



FILM INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION



TOTAL ECLIPSE
(working title)

Screenplay
by
CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON

Third Draft

9/10/92

EXT. RAILWAY STATION DAWN

It's September, 1871. The platform at Charleville railway station in the Ardennes is more or less deserted, but the CAMERA soon discovers and begins to examine an extremely striking 16-year-old boy. He has large, reddish hands, none too clean. His grey eyes are piercing, their expression merciless. His tie hangs loose round his neck like a piece of old string. His suit is frayed and shabby, the sleeves too short and the trousers ending an inch above his blue socks. His black boots are caked with mud. He's bare-headed. This is ARTHUR RIMBAUD.

A caption:

I MAUVAIS SANG.

Presently, we hear the VOICE of PAUL VERLAINE, quiet, reflective.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

Sometimes he speaks, in a kind of tender dialect, of the death which causes repentance, of the unhappy men who certainly exist, of painful tasks and heart-rending departures.

A train is puffing slowly into the station. RIMBAUD moves forward towards the edge of the platform.

2 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT DAY

RIMBAUD sits in a corner of the compartment by the window puffing on an old clay pipe, much to the displeasure of his FELLOW-PASSENGERS, a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, sitting opposite him and an ELDERLY COUPLE in the two other corners of the compartment. Outside, the autumnal landscape.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

In the hovels where we got drunk, he wept looking at those who surrounded us, the cattle of poverty.

3 EXT. VIADUCT DAY

The train waits, stalled on a high viaduct, sharply outlined against the sky.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

He lifted up drunks in the black streets. He had the pity a bad mother has for small children.

INT./EXT. COMPARTMENT DAY

RIMBAUD looks out of the window, no longer smoking his pipe. After a while, he rises to his feet, and to the alarm of his FELLOW-PASSENGERS, opens the door of the compartment. Below, over the edge of the viaduct, a vertiginous drop, which we contemplate from RIMBAUD'S P.O.V.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

He moved with the grace of a little girl at catechism. He pretended to know about everything, business, art, medicine.

5 EXT. VIADUCT DAY

RIMBAUD, seen from below, framed in the open doorway of the compartment. Suddenly, he steps forward, arms outstretched and flies, at a steep angle, upwards and out of frame.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

I followed him, I had to!

INT. VERLAINE'S LODGINGS DAWN 1892

VERLAINE opens an eye. He's 48 now, but looks older, hollow-eyed, ravaged, his beard, moustache and bald head giving him the appearance of a satyr. He rubs a hand experimentally over his face.

ANOTHER ANGLE reveals more of the squalid attic room; and that VERLAINE is in bed with EUGENIE KRANTZ, also in her forties, fast asleep, her hair, dyed a garish red, splashed across the grey bolster.

VERLAINE reaches down and draws a cracked chamber-pot from under the bed. He frowns and utters a small groan as he notices that its contents are frozen. Then he glances at EUGENIE, sees she's still asleep and quietly slides the pot back under the bed.

VERLAINE pushes back the covers and gingerly steps out of bed. He's wearing a shirt over long grey darned combinations. He tiptoes across the room and reaches for EUGENIE's handbag, lying on the table. He's hardly got it open, though, when EUGENIE is sitting up, glaring at him across the room.

EUGENIE

Hands off.

VERLAINE lets go of the handbag, his expression sheepish.

Continued

EUGÉNIE

You want some money, you earn it.
I do.

VERLAINE

I just thought maybe...

EUGÉNIE

And a lot more than you ever come
home with.

VERLAINE

That's because you're so beautiful.

She isn't: she looks coarse and brassy; but sitting up in bed, naked, she's a somehow commanding figure. VERLAINE moves across, back to the bed; but she intercepts his outstretched hand.

EUGÉNIE

And none of that either. You take
that poem you wrote last night, you
go to Vanier and you sell it.

VERLAINE turns back obediently and crosses to the cramped, chaotic table he uses for a desk. On top of the mass of books, magazines and papers is a sheet of paper on which is written, in a neat but shaky hand, a poem of three 4-line stanzas, much amended, with many crossings-out and after-thoughts. VERLAINE reaches for it and contemplates it for a moment.

VERLAINE

One more verse, I think. Just to
complete the thought.

EUGÉNIE

If it's not there, they won't miss
it, will they?

VERLAINE hesitates; then puts the poem down again, yielding to her reasoning, his expression rueful.

7 EXT. GARE DE L'EST DAY 1871

VERLAINE is 27 now, expensively and quite formally dressed, already going bald, but in other respects a total contrast to the derelict carnal hulk of the previous scene. He waits at the barrier with his friend CHARLES CROS, a couple of years older, a tall dandy with frizzy hair and a mournful moustache. The train has arrived and passengers are streaming past.

7 Continued

RIMBAUD passes through the barrier, moving solitary through the crowd, looking around, coming towards VERLAINE and CROS.

VERLAINE notices him: he frowns for a moment, evidently struck by RIMBAUD's appearance. RIMBAUD, for his part, glances at the fashionable pair and passes by. VERLAINE returns his attention to the oncoming crowd.

8 EXT. STREET IN PARIS DAY

RIMBAUD is walking, fast. This is to become one of our most characteristic images of him: restless, staring straight ahead, always driving himself onward. For once, however, he's distracted by something, breaks his stride.

The street is one of those damaged in the recent civil war and destruction of the Commune. Buildings are mutilated, scorched and bullet-scarred, their windows blown out. In one place, a couple of houses have burned to the ground, leaving only a rubble-strewn, blackened gash in the continuity of the street. Rats scramble in the ruins. In front of this gap a knot of people surround a makeshift fire, next to which a couple of rats have been spitted, ready for roasting. A YOUNG MAN, no older than RIMBAUD, breaks away from the group and extends a hand towards RIMBAUD, begging.

RIMBAUD stops. His hand goes to his pocket and he produces a few coins, probably all he has. He considers for a second and then, impulsively gives the YOUNG MAN all the coins. Then he strides on.

9 INT. DRAWING-ROOM OF THE MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE HOUSE
EVENING

A handsome woman in her forties, VERLAINE's mother-in-law, MME MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE sits at the piano, playing, with unquestionable ability, a transcription of the prelude to 'Lohengrin'. Meanwhile, her daughter, MATHILDE VERLAINE, an attractive 18-year-old, eight months pregnant, arranges flowers in a cut-glass vase. It's a large room in a spacious house in Montmartre, discreetly affluent, furnished in the Louis-Philippe style.

Once this is established, RIMBAUD steps into the room. He's not seen by either of the women, so that when eventually he speaks, after standing silently in the doorway for a time, he startles them considerably.

RIMBAUD

Evening.

Continued

MME MAUTÉ breaks off from her playing: MATHILDE stands, flower in hand, mouth open.

RIMBAUD
I'm looking for Paul Verlaine.

MME MAUTÉ
Are you...M.Rimbaud?

RIMBAUD
Yes.

MME MAUTÉ
M. Verlaine is not with you, then?

RIMBAUD
Well, no.

MATHILDE
He went to the station to meet you.

RIMBAUD
He doesn't know what I look like,
does he?

By now MME MAUTÉ is on her feet.

MME MAUTÉ
I am Mme Maute de Fleurville,
M. Verlaine's mother-in-law. And
this is my daughter, Mme Verlaine.

RIMBAUD exchanges perfunctory handshakes with the two women.

MATHILDE
How did you get from the station?

RIMBAUD
Walked.

MME MAUTÉ
Perhaps you'd like a wash?

RIMBAUD
No.

MME MAUTÉ
Did you leave your luggage in
the hall?

RIMBAUD
. What?

Continued

MME MAUTÉ
Your luggage.

RIMBAUD
I have no luggage.

MME MAUTÉ
No luggage?

RIMBAUD
No.

MME MAUTÉ
Oh.

Silence. MME MAUTÉ makes an effort to persevere.

MME MAUTÉ
You're even younger than we imagined.

MATHILDE
How old are you?

MME MAUTÉ
Darling, it's not very polite to ask people their ages.

MATHILDE
I'm sorry, I was just so interested.

They both look at RIMBAUD, but he seems disinclined to help them out. There's a longish silence, which eventually he breaks.

RIMBAUD
I need a piss.

MME MAUTÉ reacts as positively as she can, her smile queasy.

10 INT. DINING-ROOM NIGHT

CLOSE on VERLAINE as he stares, fascinated, across the table at RIMBAUD. There's silence at the moment; and when we eventually take VERLAINE'S P.O.V., we see that RIMBAUD is picking unenthusiastically at his food. Also at the table are CLOS, MATHILDE and MME MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE.

VERLAINE
How old are you, if you don't mind my asking?

.0 Continued

MATHILDE

He does.

RIMBAUD

Sixteen.

VERLAINE

Only you did say in your letter
you were twenty-one.

RIMBAUD

Mm.

VERLAINE

I noticed you at the station, but I
didn't think it could be you.

RIMBAUD

Likewise.

VERLAINE

Those poems you sent me were
remarkable for someone of twenty-
one. For someone of sixteen they're
unprecedented.

RIMBAUD

That's why I told you I was twenty-
one. I didn't want you to feel
patronising before you'd read them.

VERLAINE

Of course, it all makes sense now.
The fact your mother kept you at
home with no money. You have left
school?

RIMBAUD

Yes.

VERLAINE

I hope your mother isn't too angry
with me.

RIMBAUD

No, once she found out you'd sent
me the fare, she seemed quite happy.

MME MAUTE

You come from the Ardennes, don't you,
M. Rimbaud? Charleville?

RIMBAUD

Yes.

10 Continued

MME MAUTÉ

Pleasant town, Charleville, isn't it?

RIMBAUD

Last place on God's earth.

MATHILDE

What does your father do?

RIMBAUD

Drinks mostly, I believe. We haven't seen him for ten years.

MATHILDE

I'm sorry.

RIMBAUD

No need to be. He's very well out of it.

He pushes his plate away and produces from his pocket a repulsive old clay pipe and some matches. He lights the pipe, sucking noisily. MME MAUTÉ watches him in some dismay.

RIMBAUD

Mind if I smoke?

MME MAUTÉ

Not at all.

She makes a considerable effort and produces a friendly smile.

MME MAUTÉ

I was also very impressed with your poetry.

RIMBAUD looks across at VERLAINE, frowning.

RIMBAUD

You let her read it?

MME MAUTÉ

Perhaps you'd like to read something to us after dinner?

RIMBAUD

I don't think so.

MATHILDE

Oh, why not?

10 Continued

RIMBAUD

I don't want to. I never read out
my poetry.

MATHILDE

All the other poets do. We have
soirees...

RIMBAUD

I'm not interested in what all the
other poets do.

CROS

Don't you think poets can learn
from one another?

RIMBAUD

Only if they're bad poets.

VERLAINE can't resist a smile at the absolute confidence and
truculence of this assertion.

11 INT. ANDRÉ'S DAY

André's is a dingy café-bar, patronised by VERLAINE: we
shall see it over twenty years and more without it changing
very much beyond a certain inevitable deterioration of the
smoke-stained, low-ceilinged, poorly lit room.

At the moment, however, what fills the SCREEN is a glass of
pure absinthe. A sugar-lump rests on the copper strainer
across the top of the glass. VERLAINE's hand picks up the
jug of water and carefully begins to pour; the water passes
through the strainer and begins to transform the liquid from
dull brown to a swirling milky green.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

Do you know about this?

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I know what it is.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

It's the poet's third eye. It melts
glaciers.

A WIDER ANGLE: he finishes pouring and pushes the drink
across to RIMBAUD. Then he begins to dilute his own drink.
RIMBAUD takes a sip and does his best not to reveal its
powerful effect. VERLAINE considers him shrewdly for a
moment.

11 Continued

VERLAINE

Tell me, what do you think of my wife?

RIMBAUD

I don't know. What do you think of her?

VERLAINE

She's still only a child, of course.

RIMBAUD takes another sip of absinthe and looks VERLAINE in the eye.

RIMBAUD

So am I.

12 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

MATHILDE lies in her brass double-bed next to VERLAINE, in his nightgown, who is reading from a sheaf of manuscript poems written in a clear, bold hand. What he's reading at the moment, in fact, is Bateau Ivre.

VERLAINE

Listen to this: "Sometimes I've seen what people think they've seen."

MATHILDE

He's not how I imagined him.

VERLAINE isn't listening to her: he finds something on another page.

VERLAINE

"I've wept too many tears. Heartbreaking dawns, Each sun is gall, each moon is misery..."

MATHILDE

I prefer your poems. I don't really understand that kind of thing.

VERLAINE

No. No, this is something new.

13 INT. DRAWING-ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD, holding a candlestick, his pipe clamped in his mouth, lets himself into the darkened room and crosses to inspect the bookshelves in MAUTÉ's library. He takes down a copy of Les Fleurs du Mal and then a copy of Les Châtiments by Victor Hugo. A glance at the flyleaf proves that this is

13 Continued

a signed copy, inscribed with a dedication in Hugo's flowery hand. He continues to search, running his fingers along the spines of the fine leatherbound editions.

14 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

VERLAINE is still reading: presently, MATHILDE gives a little gasp.

VERLAINE

What is it?

MATHILDE

He's kicking.

VERLAINE puts down the manuscript pages, draws back the covers, pulls up MATHILDE's nightdress and puts his ear against the spot MATHILDE indicates on her swollen belly. For a moment, he listens, reacting delightedly as the baby kicks. MATHILDE's expression, however, is thoughtful.

MATHILDE

Don't you think it would be more sensible to get one of your friends to put him up for a while?

VERLAINE's expression darkens. He takes his head away from her stomach and straightens up, frowning.

VERLAINE

People don't understand him. I'm the only one who understands him.

MATHILDE

Well, Daddy certainly won't understand him.

VERLAINE sighs exasperatedly and speaks sharply to her.

VERLAINE

You don't seem to realise, we had a revolution this year: which I supported. I could have been shot. If I hadn't been thrown out of my job, do you suppose I'd have accepted your father's damn charity for one instant?

MATHILDE looks away, hurt. VERLAINE gathers up the manuscript and resumes reading, his expression righteously indignant.

23 EXT. PARK EVENING

RIMBAUD sits on a bench, his collar turned up against the still-falling rain, his expression dreamy. He reaches into a side-pocket, produces a carrot and begins to gnaw at it. Then, from another pocket, he produces the presentation copy of "Les Châtiments" and begins to read.

Suddenly, VERLAINE is standing above him.

VERLAINE

Thank God, I thought I was never going to find you.

RIMBAUD

I'm all right.

VERLAINE

I don't know what that old bastard thought he was doing.

RIMBAUD

It's his house.

VERLAINE reaches down to take RIMBAUD's arm.

VERLAINE

Come. We'll find you somewhere.

24 INT. ATTIC ROOM IN THE RUE DE BUCI EVENING

RIMBAUD follows VERLAINE into a small attic room, crazily angled with a dormer window and a skylight, dusty and cobwebbed. There's a table with jug and basin and a mattress with some coverings on the floor.

VERLAINE

It's not much, I'm afraid.

RIMBAUD

It's fine.

VERLAINE

Just for a few days.

25 EXT. STREETS NIGHT

A fiacre climbs towards Montmartre. VERLAINE's face at the window.

19 Continued

VERLAINE

You know very well, since the Commune...

MAUTÉ

Any excuse.

VERLAINE

I don't notice you working your fingers to the bone.

MAUTÉ draws himself up, deciding to rise above this. When he speaks again, his tone is icy. MATHILDE watches, her expression fearful.

MAUTÉ

When you next see that hooligan, you'll kindly ask him to return the objects he's pilfered.

VERLAINE

What are you talking about?

MAUTÉ

He'll know what I mean.

VERLAINE

Then ask him yourself.

MAUTÉ

I'm happy to say he's left the house.

VERLAINE

What?

He jumps out of bed, at last genuinely concerned.

20 EXT. MONTMARTRE STREET DAY

VERLAINE runs down the same steep Montmartre street, struggling with his umbrella.

21 EXT. MAIN STREET DAY

VERLAINE moves through the crowd, anxiously inspecting the passers-by.

2 INT. ANDRÉ'S DAY

VERLAINE moves around the dingy café, peering into dark corners, scrutinising every table.

17 Continued

He's by the fireplace now; he indicates the shattered remains of the china dog.

RIMBAUD

I'm afraid I broke your dog last night.

MAUTÉ

Why?

RIMBAUD

Dogs are all liberals.

He leaves the room smartly: MAUTÉ, entirely bewildered, remains rooted to the spot.

18 EXT. MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE HOUSE RUE NICOLET DAY

RIMBAUD leaves the substantial, three-storey house (no.14), closes the front door firmly behind him, sets off briskly down the front path and out through the gate.

He turns into the steep, narrow Montmartre street. It's raining lightly, but he seems indifferent, his expression absolutely serene and happy.

19 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM DAY

MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE bursts into the room without knocking, shaking with rage. VERLAINE and MATHILDE, still in bed, sit up, shocked by this invasion.

MAUTÉ

Since when have you had the right to invite people to stay in this house without my permission?

VERLAINE

Since you offered to let us live here, I've treated it as our home.

MAUTÉ

So it is, your home, not a guest house.

VERLAINE

If I can't put up a guest in my home when I feel like it, I might as well live somewhere else.

MAUTÉ

If you weren't so idle, you might be able to afford to.

17 Continued

RIMBAUD

Morning. Everyone's out, I'm afraid.
Or perhaps you've come to see the
old boy?

MAUTÉ

The old boy?

RIMBAUD

Mauté de Fleurville. Not a friend
of his, are you?

MAUTÉ

No.

RIMBAUD

No, I didn't think you were. As
far as I can tell, he doesn't have
any friends.

MAUTÉ

Really?

RIMBAUD

Apparently he defeats all comers
with an impregnable combination of
tediousness and avarice. I'm told
he can't resist rifling the pockets
of those who fall stunned by the
monotony of his anecdotes.

He's on his feet now, circling MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE, who's
beginning to utter one or two indeterminate sounds, as his
fury rises. But now RIMBAUD changes tack, producing the
crucifix from his pocket.

RIMBAUD

You wouldn't like to buy a crucifix,
by any chance? I can let you have
this on extremely reasonable terms.
It's ivory, I think.

MAUTÉ

Who the hell are you?

RIMBAUD

I might ask you the same question.
Except I'd be more polite.

MAUTÉ

I am Mauté de Fleurville.

RIMBAUD

Ah.

15 INT. DRAWING-ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD has now accumulated a small pile of books; he looks around the room and his eye is taken by a handsome ivory crucifix on the wall. He looks at it for a moment, then reaches for it and puts it in his pocket. This done, he moves to the mantelpiece, on which is a row of china ornaments.

He uses one of these to tap out his pipe, a purpose for which it's clearly not intended; and then picks up another, a very sentimentally conceived china dog, which he contemplates for a moment before dropping it into the grate so that it shatters. This seems to cheer him up; and for a second his features are enlivened by a grim smile.

16 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

VERLAINE looks up from the manuscript, clearly still annoyed, and glares briefly at MATHILDE.

VERLAINE

For God's sake, all I'm doing is helping a friend. Why do we have to go through all this? I'm your husband.

MATHILDE, uncertain, looks across at him unhappily. She reaches out to run her fingers through his hair.

MATHILDE

I'm sorry, Paul.

VERLAINE

Are you trying to annoy me?

MATHILDE takes her hand away, startled by his tone.

MATHILDE

No.

VERLAINE

Well, don't.

17 INT. DRAWING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD sits reading, slumped deep in an armchair with his boots resting on an occasional table. He looks up as the door opens to admit M. MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE, 64, an imposing figure with a white beard. MAUTÉ doesn't immediately notice RIMBAUD and is therefore momentarily startled when the latter speaks, his tone hospitable.

26 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD slips off his jacket and starts to pluck at his shirt. It's as if he's just become aware that he's soaking wet. He starts to unbutton his shirt.

27 EXT. RUE DE BUCI NIGHT

There's a small group of people gathered in the street, all looking up. Passers-by join the group, until a small crowd forms.

What they're looking at is RIMBAUD, far above, standing on the window-sill of his room, back-lit by candles. He's naked.

28 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD leans over, picks up the bundle he's made of his clothes and drops them.

29 EXT. RUE DE BUCI NIGHT

The clothes float slowly down, separating as they fall. RIMBAUD watches calmly. Below, astonished, the crowd gapes up at the extraordinary vision.

30 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

MATHILDE is in bed as VERLAINE, his mind still elsewhere, lets himself into the room.

MATHILDE

Did you find him?

VERLAINE

I did.

MATHILDE

And did he give you back Daddy's crucifix?

VERLAINE looks up at her sharply, his expression hardening.

VERLAINE

If your father's capable of throwing that boy out without a penny, he's got no right to have Christ hanging all over his walls. You people don't understand what poverty is. Do you realise that in Charleville, if

30 Continued

VERLAINE (Cont)

Rimbaud wanted a book, he had to go
and steal it?

MATHILDE

That proves what kind of a person
he is.

VERLAINE bounds across the room, grabs her by the hair and drags her off the high bed. She hits the floor with a sickening crash. He stands over her as she struggles to her feet, then punches her in the face. She goes down again, knocking over the bedside table as she falls. She stays on the ground, moaning softly. VERLAINE starts forward and lifts her off the floor.

VERLAINE

I'm sorry...I'm sorry, love...
sorry. You shouldn't have
said that.

He helps her over to the bed; at which point, the door opens to reveal the MAUTE DE FLEURVILLE, both in their night-clothes, he in a nightcap and clutching a candle.

MAUTE

What's going on? Mm?

MATHILDE

Nothing.

MAUTE

What was all that noise?

MATHILDE

I...knocked the table over.

MME MAUTE DE FLEURVILLE hurries over and takes MATHILDE in her arms.

MME MAUTE

Are you all right, dear?

MATHILDE nods, very pale. MAUTE continues to glare at VERLAINE.

MATHILDE

Yes. Yes, I'm all right.

11 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM IN THE RUE DE BUCI DAY

RIMBAUD paces up and down, still naked, but wrapped in the

31 Continued

coverlet from his mattress. VERLAINE sits in the single chair, watching him.

RIMBAUD
So do you love her?

VERLAINE
Of course. She's ideal. Eighteen.
Beautiful. Plenty of money. All
the wifely virtues. And she's
about to give me a baby.

RIMBAUD
Do you have anything in common?

VERLAINE
No.

RIMBAUD
Is she intelligent?

VERLAINE
No.

RIMBAUD
Does she understand you?

VERLAINE
No.

RIMBAUD
So the only thing she can give
you is sex?

Silence. They look at each other. Finally VERLAINE rises to his feet.

VERLAINE
Let me see if I can find you some
clothes.

32 EXT. RUE NICOLET NIGHT

RIMBAUD waits by the gate of the Maute' house. Presently, the door opens and VERLAINE catapults out of the house. RIMBAUD opens the gate for him.

RIMBAUD
All right?

32 Continued

VERLAINE

For God's sake, let's have another drink.

33 EXT. BANKS OF THE SEINE DAY

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD move along the Quai, deep in conversation.

VERLAINE

We should do something about getting some of your work published.

RIMBAUD

Why?

VERLAINE

Why? Because that's what writers do.

RIMBAUD

Not me. I couldn't care less about being published. The only thing that matters is the writing itself. Everything else is literature.

He manages to imbue the last word with a memorable amount of contempt. VERLAINE, perplexed, is searching for an answer to this, when RIMBAUD goes on the attack.

RIMBAUD

Your last book.

VERLAINE

Yes?

RIMBAUD

It wasn't good enough.

VERLAINE

You don't think so?

RIMBAUD

Premarital junk.

VERLAINE

No, love poems. A lot of people found them very beautiful.

RIMBAUD

But they're lies.

33 Continued

VERLAINE

They're not lies. I love her.

RIMBAUD

Love?

VERLAINE

Yes.

RIMBAUD

No such thing.

VERLAINE

What do you mean?

RIMBAUD

Whatever it is binds families and married couples together: that's not love. It's stupidity or selfishness or fear. Love doesn't exist.

VERLAINE

You're wrong.

RIMBAUD

Self-interest exists. Attachment based on personal gain exists. Complacency exists. But not love.

He stops for a moment, staring out across the brown water.

RIMBAUD

Love has to be re-invented.

34 INT. ANDRÉ'S NIGHT

The water trickles down once again over the sugar-lump into the absinthe. VERLAINE finishes pouring and raises the glass to his lips. RIMBAUD, facing him, also raises his glass.

RIMBAUD

Here's to your son.

35 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

MATHILDE wakes with a start as the door bursts open. VERLAINE stands in the doorway for a moment, swaying slightly, candle in hand. Then he advances unsteadily into the room.

35 Continued

MATHILDE

Don't wake the baby.

VERLAINE

Never mind the baby.

He puts the candlestick down and pitches himself full-length on to the bed beside MATHILDE. He kisses her and she submits to this, but a moment later, when he begins wrenching at her nightdress, she pulls herself away from him.

MATHILDE

No.

VERLAINE

Why not? It's nearly a week since the baby was born.

He returns to the charge; but eventually MATHILDE puts both hands on his chest and pushes him away as firmly as she can manage.

MATHILDE

No!

VERLAINE lets go of her abruptly, his eye cold. Without a word, he picks up the pillow next to her and moves it to the bottom of the bed. Then he puts his head down on it, just as he is, hat, overcoat, muddy boots.

The baby starts to cry. MATHILDE stares miserably at the boots, a few inches away from her face.

FADE

36 EXT. VILLAGE IN THE ARDENNES DAY

LONG SHOT of the village: a house is on fire, and a number of Prussian soldiers, in their striking uniforms are rounding up the remaining villagers, mostly old people and children, and corralling them in a corner of the dusty square. The SOUNDS of guttural German commands in the distance.

Over this, a caption:

II FAUSSE CONVERSION

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

It was last summer, during the war.

36 Continued

Now we can see that this scene is from the P.O.V. of RIMBAUD, who is lurking in the shadows on a hill which slopes down into the village. He watches for a moment, then turns to cut across a field in the direction of a wooded area.

37 EXT. WOODS DAY

The CAMERA TRACKS through woodland, pushing leaves aside as it goes.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

One of my times I ran away from home.

RIMBAUD moves through the trees towards a blaze of distant light.

38 EXT. CLEARING BY THE RIVER DAY

RIMBAUD emerges into the brightly-lit clearing, stops on the edge of the treeline, looking around. Mountains behind him in the distance.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I came down to the river to fill my water bottle.

RIMBAUD reacts suddenly, retreats back into the trees.

HIS P.O.V.: a SOLDIER is lying on the river-bank, dark blue and red uniform, apparently asleep.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

There was a Prussian soldier, not much older than me, asleep in a clearing.

39 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM IN THE RUE DE BUCI DAY

In the few weeks since RIMBAUD's arrival in Paris, VERLAINE's appearance has changed drastically. He looks as if he's been wearing the same shabby clothes for several days. RIMBAUD's hair has grown into a mane which cascades over his shoulders.

RIMBAUD

I watched him for a long time before I realised: he wasn't asleep, he was dead. And somehow it clarified things for me.

10 EXT. CLEARING BY THE RIVER DAY

The dead SOLDIER is smiling. He looks perfectly at ease except for a small pool of black blood issued from a neat wound just above his waist. Silence, except for the hum of insects. The surface of the river is fiercely bright. RIMBAUD sits beside the corpse, holding its hand.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I understood that what I needed to become the first poet of this century was to experience everything in my body. It was no longer enough for me to be one person. I decided to be everyone.

41 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD is staring piercingly at VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD

I decided to be a genius. I decided to originate the future.

VERLAINE's face, as he considers this proposition.

42 INT. CAFÉ DU THÉÂTRE DU BOBINO NIGHT

A dinner of the Vilains Bonshommes, a poetry society, is in progress. Food is being cleared away and the next stage, the poetry reading, is about to begin. The featured poet this evening is JEAN AICARD, a portly and respectable figure, now somewhat nervously sorting through his papers. VERLAINE and RIMBAUD are sitting at a corner of the table at the far end, both evidently somewhat the worse for drink. For some reason, RIMBAUD is wearing a battered top hat. Their immediate neighbours at the table are CHARLES CROS and the photographer ETIENNE CARJAT, 43, a dapper figure with a goatee beard. Much of the following dialogue is overlapped, forming part of the general buzz of animated chatter.

CROS

The principle is very like photography. Only instead of photographing a man's face, you photograph his voice.

RIMBAUD

For Christ's sake, let's get the fuck out of here.

VERLAINE

We can't.

42 Continued

RIMBAUD

Why not?

VERLAINE

He's just about to start reading.

CROS

Then, twenty years later, just as you might open a photograph album, you simply put the relevant cylinder into the paleophone and listen to him reading his poem or singing his song.

CARJAT

And you think you could invent a machine like that which worked?

CROS

Perfectly possible.

RIMBAUD

Which one is it?

VERLAINE

Aicard.

He points up towards the other end of the table.

VERLAINE

Over there.

RIMBAUD

Oh, I don't think I'm going to like his stuff much.

VERLAINE smiles at the understatement.

CARJAT

What about your idea for colour photographs?

CROS

There's no money in it.

CARJAT shakes his head, turns to RIMBAUD, who's in the process of demanding more wine from a passing waiter.

CARJAT

I read those poems you left for me.

RIMBAUD

Oh, yes?

42 Continued

CARJAT

Remarkable. Very promising. Only it seems to me all that ingenuity is rather marred by...well, not exactly a juvenile urge to shock, but something of the sort.

RIMBAUD

And were you shocked?

CARJAT

No, I wasn't, of course not.

RIMBAUD

Then why should you suppose I intended you to be?

CARJAT

Well...that's not really the point.

VERLAINE

Seems fair enough to me.

CARJAT

I could object to your technical approach.

RIMBAUD

I could object to your tie.

VERLAINE

He doesn't like discussing his poetry.

CARJAT

I see.

A ripple of applause as AICARD, at the far end, rises to his feet.

AICARD

Thank you, gentlemen. My first poem is written expressly for children.

As he continues to speak, RIMBAUD produces a small phial from his waistcoat pocket and empties the contents into CARJAT's wine, which immediately begins to bubble and fizz.

AIRCARD

I would ask you to bear this in mind: although, as with all worthwhile work for children, it

2 Continued

AICARD (Cont)
is hoped that what is said is not
entirely without relevance to
adults.

CARJAT reaches for his wine, lifts it almost to his lips,
then does a horrified double-take and puts the glass down
hurriedly. VERLAINE suppresses a laugh; and RIMBAUD leans
towards him with a murmured explanation.

RIMBAUD
Sulphuric acid.

At the other end of the table, AICARD is clearing his
throat.

AICARD
The poem is called "Green Absinthe".

A burst of ironic applause from RIMBAUD.

AICARD
"Green Absinthe is the potion of the damned...

RIMBAUD groans.

AICARD
A deadly poison silting up the veins
While wife and child sit weeping in their slum...

RIMBAUD
I don't believe it.

A certain sensation. AICARD decides to soldier on.

AICARD
The drunkard pours absinths into his brains.

RIMBAUD
Shit.

AICARD
Oh! Drunkard, most contemptible of men...

RIMBAUD
Shit.

AICARD
Degraded, fallen, sinful and obtuse...

His voice is beginning to crack.

AICARD
Degraded, fallen, sinful and obtuse...

42 Continued

RIMBAUD

It is! It is! Authentic shit!

AICARD

Degraded, fallen, sinful and obtuse...

RIMBAUD

I like it.

AICARD

You scruple not to beat your wife
and child..."

RIMBAUD

For trying to deprive you of the juice.

Pandemonium. Protests, laughter, shouting. AICARD subsides
hopelessly. CARJAT springs to his feet and turns on
RIMBAUD.

CARJAT

Get out, you!

RIMBAUD

Me?

CARJAT

Yes, you, you offensive little
bastard. Get out, or I'll throw
you out.

RIMBAUD

I think I may, may I not, be
permitted to raise some objection
against the butchering of French
poetry?

CARJAT

No, you may not. Now apologise
and get out.

He moves towards RIMBAUD, who rises to his feet and grabs
bold of VERLAINE's walking-stick:

VERLAINE

Careful.

RIMBAUD

Don't come any nearer.

CARJAT

If you think you can frighten me
with that thing...

42 Continued

He grabs hold of the walking-stick; now RIMBAUD pulls on it to reveal it's a swordstick. The blade flashes as CARJAT falls silent. Deadlock. They circle each other venomously. Then CARJAT lunges and RIMBAUD slashes out at him. CARJAT, appalled, cries out and grasps his wrist. Blood flows. Chaos.

VERLAINE

Careful, I said.

But RIMBAUD turns, pointing his sword at AICARD.

RIMBAUD

And now, you!

He bears down on AICARD who, for a moment, is transfixed with horror, before breaking and running for his life. RIMBAUD pursues him, slashing wildly at him.

RIMBAUD

Fucking inkpisser!

Eventually, RIMBAUD is overcome and disarmed. VERLAINE takes back the swordstick and breaks the blade over his knee. The incident appears to be over. But all of a sudden, RIMBAUD breaks free and jumps on the table.

RIMBAUD

In the days of Francois Premier, wise and benevolent giants roamed the countryside. And one of their natural functions was to rid the world of pedants, fools and writers of no talent...

By now, before anyone can stop him, he's reached the top of the table, where he succeeds in pissing on AICARD's poems and, when he moves forward to try to rescue them, on AICARD himself.

RIMBAUD

...by pissing on them from a great height!

43 EXT. RUE DE BUCI NIGHT

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD make their way back, arm-in-arm, moving through the deserted streets, helpless with laughter.

VERLAINE

How to make your way in the literary world.

43 Continued

RIMBAUD

What's depressing about this city
is that the artists are even more
bourgeois than the fucking
bourgeoisie.

They turn in through the narrow doorway of RIMBAUD's
building.

RIMBAUD picks up the freshly-lighted candle and lights the
hashish and tobacco mixture in his pipe. VERLAINE is
already slumped in the chair, watching him. RIMBAUD inhales
luxuriously and then passes the pipe to VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD

Colour is what this gives you,
colour. Thick colours you can
smell and hear. I'd like to go
somewhere I could get it without
this.

He takes the pipe back from VERLAINE and flops down on the
mattress, inhales again.

RIMBAUD

South. Away from the dusty
mantelpiece of Europe.

DISSOLVE TO

44 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM DAWN

The candle has burnt to a stub and guttered. Both men are
in the same position. RIMBAUD looks at VERLAINE, his eyes
piercing.

RIMBAUD

I think we should make a bargain.
You help me and I'll help you.
If we go away together, I'm sure
you'll be able to start doing good
work again. And when we've taken
as much as we can from one another,
we split up and move on.

VERLAINE

How would we live?

RIMBAUD

You have some money.

44 Continued

VERLAINE

Ah. I understand. I help you by supporting you and you help me by renewing my rusty old inspiration, is that it?

RIMBAUD

Not altogether.

RIMBAUD rises abruptly from the mattress and stretches out a hand to VERLAINE. VERLAINE hesitates through a long silence; then he gets up and RIMBAUD takes him in his arms. A long kiss. The CAMERA rises slowly away from them and back through the window.

45 EXT. RUE DE BUCI DAY 1892

The same SHOT CONTINUES, descending slowly to street level until it picks out the older VERLAINE. He moves along the street blindly, limping noticeably, in the grip of a violent emotion. A passer-by cannons into him and unleashes a volley of abuse but neither he nor we hear it. He comes to a ragged halt and stands in the street, tears gathering at the corners of his eyes, the crowds parting about him, looking up at the blind window at the top of the building on the other side of the street, remembering twenty years back.

46 INT. OFFICES AT VANIER'S DAY

VERLAINE trudges up a narrow staircase, through a large ante-office in which an old printing press is in operation, past a frail-looking WOMAN dressed in black, who sits on a bench waiting and into a largely-glassed-in inner office where a SECRETARY, a severe-looking middle-aged woman, sits behind a desk. He deposits the single piece of paper, on which he's made a fair copy of his new poem, on the desk. The SECRETARY takes it without comment, opens the petty cash box and counts out five francs, which she hands over to him and which he pockets.

SECRETARY

There's someone waiting to see you.

VERLAINE follows the direction her eyes are indicating and sees, through the glass, the frail WOMAN in black. He frowns, not recognising her.

SECRETARY

She didn't give a name.

46 Continued

Without more ado, VERLAINE leaves the inner office and approaches the WOMAN, who sees him coming, and rises to her feet.

WOMAN

M. Verlaine?

VERLAINE

I have a couple of appointments,
I'm afraid, but perhaps we can
make an arrangement to meet later,
say early evening...?

All this comes out with practised charm, as he's shaking the WOMAN's hand.

WOMAN

You don't remember me, do you?
Here's my card.

She hands him a card. He glances down at it and then goes deathly pale. He looks back at the WOMAN, his mouth opening and closing; and then, once again, down at the card.

INSET: The name on the card is ISABELLE RIMBAUD; quite clearly visible, even though VERLAINE's hand is shaking.

VERLAINE looks up: ISABELLE's calm face, from his P.O.V.

47 EXT. RIMBAUD FARM AT ROCHE DAY 1872

CLOSE ON a window in the main farm building: a waiflike child, dressed entirely in black, behind the window, stares out. This is, recognisably, ISABELLE at 11. Suddenly, she reacts excitedly and disappears from the window.

The CAMERA PULLS BACK slowly to reveal the sombre facade of the RIMBAUD family farm at Roche.

The ensemble of eighteenth-century buildings is pleasant enough, but it sits on flat and featureless terrain, broken only by a few imposing poplars; and has been partially destroyed during the war. Outbuildings are half-collapsed, the walls blackened with fire and shell damage. The courtyard is overgrown with weeds. It's a bleak day in early spring.

As the CAMERA MOVEMENT is completed, RIMBAUD strides into the courtyard, moving fast. At the same time, the main door of the farmhouse is thrown open and the child rushes out and buries herself in his arms.

47 Continued

RIMBAUD

Isabelle!

ISABELLE

I didn't know you were coming.

In spite of her obvious excitement, there's something grave and pinched about her, as well as a maturity beyond her years.

RIMBAUD

Where's the mouth of darkness?

ISABELLE

Mother? She's in the fields with
Vitalie. Do you want to see her?

RIMBAUD shakes his head, his expression uncharacteristically tender.

48 INT. HAYLOFT DAY

RIMBAUD has arranged a rough table and wooden chair in the hayloft of one of the barns, so that the light passing through the opened shutters of a high window falls across it. He writes in a child's exercise book, with a scratchy child's pen, dipping it from time to time into a lead inkwell. All of a sudden, a shadow falls across the desk and he looks up.

Standing above him is his MOTHER, now 47, although she looks older, lines of hardship etched into her unsmiling features. She's also dressed entirely in black.

MME RIMBAUD

Are you back for good?

RIMBAUD

For good? I don't know. For better
or worse.

MME RIMBAUD

Because there's work to be done in
the fields.

RIMBAUD

There's work to be done here.

Silence. MME RIMBAUD considers this for a while.

MME RIMBAUD

I thought you were getting on well
in Paris.

48 Continued

RIMBAUD

So I was. But Verlaine's wife started to make trouble.

MME RIMBAUD

What kind of trouble?

RIMBAUD

Threatening divorce, you know... she thought we were spending too much time together.

MME RIMBAUD frowns in indignation.

MME RIMBAUD

Spoilt rich girl, I suppose.

RIMBAUD

That's right.

MME RIMBAUD

This work you're doing: is it the kind of thing that will lead to anything?

RIMBAUD

I don't know. All the same, it's the kind of work I do.

There's another silence. Then MME RIMBAUD turns and moves away.

49 INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN DAY

MME RIMBAUD sits at the head of a plain wooden table. On her right are her sons, the older of whom, FRÉDÉRIC, although only 18, already has the red face and broken veins of a confirmed drinker; on her left are her daughters, ISABELLE and VITALIE, 13, a touchingly frail and under-sized child, alarmingly pale against her black dress.

It's still light outside, but the day is almost over. The meal is some kind of vegetable stew. RIMBAUD grapples with his unenthusiastically. Except for the clatter of cutlery, a profound silence reigns. Eventually, FRÉDÉRIC turns to RIMBAUD and speaks, his voice gleeful, with a barely suppressed note of hysteria.

FREDERIC

I don't suppose Paris ever gets as exciting as this?

50 EXT. FARMHOUSE AT ROCHE DAY

Blustery spring weather. RIMBAUD strides away from the farmhouse, walking fast, carrying no luggage.

FADE

51 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

VERLAINE stands in the doorway, swaying slightly, candlestick in hand.

Over this, a caption:

III VIERGE POLLE

VERLAINE'S P.O.V.: MATHILDE lies in bed with GEORGES in her arms, a tableau of innocence. She wakes as VERLAINE advances into the room.

VERLAINE

You look like a fucking saint.

He slams the candlestick down on the bedside table.

VERLAINE

Except you haven't got a halo.

He leans over and wrenches GEORGES from her arms.

VERLAINE

Where's your halo?

He turns and throws GEORGES across the room. He means to throw him into his cradle but he misses. There's the usual moment of shocked silence before the baby's lungs begin to function and he begins a terrified howl. MATHILDE tries to scramble out of bed to attend to him, but VERLAINE holds her down.

VERLAINE

Come here. I'm going to give you your halo.

He hangs on to her and reaches for the candlestick. Then he holds the lighted candle to her hair. She remains perfectly still, her eyes tightly shut. The baby screams. Her hair smoulders and singes, but doesn't actually catch fire. VERLAINE suddenly releases her, puts the candle down and bursts into tears. MATHILDE opens her eyes, speaks quietly.

MATHILDE

He's back, isn't he?

52 INT. CAFÉ DU RAT MORT EVENING

A spectacularly dingy bar, even by VERLAINE's standards.

RIMBAUD picks at the blackened table with a large, ugly knife. VERLAINE sits opposite, two empty glasses between them. VERLAINE waves at the patron, standing stolidly behind the zinc. Otherwise, the place is more or less deserted.

VERLAINE

Two more.

RIMBAUD

It's time we left.

VERLAINE

I've just ordered another drink.

RIMBAUD

Paris, Paris.

VERLAINE

Oh, no, I can't leave Mathilde at the moment, she's not very well.

RIMBAUD

I'm not surprised, if you keep setting fire to her.

VERLAINE

I haven't set fire to her since Thursday.

They both laugh.

VERLAINE

It's not very funny.

They both laugh some more.

RIMBAUD

No, it's pathetic. Your acts of violence are always curiously disgusting.

VERLAINE

What do you mean?

RIMBAUD

They're not clean. You're always in some sort of drunken stupor. Then you start apologising and grovelling.

VERLAINE

I don't like hurting people.

52 Continued

RIMBAUD

Then don't. Or if you do, do
it coolly and don't insult your
victim by feeling sorry afterwards.

The PATRON arrives with the drinks. VERLAINE adds water to
his, brooding silently for a while.

VERLAINE

I love her, you see.

RIMBAUD

You can't possibly.

VERLAINE

I love her body.

RIMBAUD

There are other bodies.

VERLAINE

No. I love Mathilde's body.

RIMBAUD

But not her soul?

VERLAINE

I think it's less important to love
the soul than to love the body.
After all, the soul may be immortal,
we have plenty of time for the soul:
but flesh rots.

RIMBAUD snorts derisively.

VERLAINE

It's my love of flesh which keeps
me faithful.

RIMBAUD

Faithful? What do you mean?

VERLAINE

I'm faithful to all my lovers,
because once I loved them, I will
always love them. And when I'm
alone in the evening or the early
morning, I close my eyes and I
celebrate them all.

RIMBAUD

That's not faithfulness, it's
nostalgia. If you don't want to

52 Continued

RIMBAUD (Cont)
leave Mathilde, it's not because
you are faithful, it's because
you're weak.

VERLAINE
If strength involves brutality,
I prefer to be weak.

RIMBAUD
With you, weakness involves brutality as well.

He looks angrily across at VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD
Don't expect me to be faithful to
you.

VERLAINE
Why are you so harsh with me?

RIMBAUD
Because you need it.

VERLAINE
Isn't it enough for you to know
that I love you more than I've ever
loved anyone and that I'll always
love you?

RIMBAUD
Shut up, you snivelling drunk.

VERLAINE
Tell me if you love me.

RIMBAUD
Oh for God's sake...

VERLAINE
Please.

RIMBAUD looks away in disgust. VERLAINE reaches across the
table and puts a hand on his arm.

VERLAINE
Please. It's important to me.

RIMBAUD looks back at him, rage in his eyes.

VERLAINE
Please. Just say it.

52 Continued

RIMBAUD lowers his eyes. He whittles away at the table.

RIMBAUD

You know I'm very fond of you...
we've been very happy sometimes.
I...

He breaks off. Long silence. Eventually, he looks up at VERLAINE and speaks, almost inaudibly.

RIMBAUD

Do you love me?

VERLAINE

What?

RIMBAUD

Do you love me?

VERLAINE

Yes.

RIMBAUD

Then put your hands on the table.

VERLAINE

What?

RIMBAUD

Put your hands on the table.

VERLAINE does so.

RIMBAUD

Palm upwards.

VERLAINE turns his hands palm upwards. RIMBAUD looks at them for a moment; and then stabs at them both with short, brutal blows. VERLAINE sits looking at his hands in amazement, as blood begins to drip down onto the floor. Finally, RIMBAUD speaks, with deadly quiet.

RIMBAUD

The only unbearable thing is that
nothing is unbearable.

53 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM IN THE RUE DE BUCI NIGHT

CLOSE on VERLAINE's hand, wrapped in a makeshift, bloodstained bandage, and his head, face down on the bolster.

53 Continued

RIMBAUD'S face lunges INTO FRAME, and VERLAINE cries out as he's penetrated.

DISSOLVE

54 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD stretched out on the mattress, seen in an OVERHEAD SHOT, in the bare, uncurtained moonlit room. VERLAINE comes up on one elbow, careful of his bandaged hands and looks down at his sleeping friend.

55 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

A strange, jolting, TRACKING POINT-OF-VIEW SHOT, travelling across the cracked, brown earth of some arid wilderness. A piece of white canvas flaps incongruously IN and OUT OF SHOT.

56 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

VERLAINE leans over towards RIMBAUD. Using the side of his bandaged hand, he brushes the hair out of RIMBAUD's eyes with infinite care and tenderness.

57 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

Now the TRACKING SHOT approaches a sheer drop, stops at the edge and settles. Below, is a landscape of a scarcely imaginable austere ferocity: broken rock, fissured dark-brown earth, no vegetation except for blackened thorn-bushes, dancing heat-haze, steep, jagged rock-faces and bare plains featureless as a desert. Far below, shimmering at the edge of FRAME, the silver, dazzling stripe of some distant sea. There's no doubt that this is Africa, if indeed it is anywhere on this planet.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

On. On.

58 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD moves restlessly in his sleep.

RIMBAUD

On.

VERLAINE watches, his eyes glittering in the moonlight.

58 Continued

VERLAINE (V.O.)

How many hours have I watched beside
his dear sleeping body, wondering
why he wanted so much to escape from
reality. There never was a man with
such an aim. Did he perhaps know
secrets to change life?

RIMBAUD's eyes open suddenly: pale and piercing.

RIMBAUD

We have to leave.

VERLAINE

I don't know.

RIMBAUD

Yes, this is the time to leave,
the summer. Happiest days of
my life were last year when I ran
away from home. No idea where I
was, I just carried on. I've never
known such long and coloured days.
Only I never could get far enough.
I've never seen the sea.

59 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAWN

The silver expanse of the sea, beyond which the sun's disc
gradually begins to appear. A slow PANNING SHOT begins to
reveal the baked brown of the arid edge of the plateau, as
the sea's surface changes from silver to gold.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I wanted to walk to Africa and
cross a desert. I wanted heat and
violence of landscape. I wanted
the sun.

60 INT. RIMBAUD'S ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD reaches up and takes VERLAINE's face between his
hands.

RIMBAUD

I want the sun. Do you understand?

VERLAINE

Yes.

But like a dog, he can't sustain eye-contact for long and
looks away shiftily. RIMBAUD releases him and slumps back

60 Continued

on his pillow, sighing. VERLAINE turns back to him, his expression tormented.

61 EXT. RUE NICOLET DAY

Early morning on a blazing hot day. RIMBAUD waits on a shady corner of the street, watching the MAUTÉ house.

62 INT. MATHILDE'S BEDROOM DAY

VERLAINE, formally dressed in frock-coat and wing-collar, bends over MATHILDE'S supine body, a hand on her brow, his expression concerned. Not far off, the baby gurgles contentedly in his cradle. MATHILDE looks flushed and feverish.

VERLAINE

I'll go and fetch the doctor.

MATHILDE

No, you'll be late for work.

VERLAINE

Doesn't matter.

He leans down to kiss her and moves off towards the door, glancing back, his expression tender.

VERLAINE

I'll be right back.

63 EXT. RUE NICOLET DAY

RIMBAUD watches VERLAINE emerging from the house, fetches a letter out of his pocket and sets off down the street, moving briskly, head down, so that VERLAINE has the impression he's seen him first.

VERLAINE

Rimbe!

RIMBAUD looks up, as if taken by surprise. Then he thrusts the letter at VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD

Here.

VERLAINE

What's this?

63 Continued

RIMBAUD

I thought I'd say goodbye. I'm
leaving Paris.

VERLAINE

When?

RIMBAUD

Now.

VERLAINE

Where are you going?

RIMBAUD

I don't know. Just away.

VERLAINE

I was just on my way to fetch a
doctor. Mathilde's not well.

RIMBAUD

Why, what have you done to her?

VERLAINE

Nothing, it's a migraine.

RIMBAUD

Don't let me keep you.

But VERLAINE doesn't move. He looks first one way, then the
other, racked with indecision -

RIMBAUD

Well, goodbye.

VERLAINE

Wait!

He closes his eyes, concentrating desperately: then opens
them again.

VERLAINE

I'm coming with you.

RIMBAUD

What about Mathilde?

VERLAINE takes RIMBAUD's arm.

VERLAINE

The hell with her, she'll survive.

They set off down the street, arm-in-arm.

64 EXT. BELGIAN COUNTRYSIDE DUSK

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD jolt along in the back of an open cart. They're roaring with carefree laughter, passing a bottle of wine from hand to hand as the sun sets on an idyllic rural scene. The broad back of the DRIVER of the cart seems to provide them with complete privacy.

RIMBAUD

You know, in Charleville I was a model pupil. All the prizes, top of the class. But I understood that wasn't enough, it was nothing. I wanted to disgust them as well as pleasing them. I knew how to take communion, now I wanted to take drugs. I decided on a long, systematic and conscientious course of debauchery. I needed to become someone else.

65 EXT. GARE DU MIDI, BRUSSELS NIGHT

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD emerge from the station, a spring in their step.

VERLAINE

This has always been my lucky town.

66 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL DE COURTRAI, BRUSSELS DAWN

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD lie entwined in the half-light in a large double bed in a cheap hotel. VERLAINE extricates himself carefully and starts to pull on his clothes. RIMBAUD's eyes open, he's aware what's going on: but when VERLAINE glances over in his direction, he closes his eyes again and pretends to be asleep.

67 EXT. HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

VERLAINE stands, hesitating for a moment, outside what looks like a much classier hotel than the one he's just left.

68 INT. LOBBY OF THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

VERLAINE moves authoritatively across the lobby and starts up the stairs before the CLERK has time to register that his respectable clothes are scuffed, crumpled and muddy.

69 INT. CORRIDOR IN THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

VERLAINE finds the door he's looking for, taps on it, gets

69 Continued

no response, tries the door and discovers it's open.

70 INT. MATHILDE'S HOTEL ROOM DAY

VERLAINE lets himself quietly into the room. MATHILDE is lying face down on the bed, naked, fast asleep. VERLAINE moves half-way across the room, then stops to contemplate her, his mouth slightly open. A moment later, MATHILDE wakes, senses his presence, jumps up, runs to him and buries herself in his arms.

MATHILDE

Paul!

They stand for a moment, locked in a passionate embrace. Then VERLAINE picks her up, carries her back to the bed, kicks off his shoes and lies down beside her, tearing off his clothes as fast as he can, with her enthusiastic assistance.

DISSOLVE TO

Later; the two of them lie in each other's arms. He strokes her hair and kisses her.

VERLAINE

Do you remember happier times?

MATHILDE

Why did you leave us?

VERLAINE

I told you in my letter, I had a tip-off that I was going to be arrested for my work in the propaganda press, during the Commune.

MATHILDE

But that was over a year ago.

VERLAINE

The police may be slow, but they're methodical. I couldn't bear to go to jail. So I think it's best if I stay out of the country for a few months.

MATHILDE

With Rimbaud.

VERLAINE

Well...

70 Continued

MATHILDE

I suppose he's wanted by the police as well.

VERLAINE

No...

MATHILDE

Why do you prefer him to me?

VERLAINE

I don't, my love, I don't.

Silence. MATHILDE moves away from him and leaves the bed. She moves across to where her clothes are neatly laid out, pours some water into the nearby basin, washes herself and begins to get dressed.

VERLAINE

You don't have to get dressed right away, do you?

MATHILDE

I told Mummy I'd meet her for breakfast.

VERLAINE

What's she doing here?

MATHILDE

She came with me.

VERLAINE

Well, that's another thing: I certainly can't stand living with your parents any more.

MATHILDE

It's not safe anywhere else.

VERLAINE

What do you mean?

MATHILDE

You know what I mean.

Silence. VERLAINE avoids her eye. She comes over and sits on the bed. He reaches up to stroke her shoulders and neck.

MATHILDE

Listen, I had this idea, I thought of this idea. I thought we might emigrate.

70 Continued

VERLAINE

Emigrate? Where to?

MATHILDE

New Caledonia. A lot of your friends from the Commune are out there. You'd be able to write. It'd be like it was when we were first married and...

VERLAINE

What?

MATHILDE

Nothing.

VERLAINE

No; go on.

MATHILDE

I was only going to say: you could stop...it would be easier for you... if you wanted...to stop drinking.

VERLAINE

You're frightened of me, aren't you?

She doesn't answer; he takes her in his arms.

VERLAINE

Don't think I like getting drunk. I mean, I do like getting drunk, but I don't like being drunk. Or anyway, when I hit you or...I feel so terrible about it, the only thing I can think of is to get drunk again and forget about it. Most of the time I want to give it up as much as you want me to. But it's as difficult as deciding to wake up when you're asleep. Perhaps I could wake up out there. Can you see us living in a grass hut or whatever they have?

MATHILDE

Why not?

VERLAINE

Then, let's go, for Christ's sake, let's go. Before it's too late.

MATHILDE

We can go whenever you like.

70 Continued

VERLAINE

God, I love you.

He kisses her, a long, clinging kiss, after which he begins to undress her. But she pulls away from him.

MATHILDE

Not now.

VERLAINE

Why not?

She doesn't answer; instead she steps into her stern, billowing dress.

MATHILDE

Help me with this.

VERLAINE grudgingly concedes and helps her. He takes her in his arms; and now, with him naked and her dressed, they form a reverse image to the opening of the scene.

71 INT. CORRIDOR IN THE HOTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

MATHILDE leaves the room and sets off down the corridor: only to come to a halt with a sudden gasp. ANOTHER ANGLE reveals, leaning against the wall, blocking her way, his expression sardonic: RIMBAUD.

MATHILDE

Why are you doing this to us?

RIMBAUD

Don't worry, you can have him back quite soon: and only slightly damaged.

MATHILDE

He's coming back now.

She stands her ground, facing him down defiantly. They look at each other for a moment and then MATHILDE pushes past RIMBAUD, leaving him not quite as confident as she found him.

72 INT. MATHILDE'S HOTEL ROOM DAY

VERLAINE starts up in bed as RIMBAUD barges into the room.

RIMBAUD

I see.

72 Continued

VERLAINE
What are you doing here?

RIMBAUD
Nice, was it? A scene of conjugal bliss?

VERLAINE
I'm going back to Paris with her.

RIMBAUD
Right.

He turns on his heel and heads for the doors so abruptly, that VERLAINE has to speak fast to interrupt him.

VERLAINE
No, wait, wait, let me explain.

RIMBAUD
Why should I?

VERLAINE
It's not what you think. It's something else. She suggested that we emigrate.

RIMBAUD
Emigrate?

VERLAINE
Yes, to New Caledonia. It'd be a change for me, a quiet life, I could stop drinking, don't you think it's a good idea?

RIMBAUD
No.

VERLAINE
You don't care about my happiness, do you?

RIMBAUD
No, and neither should you.

Silence. VERLAINE shakes his head in confusion.

VERLAINE
You've never been able to understand how much I love her. I walked in this morning and she was lying there, naked, on the bed. She looked so beautiful, she looked so young and confused...

72 Continued

He breaks off, aware that RIMBAUD is laughing.

VERLAINE

What's so funny?

RIMBAUD

Was she really lying naked on the bed?

VERLAINE

Yes.

RIMBAUD

Well, my estimation for her goes up a long way.

VERLAINE

What do you mean? Why?

RIMBAUD

For realising what was required and providing it.

He shakes his head, suddenly impatient.

RIMBAUD

Oh, what's it matter? She's your wife, you love her, go back to her.

He strides out of the room

73 INT. CORRIDOR IN THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

As RIMBAUD walks down the corridor, away from the CAMERA, he reaches up to where the wallpaper has begun to come away from the wall a little; and without breaking stride he rips away the entire sheet of wallpaper.

74 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT DAY

VERLAINE sits opposite MATHILDE and MME MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE, his expression morose.

MATHILDE

Daddy says he's more than willing to help with the fares to New Caledonia.

VERLAINE looks up, sharply.

VERLAINE

Oh, so this is all his idea, is it?

74 Continued

MME MAUTÉ

As a matter of fact, it was my idea. But if you prefer to stay in Paris, of course, no-one would be happier than I.

VERLAINE relaxes again. He turns and stares gloomily out of the window.

75 EXT. STATION AT QUIEVRAIN DAY

At the Franco-Belgian border, everyone's papers have to be stamped. The passengers who've undergone this process mill around, eventually drifting back on to the train. Another train waits on the facing platform. GUARDS shout inaudible announcements. VERLAINE is shepherding MATHILDE and MME MAUTÉ back on to the train. As he waits for them to climb aboard, he looks up and sees something.

VERLAINE'S P.O.V.: standing on the bridge between the platforms, wreathed in smoke, is RIMBAUD. He's standing quite motionless, staring down at VERLAINE, his expression grave.

VERLAINE

I'm just going to find a newspaper.

MME MAUTÉ

Don't be long.

VERLAINE grunts an acknowledgement and moves off down the platform. After a few paces he stops, looking up again at the bridge between the platforms, agonised. There's no sign of RIMBAUD. The engine on the facing platform gives a couple of premonitory blasts of steam; and VERLAINE, as if suddenly galvanised, makes a dash for the bridge and races across to the other side, holding on to his hat as he runs.

76 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT DAY

MATHILDE and MME. MAUTÉ DE FLEURVILLE are settled in their compartment, when the train facing them begins to move. They pay very little attention to this, until suddenly something catches their eye and they both react, appalled.

Their P.O.V.: in the other train, moving away from them now, is VERLAINE, his tongue sticking out and his thumbs in his ears, making an obscenely insolent face at them. Again, no sign of RIMBAUD.

76 Continued

MATHILDE and MME MAUTE look at each other, scarcely able to believe what they've just seen.

When they look back, it's in time to catch a glimpse of RIMBAUD, who is now standing next to VERLAINE, also wildly grimacing.

As her train starts and begins to jolt out of the station, MATHILDE, in a sudden access of rage, grabs VERLAINE's carpet-bag and hurls it out of the window.

77 INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT (SECOND TRAIN) DAY

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD collapse on to the seats opposite one another shaking with helpless laughter.

78 INT. BELGIAN COUNTRYSIDE DAY

The train pulls away, out into the open countryside.

FADE

79 EXT. BELGIAN COAST DAY

Summer's day. VERLAINE leads RIMBAUD up a narrow path rising through grassland. At the last minute, impatient, RIMBAUD overtakes him, arriving first at the crest of the headland and stopping dead.

REVERSE SHOT: RIMBAUD stands, his eyes sparkling, an expression of wonder. VERLAINE comes up alongside him, says something and makes a proprietorial gesture as if he's personally responsible for the view.

It's by no means a spectacular view, the greyish expanse of the English Channel, the waves lapping timidly on to a pebble beach. But it's obviously RIMBAUD's first view of the sea and his excitement is palpable.

Over this, a caption:

IV ALCHEMIE DU VERBE

80 EXT. PLOUGHED FIELDS DAY

The sun blazes down: this time it's VERLAINE who follows RIMBAUD as he marches across the fields in the middle of a vast tract of open countryside.

80 Continued

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

The first thing he did, it seems,
when he was given the ring, a
magic ring you understand, was
to summon up a beautiful woman,
the most beautiful he could imagine.
And they were wonderfully happy
and lived alone on a light blue
southern island.

81 EXT. RIVERBANK DUSK

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD sit, passing a bottle of wine from hand
to hand, leaning against the broad trunk of an elm, as the
sun starts to go down behind a distant church spire.
Somewhere, a bell tolls the angelus.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

One day he explained to her that with
the ring he could grant her anything
she wanted; and she asked him to
build her a city. So he caused a city
to grow up out of the sea, full of
churches and echoing courtyards.

82 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD NIGHT

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD lie huddled in a dry ditch beside a
deserted road, in each other's arms.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

She was so delighted with it that
he granted her another wish; and
she asked for a ship. So he gave
her a magnificent galleon which
needed no crew to look after the
silk hangings and golden figurehead.

83 EXT. FARMLAND DAY

As the mist clears from the fields, RIMBAUD uproots a couple
of turnips, shakes the earth off, hands one to VERLAINE and
bites into the other.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

It seemed to give her such happiness,
that he decided to grant her one more
wish. "One more wish", he said, "I
will grant you one more wish". "Give
me the ring", she said.

84 EXT. BEACH DAY

RIMBAUD sits at the end of a deserted jetty. Beside him is a small heap of pebbles, which, one by one, he's throwing out to sea. VERLAINE stands nearby, watching him.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

He gave it to her. She smiled serenely at him and threw it into the sea. At once, she disappeared., the ship disappeared and the city slowly sank back under the water.

85 EXT. DECK OF A FERRY BOAT NIGHT

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD sit huddled on the upper deck of the Ostend-Dover ferry. The ship is pitching in a swell, the wind is gusty and the deck is otherwise deserted, as RIMBAUD finishes his story.

RIMBAUD

For a long time after that the man sat looking out to sea without moving. Finally, he began to weep, because he understood what he had done and that he would be alone forever. That was it. Something like that.

86 EXT. ENGLISH CHANNEL DAWN

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD lean over the deck-rail, as seagulls dip and call harshly and a grey dawn breaks.

Their P.O.V.: rising theatrically sheer, the white cliffs of Dover.

87 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

ISABELLE RIMBAUD looks up from some papers she has spread out on one of the bar's better-lit shabby tables and sees VERLAINE limping towards her. She rises to her feet, her expression guarded, though not unfriendly. They shake hands.

VERLAINE

Please sit down, please. Has André been looking after you? Can I get you something to drink?

ISABELLE

No, thank you.

87 Continued

VERLAINE

I think I might, just to celebrate this remarkable encounter. Do you mind?

ISABELLE

Not at all.

VERLAINE waves a hand; and ANDRE, the mountainous patron, brings the already prepared absinthe to him at once. VERLAINE pours the water over the sugar lump with barely concealed impatience.

VERLAINE

You look a bit like him, you know. Your eyes are not unlike his.

ISABELLE

So I've been told.

VERLAINE takes a long draught of absinthe; ISABELLE straightens the papers in front of her, and draws from among them a book.

ISABELLE

It's really a business matter I want to discuss with you, M. Verlaine.

VERLAINE

I'm at your service, Mademoiselle.

She indicates the book in her hand. It's called "Le Reliquaire".

ISABELLE

This was published a few months ago; a completely unauthorised selection of my brother's poems. My mother and I were extremely upset.

VERLAINE is very uncomfortable; it's quite clear he knows more about this than ISABELLE suspects.

VERLAINE

I've seen it, yes.

ISABELLE

My mother and I are anxious to prevent anything like this from happening again. We thought you might be able to help us.

VERLAINE

I? How?

87 Continued

ISABELLE

I understand you have a large number of my brother's manuscripts.

VERLAINE

I have...some, yes.

ISABELLE

Well, my mother and I would be very grateful if you would return them.

VERLAINE looks away, avoiding ISABELLE's eye.

VERLAINE

I've always tried to use...the utmost discretion in everything concerning your brother. I think I can say I've always defended his interests. Sometimes I wonder why, since in many ways they're diametrically opposed to my own.

ISABELLE

I don't see how, in what way?

VERLAINE

It took many years for your brother's work to be understood: but once his name began to be well-known, it soon became clear our ways were numbered. The music of old-fashioned verse was no longer enough. He swept us away. Not that I mind, you understand. I know I was once a good writer.

ISABELLE

I didn't know his name was so well-known.

VERLAINE

Yes.

ISABELLE frowns, grappling with the implications of this new information.

88 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM AT 34, HOWLAND ST., LONDON DAY

RIMBAUD and VERLAINE's London lodgings are formed from the drawing-room of a once elegant Georgian house on the fringes of Soho. There's a desk in the window at which RIMBAUD is sitting, thinking, occasionally scribbling a few words in the notebook in front of him. Tranquil domestic atmosphere.

88 Continued

VERLAINE (V.O.)

And what matters to me is that we
did our best work together, both
of us.

During this, VERLAINE has wandered over to RIMBAUD's desk
and picked up his notebook. He reads silently for a moment,
then decides to read aloud.

VERLAINE

"I became a fabulous opera: I saw that
all creatures are condemned to happiness:
action is not life, but a means of
squandering strength, a wearing down.
Morality is intellectual weakness".

RIMBAUD

Well, it is, isn't it?

VERLAINE turns the page and reacts with surprise.

VERLAINE

What's this? Are you going back to
rhymes?

He reads out again.

VERLAINE

"I have researched the magic shapes
Of the happiness no one escapes."

He looks up.

That's wonderful. What does it mean?

RIMBAUD doesn't answer; instead he reaches out and gently
reclaims his notebook. VERLAINE shakes his head admiringly.

VERLAINE

Why did you choose me to write to?
I've often wondered. You're so far
up ahead, I can't ever understand the
signs you're making. You make me
feel I'm from another century.
"I have researched the magic shapes
of the happiness no one escapes."

RIMBAUD

I chose you for a very good reason.
I've always known what to say; but
you, you know how to say. I thought
I could learn from you: and I have.

88 Continued

VERLAINE is very pleased: he puts his arm round RIMBAUD and kisses him on the cheek.

89 EXT. HYDE PARK DUSK

It's foggy and the bare trees indicate that winter is now well advanced. RIMBAUD and VERLAINE stroll together, the latter exaggeratedly wrapped up against the cold with overcoat, red scarf wrapped around his nose and cotton wool in his ears. Around them, the lovers, the nannies with their perambulators, the smartly-dressed riders on their Handsome horses. The sun is a red ball seen through a lattice of bare branches.

RIMBAUD

What's your greatest fear?

VERLAINE

I don't know, I wouldn't like to mislay my balls. Why, what's your greatest fear?

RIMBAUD

That other people will see me as I see them.

They pass through the gates, moving towards the group of orators on their soap-boxes, surrounded by drifting audiences.

VERLAINE

One evening, did I ever tell you, I set out to assassinate Napoleon III. I was rather drunk and I decided things had gone far enough. Unfortunately, I never managed it.

RIMBAUD smiles at him with some tenderness, takes his arm.

VERLAINE

Of course, here, they have the famous democracy.

They drift on, arm-in-arm.

90 INT. PUB IN SOHO DAY

A smoke-filled, cavernous pub, sawdust on the floor, crowded with a cosmopolitan clientèle, many of them refugees from one European country or another, most of them on the edge of poverty. VERLAINE brings RIMBAUD a pint of beer, which he samples, grimacing as he does so.

90 Continued

VERLAINE

No absinthe. Just this warm piss.

RIMBAUD

I like it.

VERLAINE

We're getting quite short of money, you know.

RIMBAUD

So you keep saying.

VERLAINE

Perhaps it's time we took a job.

RIMBAUD

I've told you before, I've no intention of taking a job. My work's going too well, I can't afford to waste time earning money.

He's said this quite simply and VERLAINE laughs at the outrageousness of it.

91 INT. BRITISH MUSEUM READING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD is escorted to his desk by a frock-coated LIBRARIAN. He nods in acknowledgement and sits. For a moment, he looks around, up at the great dome which gives the room its cathedral-like immensity and at the READERS, disposed each at his or her individual space or roaming the walkways above in search of reference works.

RIMBAUD reaches for his notebook, opens it, takes up his pen.

92 EXT. DOCKS DAY

RIMBAUD and VERLAINE move along the quaysides, teeming with sailors of all nationalities. Piles of crates block the way, where ships are loading and unloading and impromptu marketplaces are thronged with haggling Eastenders. The Thames is wide here and iron-grey. RIMBAUD seems intensely fascinated with the life around him. VERLAINE, preoccupied, breaks into his reverie.

VERLAINE

I had a letter this morning. From Mathilde's lawyer.

92 Continued

RIMBAUD

And?

VERLAINE

She's applied for a legal separation on the grounds that you and I are "indulging in immoral relations".

RIMBAUD

Is that so?

VERLAINE

And he wants to know if we're prepared to submit to a medical examination.

RIMBAUD

What?

VERLAINE

I don't know what makes them think they can make that kind of outrageous accusation.

RIMBAUD

Wait a minute...

VERLAINE

I'm going to write straight back, I'm going to say as far as we're concerned, the whole gang of them can look up our asses.

RIMBAUD looks at him for a moment, incredulous.

RIMBAUD

What are you, insane?

He's spoken with some vehemence; but he can't take this very seriously and now he stops walking, his eye distracted by a ship which is preparing to cast off, its decks crowded with lascars. On the stern, beneath the ship's name, is printed its port of origin: BATAVIA.

RIMBAUD

Batavia. You can hear the wind rustling in the palm trees.

93 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

As in Scene 55, the strange, jerky TRACKING SHOT. The piece of canvas flaps IN and OUT OF SHOT.

94 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM IN HOWLAND STREET NIGHT

VERLAINE wakes and looks down, concerned, at RIMBAUD as he threshes about in the big wooden-framed bed.

RIMBAUD.

On. On.

95 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

As in Scene 57, the dizzying panorama of the Abyssinian coastal plain. As the SHOT SETTLES, the SOUNDS of the tropics begin to establish themselves.

RIMBAUD (O.V.)

On!

96 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM NIGHT

RIMBAUD wakes with a start, to find VERLAINE looking down at him.

VERLAINE

Are you all right?

RIMBAUD

Just a dream.

VERLAINE

Shall I make some tea?

RIMBAUD shakes his head: there's a strange, remote expression in his eyes.

RIMBAUD

Do you think we should move on?

VERLAINE

You mean...?

RIMBAUD

I mean, what about Mathilde's lawyer? Shouldn't we escape?

VERLAINE

Oh no, don't worry about that. But we will have to move from here. I can't afford it any more; so yesterday, while you were at the Museum, I found us another place.

97 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM AT 8, GREAT COLLEGE STREET LONDON
DAY

A far drabber and more cramped room, this time in Camden Town. The window, on the first floor, looks down on a dispiriting street of terraced houses. RIMBAUD is standing at it, staring out at the grey skies, the drizzle and the shiny wet street. VERLAINE is finishing unpacking; more or less distracted by this, he's not paying a great deal of attention to RIMBAUD.

RIMBAUD

You don't seem at all worried about this divorce.

VERLAINE

They're not going to give her a divorce. It's just sabre-rattling.

RIMBAUD

They can give her it to her on desertion, you know. And if it's desertion and Sodomy, they can throw us both in jail as well.

He looks back into the room

RIMBAUD

I'm not going to jail.

VERLAINE

I don't know: would it be so bad?

He's not taking the conversation at all seriously. RIMBAUD's expression, on the other hand, is sombre.

98 INT. BRITISH MUSEUM READING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD sits at his desk, dwarfed by the vast proportions of the room. He crouches over a blank sheet of paper, frowning ferociously, his fist clenched.

99 EXT. GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

It's raining again. VERLAINE, carrying a bag of groceries, lets himself into the house.

100 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD is sitting at the table, his face buried on his arms. He doesn't stir as VERLAINE comes into the room and puts down his bag of groceries.

100 Continued

VERLAINE
What's the matter?

RIMBAUD raises his head and turns to look at him.

RIMBAUD
It's so hard. Who would have
imagined it would be so hard?

101 INT. PUB IN SOHO EVENING

VERLAINE and RIMBAUD sit at a corner table, pints of
'ordinary' in front of them.

VERLAINE
I wrote to the lawyer today: I
explained to him, it's her father
who's in the wrong. How many times
have I asked for my things back from
that house? And he takes no notice
whatsoever.

RIMBAUD
You're in the wrong.

VERLAINE's jaw clenches in sudden cold anger.

VERLAINE
All right, I'm in the wrong, if
you say so, then that's established,
isn't it?

RIMBAUD doesn't answer. For a moment, VERLAINE sulks, his
mouth a thin line. Then he turns to RIMBAUD.

VERLAINE
I don't know, what is it? You seem
different.

RIMBAUD
Yes. It's the writing. The writing
has changed me.

And he does, indeed, look different. They sit on, in
silence.

