believe it, Florinda slowly enters and inches closer to see what appears to be Elena, stretched out on the bed, her skin even more gray, still in the wedding gown, glass eyes staring into infinity!

FLORINDA

(Softly - Aghast)

No... it can't be.

Shift into SLOW MOTION with MUFFLED SOUND as Florinda realizes the horrible truth, falling to her knees beside the bed as she screams - VonCosel still in the doorway, watching.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VONCOSEL'S SEASIDE HOME - DAY

VonCosel stands at the end of his yard and watches as DETECTIVES and OFFICERS walk in and out of the house, a couple of them escorting a traumatized Florinda out the front door.

VONCOSEL (V.O.)

I almost could not bear to watch, least of all the sister that only now chose to confirm these rumors. Even in my shock and grief, I was suspicious. Elena had been buried with some of the jewelry I gave her, and I knew from Florinda's husband Mario that the family was still struggling with money. Still, it didn't matter, as she was taken from me yet again.

Then, to VonCosel's horror, Elena's body is carried out in a long WICKER BASKET through the front door. As it draws closer, Elena's pale form appears to VonCosel, walking slowly towards him - never diverting her gaze from him - moving as if to keep just ahead of her own carried corpse.

Without turning his head, VonCosel meets the gaze of his beloved's spectre. As she starts to walk by, she stops momentarily and puts a hand gently upon his shoulder. Then, she whispers loudly into his ear familiar words.

ELENA

Suffer this. For me. Beloved.

Elena then walks slowly past VonCosel and disappears behind him. A moment later, the basket is carried by at almost the exact spot, and seeing it, a tear crawls down VonCosel's otherwise stoic face.

VONCOSEL

Since then, there have been some that have looked at me like I was some kind of monster... not for taking a life, but for actually trying to restore it.

INT. KEY WEST JAIL

VonCosel now sits behind bars, conversing with a familiar visitor. The Nurse... and Waitress... now, a JOURNALIST with a NAME TAG on her blouse, sitting across from him in yet another wooden chair.

JOURNALIST

But still, there you were, all that time.

VONCOSEL

Both of us.

JOURNALIST

I must say, Doctor. Your passion is truly overwhelming. I believe I can represent you in my column.

VONCOSEL

I knew people wouldn't understand. That's why I... we... stayed to ourselves all those years.

JOURNALIST

Seven, correct? And for what it's worth, I think it's quite noble... romantic, even.

The Journalist stands, sidling up to the bars as VonCosel meets her almost affectionate gaze.

JOURNALIST (CONT'D)

Trust me. I can get your story out there. We can write - stay in touch. I can make people understand. I mean, the way I see it, you're like that guy in Greek mythology... what was his name? Played the harp, tricked Hades into getting his wife back...

VONCOSEL

Orpheus.

JOURNALIST

Yes! That's it.

The Journalist smiles, trying to truly gain VonCosel's trust and bring him into the present.

JOURNALIST (CONT'D)

Honestly, doctor, what have you got to lose? I know how you feel, but the world outside isn't always so cruel. Just give it a chance. Give me a chance. Please?

VonCosel thinks a moment, then hangs his head.

VONCOSEL

Yes, but to what end?

JOURNALIST

To make people see you as more than just some mad scientist and grave robber - to see your love and humanity. Those at the Lopez Funeral Home, using your work in some maudlin display - I think they're the monsters!

(Beat - Pleading)

You're not alone, Karl, and you don't have to be ever again. Let me show people the truth.

Finally, VonCosel speaks.

VONCOSEL

*Alone... never again. Yes, dear Frau. I now realize that my Elena will always be with me - forever.*

(Points to his head & heart)

*In here... And in here.*

(Beat)

*The truth is simple. We were in love, and when I finally looked behind to make sure she was there, they took her away.*

(Beat)

*But not for long.*

Realizing the extent of VonCosel's self-deception, the emotionally-fragile Journalist steps slowly away from the bars, her eyes watering up with tears as she watches VonCosel step back and retreat into his dark cell.

FADE TO BLACK.

Accompany the following TEXT with actual photos.

*SUPER-IMPOSE: "Carl Tanzler - aka, Count Carl VonCosel - made national headlines and escaped charges of grave robbery on a technicality, but was run out of Key West forever. Having capitalized on his story in a pulp magazine, he died alone in Florida in 1952."*

*"The preceding is a fictionalized retelling of events based mostly on the public record in newspapers, etc."*

FADE-OUT: