

EXIT DOOR:
The Downfall of Arthur Rimbaud

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1.0 INT.CAFE BAR.DAY

A Sunday afternoon in Nouzonville, a post industrial town near the Belgian border. Inside the only café open, a group of Algerian-French men play pool. Others sit along the bar and on small tables smoking and drinking strong coffee in small white cups. The walls are adorned with photographs, scarves, posters and other memorabilia of Che Guerva. There is hardly a free space from floor to ceiling in this collage of images as his youthful face stares back. An Irish man and woman in their 40s stray in. He is bald wearing shorts and a football jersey. She is plump with dyed hair and is dressed in a stripy T-shirt with Florida written across it. They momentarily stand in the middle of the bar and stare around as if surprised by the interior. The locals watch them silently.

Tourist man:

Wow I wasn't expecting this bleeding, thing.

Tourist woman:

Yea, just smile Pat.

Tourist man:

What do you want to do?

Tourist woman:

Get a coffee?

The man nods and they slowly approach the bar counter. Everyone looks away as they get closer. A young woman behind the bar appears hung-over and is eating potato salad from a plastic container. She looks at the man.

Bar woman:

Yes?

Tourist man:
Two coffees please.

Bar woman:
What, huh?

Tourist man:
Two coffees please.

Bar woman:
Espresso, yes.

Tourist man:
Oh, ok, very good thanks.

Tourist woman:
Ask her for milk Pat.

Man:
Do you have milk, hot?

Bar Woman:
No, only espresso.

She points to a small basket with small tubs of long life milk and sugar sachets. The men have stopped playing pool and stand staring at the foreign couple. The couple smile and look around the bar, most people look away when their eyes meet, except for one of the pool players.

Pool Player:
Hey, where are you from?

Tourist man:
Oh we're from Ireland

The pool player laughs and says something in Arabic to his companions. The whole bar laughs.

In the background the coffee machine makes hissing sounds. The pool player walks over closer to the man.

Pool Player:
Ireland, Ireland.

Tourist man:
Yes, yes Ireland, Dublin.

Pool Player:
Ahh, what do you think of Thierry Henri?
The hand, the hand, eh?

The pool player waves his hand behind his head as the whole bar erupts with laughter and everyone shouts at each other. The man looks at the woman and is embarrassed.

Pool Player:
Thierry Henri, fucking, bastard.
Cheat, no?

Tourist man:
Ohh yes, yes, a cheating cunt.

The man laughs and the tension disappears. The bar woman smiles placing the white coffee cups on the counter.

Pool Player:
France, no good, no good.

Bar woman:
Two euro!

Tourist man:
Thanks, great stuff.

He hands her change awkwardly and places a milk and sugar sachet on the saucers carefully picking up the cups. They look around for somewhere to sit but there are no free spaces. The woman motions to go outside and he nods. Slowly smiling the couple move towards the door as everyone studies them.

Pool Player:
Hey, my friend!

Tourist man:
Yes, world cup, ha ha.

The man laughs studying the image before him, of revolutionary kitsch and a smiling French-Algerians. The pool player then stands to attention with the pool cue under his arm like a rifle and clenches his fist in a raised arm salute.

Pool Player:
Hey, welcome to France!

Tourist man:
Well thanks, very nice to be here.

Pool Player:
Mister, mister!

The pool player slowly brings his hand down and extends two fingers as if aiming a pistol. The bar crowd laugh at this gesture and couple shuffle through the bar crowd as people smile at them as they pass. The balls click again on the pool table as the game resumes. The couple leave the bar carrying their coffees.

CUT TO BLACK

2.0 INT. COURTROOM. DAY

A 19th century oak lined courtroom is full with barristers and legal assistants and a large public gallery. People talk and the legal teams discuss intently and read over documents. Entering through a door at the back an old man shuffles slowly along the dock, followed legal assistants. Judge t'Serstevens is a thin elderly man with a sombre expression. He wears an ornate beige wig and red velvet throng on top of his neat, pressed suit. He is hands are long and frail. He takes out documents form his suitcase whispering with his staff.

Arthur Rimbaud is a teenager with a pale chubby face, a big mouth and curly brown hair. He is an enfant terrible with an evil grin. He is wearing a faded black suit and stained white shirt with an unmade bowtie around his neck. He has a heavily bandaged right hand. His other hand rests on his knees and he shakes his left leg nervously. Across from him on the opposite side of the courtroom sits Paul Verlaine. He is older, bald with a patchy beard and slanted deep-set eyes. He has a dandyish air, an expensive brown velvet suit, torn and stained with a discoloured silk scarf in his lapel. He is slumped over a wooden bench flanked by two policemen. Rimbaud has charged Verlaine with criminal assault for shooting him in the wrist.

Judge:

Case 19! The accused Paul Verlaine,
charged...with criminal assault on
Arthur Rimbaud, the 10th July in the Hotel Liège,
Brussels. (Pause)

I call upon the state's prosecution attorney,
a Mr Nouveau, to begin legal proceedings.

The prosecution barrister, Mr Nouveau, is a heavy-set, middle-aged man dressed in a black cape and wig with small thick bifocals. He has a round bullish face.

He stands looking around the court and nods confidently to the Judge. He then calls Rimbaud to the stand who walks over and mockingly grins as he places his hand on the bible. People snigger and whisper in the public gallery.

Lawyer:

Mr Rimbaud, can you tell the court how old are you?

Rimbaud:

Er, 18 years, 33 days and..

The lawyer interrupts Rimbaud aggressively.

Lawyer:

Thank you but I wanted to furnish with a year, no more.

What is the nature of your relationship with the accused, Mr Verlaine?

Rimbaud stares at the lawyer menacingly and then suddenly grins, winking at Verlaine who looks away clasping his wrists together.

Rimbaud:

We are friends and poets.

For the last year I have been living with him.

We wrote letters for newspapers and gave French lessons in London.

But he had become impossible to live with and I had expressed a desire to return to Paris.

Lawyer:

Oh and do friends, as you describe it, normally, shoot each other?

Rimbaud:

That day Verlaine was not himself and flew into a drunken rage, that's all.

Lawyer:

As we can see from your hand sir, he did shoot you!

Furthermore Mr Verlaine was overheard saying, as he loaded the gun, in the Rue des Chasseurs bar that morning, 'It's for you, for me, for everyone.'

Rimbaud:

He was behaving as if he were insane at the time, Verlaine is harmless, I assure you of that.

The lawyer removes his bifocals and places them on the table and turns to Rimbaud. Then the Judge sits up and interrupts the cross-examination.

Judge:

Mr Rimbaud your opinion of Mr Verlaine's mental condition is for the law to determine, not you. Continue Mr Nouveau!

Lawyer:

It does appear rather excessive behaviour for two gentlemen, doesn't it, Mr Rimbaud?

What could drive a man to such measures in relation to another man?

Was this a duel over honour, a woman or money?

Is there something you would prefer not to tell the court, Mr Rimbaud?

Sniggers again from the public gallery in the courtroom. Rimbaud looks up at them with an indifferent glare.

Rimbaud:

We are poets and brothers and our manners may appear strange or not easily understood to others.

Lawyer:

I do not indeed profess to be a poet;
and when I hear you give evidence,
I am glad that I am not.

Have you always being a poet,
even at your young age?

Where does your inspiration to write poetry come from?

Rimbaud looks down for a second and raises his head slowly, sternly focusing on at the lawyer.

Rimbaud:

Boredom mostly.

Lawyer:

Do go on please!

Rimbaud:

I've always been very bored, in fact,
I've never known anyone as bored as I am.
This is, of course,
the first mark of the poet.
And the little green fairy helps too.

Lawyer:

Indeed, Mr Rimbaud,
that will be all for now.

Rimbaud steps down, swaggers through the courtroom and glances at Verlaine. The defence barrister, Mr Carjat, 60s, chubby man dressed in a black cape and wig. He takes his turn and mutters to himself as he stands up, shuffling papers in his hands.

A pencil falls from behind his ear and he stares at it on the ground embarrassed. He raises his head and smiles at the Judge and looks over to Verlaine in the dock.

Defence Lawyer:

Thank you, and forgive me, your Honour these indulgences.

The defence would like to call Mr Paul Verlaine to take the stand.

Verlaine's handcuffs are unlocked by the policeman and he stands up awkwardly and looks nervously around as he crosses the court. He stands in the dock, leaning on the bars. He swears solemnly on the bible which causes Rimbaud to chuckle loudly. The lawyer speaks in a soft slow tone.

Lawyer:

Mr Verlaine, on the day in question, the 10th July, can you explain to the court why indeed you shot Mr Rimbaud in the wrist?

Verlaine stands nervously and seems stunned at first, mumbling in a dry high-pitched voice.

Verlaine:

I had bought this pistol, to end it all.

I was distraught by my emotions,
the whole mess, my wife and child,
and the guilt I feel for the difficult situation
with Arthur.

I was out of my mind, drunk I'm afraid.

But I never wanted to hurt anyone,
I thought to end my own life, you see,
but it got confused when we argued.

I mean, I begged him to finish me off.

And he wouldn't...

It was a terrible, terrible mess.

The old Judge looks at Verlaine sternly, muttering to himself and making notes in his court ledger. He then seems surprised and raises an eyebrow and motions over the policeman. He leans over dock and the Judge whispers to him.

Judge:

Find out if he is a homosexual.

Policeman:

Yes my Lord.

Verlaine raises his head and glances at the policeman beside him in the dock. He mimes to him.

Verlaine:

What did he say?

Policeman:

Keep your mouth shut!

Verlaine looks embarrassed and the court remains silent except for coughs and feet shuffling. The defence lawyer seems oblivious to this and looks up from his documents as continues.

Defence Lawyer:

How old are you?

Verlaine:

Eh, 29, sir.

Lawyer:

You are married with a beautiful wife and baby son, I believe.

Verlaine:

Yes, I love my wife and child very much and saw them just a few days ago, just before, Rimbaud arrived.

Lawyer:

And Mr Rimbaud is 18, so there is a considerable age gap between you both.

How would you describe the nature of your friendship?

Verlaine:

Oh, it's based on a mutual interest in poetry. We composed works together and encourage each other, supporting the pursuit of our art.

Defence Lawyer:

How does this labour occur would you say?

Verlaine:

I guess nothing unusual,
mostly in poetry readings,
clubs and associations,
magazines that sort of thing.

Then the prosecution takes its turn with an unsettled Verlaine. The lawyer senses the weakness and his voice grows in confidence. He decides to ask how they survive financially in London.

Prosecution Lawyer:

Mr Verlaine, could you inform the court further about your relationship with Mr Rimbaud?

Verlaine:

As Arthur said we are poets and friends,
lodging together in London.

We find work occasionally in translation or teaching
French and other language work to support our
poetry.

And we hope to secure more permanent work.

*Verlaine looks around the court sheepishly but is met by
severe looks from the legal teams, police and public.
He puts both hands on the brass bar to support himself as
he is exhausted. His voice grows weaker and weaker.*

Lawyer:

And how do you both find such gainful employment?

Verlaine:

Through contacts, or placing advertisements,
and the like.

Lawyer:

Perhaps in newspapers?

Verlaine:

Yes, sometimes.

Lawyer:

Fascinating and of course I would envisage,
if I may,
that one needs a vivid imagination to
compose modern poetry?

Verlaine:

Yes, that's right,
imagination is a valuable asset to a poet,
in any era.

The lawyer pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose and holds up a newspaper. He displays it to the court then gives it to his assistant who respectfully places it in front of the court clerk.

Lawyer:

I have one of your, job advertisements,
in the Times Newspaper,
which states:

'French Gentleman, most respectably connected,
of superior education, possessing French diplomas,
thorough English, and extensive general knowledge,
wish employment as private secretaries or tutors.
Excellent references'.

The Judge motions to the to the court clerk who hands it over to him. Verlaine looks to Rimbaud who has his arms crossed and head down. Verlaine begins to mumble and dribble.

Lawyer:

Indeed apart from such powers of invention,
if the court permits I would like to read an extract
from a Scotland Yard Police report dated the
26th of June 1873.

The report goes on to describe you as having
'an unnatural relationship' with Rimbaud.
Furthermore you share company with other French
exiles drawn from the ranks of the Communards.
You have attended meetings in the Hibernia Tavern,
Old Crompton St with known anarchists and
radicals, amongst them the infamous Mr Karl Marx.
Mr Verlaine why would the British police depict
respectable French teachers in such a lurid way?

Verlaine:

These are just rumours, there are many, many French
people in London from all sorts of backgrounds.

Lawyer:
Quite so.

Verlaine:
We can't be responsible for them, I mean its..

The questioning is not going well for Verlaine who is being made to look increasingly untrustworthy. Rimbaud, meanwhile appears to be uninterested and smugly examines his dirty fingernails while rolling a cigarette. He lights it up in a bored fashion blowing smoke high into the air. A policeman reaches over and snaps the cigarette from his mouth unbalancing Rimbaud.

Lawyer:
The same report contains an unfinished letter from Verlaine to Rimbaud found at the same abode. It is written in a mix between French and English and states:
'Je suis your old cunt, ever open or opened to you, I don't have irregular verbs with me'.
Is this not your handwriting sir!

Nouveau holds up the letter as gasps spread around the courtroom and the Judge calls for order.

Lawyer:
Is this the type of linguistic work you specialise in Mr Verlaine?
Are you not the worst sort of man?
Corrupting the innocent with your habits of genital congress.

Verlaine sits down and looks to the ground as the public gallery continues to rumble. The Judge taps his hammer loudly as the police surround the gallery. The defence council, Carjat, stands up and asks Rimbaud to take the stand again.

Policeman motions to Rimbaud who gets up awkwardly and saunters over to the witness stand with his hands in his pockets. As the defence lawyer stands up Rimbaud starts to giggle.

Defence Lawyer:

Thank you my Lord.

I would like to draw our attention to the character of Mr Rimbaud in the case and invite him back to take the witness stand.

I wish to demonstrate to the court Mr Rimbaud's destructive manipulation of my client Mr Verlaine. A man who we readily admit is a very emotional, sensitive and dare I say it, of vulnerable character.

Mr Rimbaud is only 18 years old yet this is not his first experience of the law.

The lawyer turns to Rimbaud in the witness stand. Rimbaud blankly stares at the ceiling.

Lawyer:

Have you been in prison before?

Rimbaud:

I was arrested once, a few years back.

Lawyer:

On what charge?

Rimbaud:

Oh something to do with a train fare in Gard du Nord.

Lawyer:

I can jog your memory that was I see here on the report, the 31st of August 1871, is this correct?

Rimbaud:
Could be, perhaps I don't know.

Lawyer:
With a sentence of,
two months in the Mazas Prison.

Rimbaud looks blankly at the lawyer and slowly nods.

Lawyer:
Have there been, how can I put it,
other brushes with the law?

He searches his documents and notes. His assistant hands him a paper folder.

Rimbaud:
The fare fine was paid and I was released,
it was nothing,
I made a simple mistake.

Lawyer:
And tells us, did not another older man,
a Mr George Izambard,
your patron,
pay your fine on that occasion?

Rimbaud:
I don't remember now.
Anyway George was my schoolteacher and
very fond of his students.

Rimbaud winks at Verlaine who ignores him.

Lawyer:
You seem to have a history of friendships with
older men.
Furthermore, why were you so eager to go to Paris?

Rimbaud sniggers at the question and clamps his hands on the bar of the witness stand.

Rimbaud:

Ha, have you been to Charleville?

It bores me to extinction!

Lawyer:

Indeed, in May you were reported to be drunken and disorderly at the Place Ducale in Charleville.

Shouting: 'Order is banished!'

Rimbaud:

So what...you're stating the...

Lawyer:

Is it not the case, Mr Rimbaud, that you were celebrating the Communard Uprising?

Your desperation to get to Paris was in fact to get on the barricades, was it not?

Rimbaud:

You're getting ahead of yourself.

Once a hyena always a hyena, et cetera.

Lawyer:

Are you not a secret member of this despicable alliance and you have a string of incidents in Paris that caused you to flee to London?

Rimbaud:

Do you mean the Communards? I don't quite follow.

Lawyer:

Surely you admit sir you were driven out of Paris, friendless, after losing even the support of the literary couture, the so-called 'Vilains Bonhommes'.

Rimbaud:

And who told you that my friend?

They're a bunch of bourgeois ink-shitters.

The Judge springs to life, as if awoken and looks towards Rimbaud.

Judge:

Mr Rimbaud, mind your language and behaviour.

You are here to be cross-examined,
answer the defence counsel's question politely,
as best you can.

So far the law has not brought charges against you
however be warned young man.

Lawyer:

Did you not stab a Mr Denis Clément at the Brassiere
Saint Sulpice during a poetry reading?

In another incident the police violently removed you
from Theodore Banville's house after you had
drunkenly thrown your clothes out the window and
displayed yourself indecently in public.

The list of charges and incidents goes on!

*The lawyer holds up and shakes the police reports to show
the courtroom. Rimbaud yawns loudly in an exaggerated
manner and mutters.*

Rimbaud:

Even the dogs are liberals.

Lawyer:

What exactly do you mean by that sir?

Rimbaud:

The poet becomes a seer through an immense,
derangement of all the senses.

He searches himself,
he exhausts all poisons in himself,
to keep only the essence.

He becomes among all men,
the great criminal and the supreme Scholar!

For he reaches the unknown.

So the poet is actually,
a thief of Fire!

Rimbaud stares nonchalantly at the Judge with a dramatic expression. The courtroom titters nervously at his unusual description. The Judge seems bored with his head resting in his hand as Rimbaud makes his speech but suddenly becomes attentive. Verlaine raises his head up with a concealed grin and despite everything admires Rimbaud's eloquence of speech.

Judge:

Your poetry is irrelevant here.

I must remind you that in a court of law we are
only interested in fact and ascertaining the truth.
However fascinating your musing may be it has no
place in a court of law.

It must be struck out of the court record as this
testimony is entirely inappropriate to the case.

I've had enough of this.

You may step down from the witness dock Mr Rimbaud.

The Judge looks at him however Rimbaud does not move and is enjoying the attention of the court. He grins and then drops a bombshell.

Rimbaud:

Following on from what I was saying,
I would like to retract the charges against my dear
friend and poet!

I know Verlaine never meant to really hurt me.

There is stunned silence in the courtroom as the Judge looks at both legal councils in the courtroom in amazement. They are confused and shrug their shoulders, raising their hands in disbelief as the public gallery begins to whisper. The Judge announces calmly that there are further legal issues here to be investigated and goes on to state that homosexual relations are illegal.

Judge:

It appears that the plaintiff, Mr Rimbaud, has requested an Act of Renunciation of this assault charge.

This is, of course his right to do so and therefore the court strikes out the criminal assault charge. However there are other grave and unscrupulous matters to be investigated here and the law is determined to get to the bottom of the matter. Therefore I order a medical examination to be carried out on Mr Verlaine and a report submitted.

The Judge's hammer is struck loudly as courtroom empties amid hushed voices. The venetian blinds are opened as light expands across the floor and walls. Rimbaud stands alone as the silence closes in around him. He wanted to teach Verlaine a lesson and get back at him for the shooting. However, this may backfire on him. He sits back down in stand and leans his head against the handrail. He notices a small brown spider on the floor between his feet. He impulsively releases a long slow spit from his mouth drowning the insect. He watches it struggle to escape the liquid and drops another blob immersing it. He enjoys watching it slowly drowning.

Verlaine is pulled down the dark corridors to the cells by two policeman. He feels light headed almost drunk and relieved to be off the hook for assault. However both men are unnerved by this unexpected turn taken by the Judge and Verlaine worries what he will face tomorrow.

2.01 INT.COURTROOM.DAY.

The next day a medical doctor is in court to present his findings. The prosecution barrister cross-examines the doctor who speaks slowly with a stutter. Mr Nouveau looks around the court and jokes with his team as Judge takes his seat. Rimbaud can't help perking up and he touches his crotch and smells his fingers.

Judge:

The medical examination report on Mr Verlaine has been made available to both legal councils earlier. I call upon the Prosecution council to continue with the case.

Prosecution Lawyer:

The prosecution would like to invite the medical officer Dr Sevigny to the stand.

The courtroom looks at the doctor who has nodded off momentarily in the public gallery.

Judge:

Dr Sevigny, Dr Sevigny, would you be so kind?

The Judge motions towards the witness box with his outstretched arm.

Judge:

Can you please furnish us with your evidence!

We await you sir.

The doctor wakes up and looks around him. He quickly straightens himself out and picks up his briefcase and enters the witness stand.

Judge:

This case now resides with a medical report of much significance.

Dr Sevigny is an elderly rotund man, dressed in a 3 piece black suit, bow ties, and round glasses with a thick grey beard. He speaks with a stutter and sits upright in the witness stand, nervously twitching. He has a briefcase and documents in front of him. He clears his throat.

Lawyer:

Were you not ordered by the court to carry out a medical examination of the accused, Paul Verlaine?

Doctor:

Yes I was.

Lawyer:

Dr Sevigny, can you please provide us with a summary of your medical findings in this case?

The doctor clears his throat and his hands shake as he shuffles the report in front of him. He offers a copy to the court registrar.

Rimbaud stares at the doctor with keen interest as a worn out Verlaine snuffles and looks at the ground. He is worried about the predicament he faces.

Doctor:

A summary of the report is as follows:

The defendant, Mr Verlaine, has a small penis with a particularly small abnormal tapering head. [stutter]

Doctor:

In terms of this case a more significant issue is the anus. [stutter]

We inserted a medical instrument in it and found that its contractibility was almost normal and there were no major injuries evident.

Judge:

Indeed, and is there more?

Doctor:

The conclusion to be drawn from this medical examination is that P. Verlaine bears on his person traces of habitual pederasty in both active and passive forms [stutter].

However, neither type of trace is sufficiently marked to give grounds for suspecting inveterate behaviour [stutter].

This appears not to be a long-standing habit.

Furthermore these traces would rather indicate fairly recent practices [stutter] and activity.

Verlaine cannot rest on the bench and constantly moves because of the pain and sobs into his brown stained handkerchief, his weeping get louder as the doctor reads the report.

The Judge takes notes keenly and Rimbaud chuckles to himself. He strokes his crotch and can't help feeling stirred up as he imagines the examination.

Judge:

Thank you, Dr Sevigny for this succinct summary of this conclusive report.

Having read this report in full earlier I share the prosecution's moral concern.

I would instruct the court to seek affidavits on the findings of this report from both parties in this case.

Suddenly Rimbaud's leg twitches nervously again but he displays no emotion. His mood has changed as his face loses colour. Tears well up in his eyes as he fights back the urge to cry. He realises now the trouble he is in. Although not afraid of prison he wants to travel and be free. Devastated Verlaine almost faints, slipping off the bench but is pulled back up by the policemen roughly. The lawyer smugly sits down.

Prosecution Lawyer:

No further questioning is required.

Judge:

Mr Carjat do you want to question the witness?

The defence counsel looks up from his desk, stands up briefly and sits back down.

Defence Lawyer:

No your Honour, the defence has no questions for this witness.

The doctor gathers his documentation papers and prepares to leave, yawning with tiredness. A large silver medical forceps fall out of his bag and he curses and stutters below his breath.

Judge:

This report gives grounds to the law's concern for the well-being of Mr Rimbaud in particular, given his impressionable age and somewhat troubled character.

Indeed one could take the view that Mr Verlaine is responsible for Mr Rimbaud's extraordinary behaviour, or certainly contributing to the bizarre nature of his character.

You may step down Dr, eh, Sevigny, thank you.

Verlaine is hunched over in the dock holding his head in his hands sobbing into his thighs. Rimbaud leans back in his chair and watches the doctor collect his things and step down.

After a pause the defence lawyer looks at his client and stands up, carefully places the documents on the desk. He slowly takes off his glasses and stares straight at the Judge.

Lawyer:

Mr Rimbaud is an arch-manipulator who causes havoc and preys on the weak-minded.

He is a pernicious, evil character, even at this young age he has already ruined others and sullied reputations.

Mr Rimbaud has no place in our society whose values he flouts without compunction!

Estranged from his wife and family and exiled in London, Mr Paul Verlaine, has attempted to escape the clutches of Mr Rimbaud's disreputable desires. I would request leniency and call for exonerating Mr Verlaine of any penal penalty.

Mr Verlaine has requested the opportunity to be reunited with his family and escape the clutches of Mr Rimbaud.

Rimbaud appears distracted and leans back with his feet propped up on the bench. The prosecution lawyer motions to him with his hands to remove his feet. He does so as if reminded where he is and looks embarrassed, turning red.

Judge:

Thank you all, excellent summaries of this most disgusting and sordid case. I will remind conclude the case after a short recess.

The court empties in hushed silence as the case is discussed. Verlaine is lowered from the dock in shock as Rimbaud looks around him for a friendly face.

2.02 INT. COURTROOM. DAY.

The court is assembled after the break and the Judge enters briskly and takes his seat. All eyes are focused on him and the newspaper journalists are poised to capture every word.

Judge:

To remind all concerned and in particular the prosecution and defence councils that Section 61 of the Offences Against the Person Act, 1867, has removed the death penalty for homosexuality. However, male homosexual acts still remain highly illegal and are punishable by imprisonment. In Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act extends the legislation outlawing any kind of sexual activity between males.

Judge:

The court therefore imposes today, the 8th of August 1873, a sentence of 2-years hard labour in prison on Mr Paul Verlaine. In addition there is a maximum fine of 200 francs for indecent behaviour.

Despite his involvement, Mr Rimbaud remains regretfully free, due in part to his young age, a mitigating factor in the court's decision.

Gasps are heard around the courtroom as Rimbaud tries to smirk but looks stupid. The side of his face bulges as blood flows around and he feels like vomiting. Verlaine desperately looks over to Rimbaud for support but he ignores his attention. Verlaine is then utterly drained, staring at the floor, motionless and unresponsive. As Verlaine is dragged away to the cells below he glances at Rimbaud who touches his bandaged hand and holds it up waving goodbye to Verlaine. He is picked up by the policemen and lowered down into the darkness. Rimbaud sits alone as the courtroom empties, watching his friend being taken away and the bench and dock where Verlaine sat. He feels guilty for what has happened to Verlaine but glad to have escaped prison himself and knows he will never see him again. Journalists crowd around and fire questions at him as the policemen attempt to impose order. All Rimbaud can think of is his freedom, getting back to the family farm and the open road. He wants to harvests his own bitter fruits, write poems and escape.

CUT TO BLACK

3.00 EXT.AFRICAN DESERT.NIGHT

A four-wheel car pulls up with headlights on and illuminates the old city walls of Harar at night-time. A white tourist couple in their 20s with large backpacks, dressed in matching T-shirts and shorts struggle to get out of the car. The local driver helps the woman as the guide begins to talk with a shabbily dressed, wild-eyed man standing there in the darkness. Car radio plays vibrant music from a local station.

Backpacker one:

Oh I need a toilet.

Backpacker two:

Really! Just nip over there,
behind the van.

Go on nobody will see you,
I'll keep a lookout.

Backpacker one:

Do you think?

Backpacker two:

Sure, I'll whistle if someone comes.

Backpacker one walks nervously away from backpacker two and the group of three local men huddled together. Behind the wheel axle she squats down and backpacker two smiles at the men and looks around. The wild-eyed man opens a bag of rotten meat and shouts in a long, hoarse, wailing call as he casts lumps of into the darkness.

The wild-eyed man:

Whisky, Tart, Mola, Jayla, Mimi! Mimi!

Slowly hyenas can be heard in the distance, whining and sniggering, inching closer to the hunks of half rotten meat which the man whirls and tosses. Backpacker two is becoming nervous and looks behind him.

Backpacker two:

Look out, they're dangerous.

Backpacker one doesn't reply as she pulls up her cotton travel shorts. She is suddenly transfixed by a mob of amber eyes staring at her, their bodies barely visible. Then she is startled by one hairy head burrowing under her arm as it comes around in front of her, almost eye to eye and says to her.

Hyena:

I am the leader of this pack,
the oldest hyena far and wide.

I welcome you here.

We need your help.

Backpacker one:

What can I do?

I mean I've never been here before.

What are you talking about?

The pack of hyenas slowly encircle her tighter as their short, rasping breaths stink.

Hyena:

You're really a stranger here,
otherwise you would know the oppression
we have suffered at their hands.

Backpacker one:

Not so loud, they'll hear you.

Two other hyenas had snuck up behind backpacker one and fastened their teeth into her belt, preventing her from standing. A bitter aroma fills the air as their open mouth steam.

Backpacker one:

Let go of me!

Hyena:

Quiet, don't be afraid,
this is in accordance with our custom.

You will be released once you hear our petition.

The backpacker's eyes dart around looking for her partner and the local men. However, the group of men are laughing and dancing as they drink and smoke. Backpacker two joins them in the circle.

Guide:

Where's your wife?

She run off with the hyenas?

Backpacker two:

Did you see that,

I saw one there!

Wild-eyed man:

Don't worry my friend,
you going to see them real good.

They're my friends, everywhere.

Have a drink!

They smile at backpacker two and hand him a bottle of cheap local whiskey. He takes a short swing, coughs and hands it back as the men continue to shout out names. He looks back at the car and edges towards it wondering if he should look for his wife.

Backpacker one:

What is your so-called petition?

Hyena:

We have been oppressed by these men all our lives
and that of our ancestors before.

We need your help.

You must kill them,

They make us sick,

Their armpits are the pit of hell.

Backpacker one:

Have you gone mad?

Hyena:

It's always the same,

you must help.

We once went all over this land now we can only
travel at night and perform our tricks for their
entertainment.

We dream to be free to roam this desert land
undisturbed.

Backpacker one:

I can't but...oh my god!

*From the pack a hyena darts in and drops a long rusted
knife at her feet. The hyena leader looks at her as she
picks up the blade carefully examining it. She stops and
stares into the hyena's amber eyes.*

Hyena:

Hide the knife until later.

When you all are sleeping around the campfire,
sneak out and slit their throats.

We will be watching and will feast of their flesh.

Don't worry we will not harm you.

The backpacker says nothing and looks away. The hyenas release her and without speaking she gets up and places the blade down the back of her shorts.

Backpacker one:
But more men will come,
are you not afraid?

Hyena:
Yes we know that.

Backpacker one:
Shit, it's mental.
I can't believe this.

Backpacker one steps over the damp patch of piss and looks back at the pack slowly retreating. She adjusts her belt and hair walking from behind the car to the others.

The wild-eyed man:
Whisky, Tart, Mimi!
Hey, camel meat.
fucking camel!

Backpacker two:
Shit, there you are,
I was worried.

Backpacker one:
Are you mad,
I'm fine just wandered a bit.
It's beautiful here.

Backpacker two:
Any sign of the beasts?

Backpacker one:
No, no, and here?

The wild-eyed man:

Here babies, come and get it ha!

Slowly the hyena pack edge closer the meat and the men shine their torches at them, eyes light up against the darkness.

Backpacker one:

Look there's lots of them.

Backpacker two:

Where's the camera?

Backpacker one:

In the rucksack, in the car backseat.

Just a snap..

Guide:

What did I tell you?

Knew they would come.

Beasts.

The backpacker walks over with the small digital camera and turns the camera on and raises it to his face. The screen image is blurred as the camera searches for a focus point. The local men dance and howl as the hyenas gorge the rotten meat.

The wild-eyed man stops and looks over at the backpackers.

Wild-Eyed Man:

Beauties aren't they?

The backpacker is surprised and stops taking the photo, putting down the camera. The driver pats him on the back and walks over to the car.

Guide:

Let's leave them to their work,
It's time to set up camp.

*Looking over at the backpackers he motions to the car.
The driver is unloading the vehicle.*

Guide:

Anyway, you've seen them now.
Wonderful creatures aren't they?
And how they hate us!

CUT TO BLACK