FADE

102 INT. READING ROOM OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM . 1873 DAY

RIMBAUD sits at his desk, as if in a trance, still in front
of a blank piece of paper. Finally, he picks up his pen and
writes something at the top of the page.

102 Continued

INSERT: What he writes, in capital letters, is:
L'IMPOSSIBLE.

Over this, a caption:

V L'IMPOSSIBLE.

He puts down his pen and stares at the paper for some time.

OVERHEAD SHOT. RIMBAUD at his desk.

Suddenly, to the absolute horror of everyone else in the reading room, he throws back his head and utters a long-drawn-out, blood-curdling animal cry, somewhere between a howl and a groan.

After a moment of frozen shock, from different directions, various frock-coated museum OFFICIALS begin to converge on his desk.

103 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM IN GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

VERLAINE stands at the window opening a bottle of wine, looking out on a sunless but oppressively warm grey day. He draws the cork and turns to look at RIMBAUD, who lies in bed, between grubby sheets, completely immobile.

VERLAINE

Any chance of you moving about at all today?

RIMBAUD

How long have we been in this shit-hole?

VERLAINE

Not more than five weeks.

RIMBAUD

God, life will never end.

VERLAINE pours wine into two glasses, takes one over to RIMBAUD.

VERLAINE

A lot can happen in five weeks.

RIMBAUD

A lot can happen in ten minutes.
But it rarely does.

103 Continued

He gulps down the wine and holds out his glass.

RIMBAUD

More.

VERLAINE fills his glass.

VERLAINE

You have to shake yourself out of this depression, inertia, whatever it is. There's nothing preventing us from being happy again.

RIMBAUD

I've told you before, I'm far too intelligent to be happy.

104 INT. PUB IN SOHO DAY

RIMBAUD, clearly in a state of inner ferment, stares at his glass; VERLAINE is drinking his beer. A thought strikes him and he speaks with a kind of forced cheerfulness.

VERLAINE

Do you realise I shall be thirty next birthday? What a horrible thought.

RIMBAUD looks up, his gaze unseeing.

RIMBAUD

I'm in despair.

VERLAINE is surprised by this, but not as surprised as one might expect

VERLAINE

Why?

RIMBAUD

When I was young and golden and infallible, I saw the future with some clarity. I knew it would be difficult, but I thought that all I needed was experience and I could turn myself into the philosopher's stone and create new colours and new flowers, new languages and a new God and everything to gold. But now I find I've tormented myself and poked among my entrails to discover something that people do not believe or do not wish to believe or would be foolish to believe. There's no love

1549 Continued

RIMBAUD (Cont)
in the world and no hope and I can
do nothing about it. And I'm in
hell.

Abruptly, he gets up and hurries out of the pub. VERLAINE
struggles to his feet and follows.

1550 EXT. PUB DAY

VERLAINE emerges from the pub, looking one way, then
another.

His P.O.V. RIMBAUD is running away, moving fast through
the summer rain.

VERLAINE sets off after him; but quite soon, as RIMBAUD
vanishes around a corner, he gives up and comes to a halt,
panting and dishevelled.

1551 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM IN GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

RIMBAUD lies on the bed, fully clothed. VERLAINE is at the
desk, trying to write.

RIMBAUD
I suppose you think I've just been
lying here all these weeks in a
state of paralysed sloth.

VERLAINE
Well, not necessarily...

RIMBAUD
Well, I have. But bubbling beneath
the surface and rising slowly through
the layers of indifference has been
a new system. Harden up. Reject
romanticism. Abandon rhetoric. Get
it right. And finally I've seen
where my attempt to conquer the world
has led me.

VERLAINE
And where has it led you?

RIMBAUD
Here. My search for universal experi-
ence has led me here. To lead an idle,
pointless life of poverty, as the
minion of a bald, ugly, ageing, drunken

106 Continued

RIMBAUD (Cont)

lyric poet, who clings on to me because
his wife won't take him back.

Sickening silence. VERLAINE gapes at RIMBAUD, for a moment
too astonished to speak.

VERLAINE

How can you bring yourself to say a
thing like that?

RIMBAUD

It's easy. It's the truth. You're
here, living like this, because you
have to be. It's your life. Drink
and sex and a kind of complacent
melancholy and enough money to soak
yourself oblivious every night. That's
your limit. But I'm here because I
choose to be.

VERLAINE

Oh, yes?

RIMBAUD

Yes.

VERLAINE

And why exactly? Why did you choose
to come to London with me? No doubt
you regarded it as another stage in
your private Odyssey. Only by plunging
ever deeper, if I may mix my myths,
will you attain the right to graze on
the upper slopes of Parnassus.

Silence. RIMBAUD seems to have decided to ignore VERLAINE.

VERLAINE

Of course, there are less subtle
reasons for your putting up with me.

RIMBAUD

Such as?

VERLAINE

Such as the fact that I support you.

RIMBAUD raises his head to look at VERLAINE before speaking,
icy and venomous.

RIMBAUD

Your mind is almost as ugly as your
body.

106 Continued

They look at each other. VERLAINE struggles with himself for a moment, then his face suddenly goes blank. He rises to his feet and heads for the door.

RIMBAUD

Where are you going?

VERLAINE ignores the question and leaves the room, slamming the door behind him. RIMBAUD's face is set in a mask of cold indifference.

107 EXT. GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

VERLAINE rounds the corner, his expression preoccupied. He's carrying a herring in one hand and a bottle of oil in the other. He looks up as he approaches the house to see RIMBAUD sitting in the open window of their room. He's laughing. VERLAINE comes to a halt and looks up at him, his face flushing.

108 INT/EXT. BED-SITTING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD laughs, looking down at the absurd figure of VERLAINE, below in the street, with his herring and his bottle of oil.

109 EXT. GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

VERLAINE stands, looking up at RIMBAUD, who now leans out of the window to speak.

RIMBAUD

God, you look such a cunt.

110 INT/EXT. BED-SITTING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD'S P.O.V.: VERLAINE suddenly draws back his arm and hurls the bottle of oil at the window.

RIMBAUD flinches as the bottle smashes against the wall of the house.

111 EXT. GT. COLLEGE ST. DAY

VERLAINE hurls the herring at the house as well. Then he turns and sets off back down the road. RIMBAUD leans out of the window again.

111 Continued

RIMBAUD
Where are you going?

112 INT/EXT. BED-SITTING ROOM DAY

RIMBAUD watches the receding figure of VERLAINE for a moment. Then he calls out again, an edge of panic in his voice.

RIMBAUD
Where are you going?

VERLAINE doesn't turn. RIMBAUD, who all of a sudden looks frightened and vulnerable, hurries over to and out of the door.

113 EXT. DOCKS DAY

RIMBAUD, clearly in a panic, is running along the quay towards St. Katherine's Dock, streaming with sweat, cannoning into unwary passers-by, moving as fast as he can.

An OVERHEAD SHOT shows the gangways being drawn up on the Antwerp ferry as the engines begin to churn; while the small figure of RIMBAUD, hair billowing out behind him, races along the quayside towards the ship.

As RIMBAUD arrives alongside the ship, it's just beginning to pull away from the quay. He's hardly able to get his breath; but he can see VERLAINE, who is standing at the handrail looking down at him, his expression blank and sombre.

RIMBAUD
Don't go! Come back! Don't leave me!

VERLAINE puts his head to one side and makes no response.

RIMBAUD
I'm sorry.

Still not a flicker of acknowledgement from VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD
How am I supposed to live?

At this VERLAINE simply turns his back and moves off into the shadows of the deck until he disappears. RIMBAUD, his calm for once entirely shattered, burries his face in his hands and begins to sob.

114 INT. BED-SITTING ROOM NIGHT

The room is lit only by the ghostly secondary light thrown by the gas-lamps out in the street. RIMBAUD sits on the floor, leaning against the wall, one knee drawn up, his face a mask of despair.

Over this, RIMBAUD's voice, full of frantic child-like appeal.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

Come back, come back, you're my only friend. I promise I'll behave myself.

115 EXT. HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS

VERLAINE stands outside the hotel, hesitating for a moment.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

It was only a stupid joke, I can't tell you how sorry I am.

116 INT. LOBBY OF THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS

VERLAINE signs the register under the beady eye of the CLERK, who clearly doesn't approve much of clients without luggage.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

Come back and we'll forget all about it. It was only a joke.

117 INT. CORRIDOR IN THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

VERLAINE hesitates in front of the door to the room he's been assigned: he recognises it as the room MATHILDE had the previous year.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I haven't stopped crying for two days. When I called to you, why didn't you get off the boat?

118 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS DAY

VERLAINE lets himself into the room. As in Scene 70, MATHILDE lies naked, face down on the bed.

VERLAINE turns to close the door behind him. When he turns back, MATHILDE has vanished.

118 Continued

RIMBAUD (V.O.)
Have we lived together for two years
to finish up like this?

119 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL LIÉGEOIS NIGHT

VERLAINE sits, motionless, RIMBAUD's letter in his hand,
tears running down his cheeks.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)
Think back to what you were before
you met me. Listen to your heart.
I'm yours for always.

VERLAINE crumples up the letter and throws it across the
room.

120 EXT. DOCKS AT ANTWERP DAY

RIMBAUD, carrying a battered cardboard suitcase, comes down
the gangplank of the London ferry, on to Antwerp docks.

121 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL DE COURTRAI NIGHT

The same shabby room VERLAINE and RIMBAUD occupied the year
before. Now, the two of them are locked in a violent
struggle, swaying in a grim embrace, wrestling and throwing
punches, until RIMBAUD is lying on top of VERLAINE, pinning
him to the ground. Stalemate: and eventually RIMBAUD rolls
off VERLAINE, sighs and passes a hand in front of his eyes.

RIMBAUD
I'll go back to Paris tomorrow.

VERLAINE
No, look, it won't happen again, I'll
never walk out on you again, I promise.

RIMBAUD
No, you won't. I'm not giving you the
chance. What was I supposed to do in
London with no money?

VERLAINE
I'm sorry, I was very hurt.

RIMBAUD
Why? God knows, I've said far worse
things to you than that. And you
really did look a cunt.

121 Continued

VERLAINE, who's on his feet again, looks as if he's on the verge of flaring up: then he controls himself and slumps into a chair.

DISSOLVE TO

Later: VERLAINE sits in the same position, in the dark, watching RIMBAUD, who lies asleep in the double bed.

DISSOLVE TO

122 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL DE COURTRAI DAWN

- the next morning, very early. RIMBAUD wakes to find himself, rather to his surprise, alone in the room.

123 EXT. PASSAGE SAINT-HUBERT BRUSSELS DAY

It's still early, but already a blazing hot day. VERLAINE's nevertheless wearing a heavy overcoat. He stands in the doorway of a small shop, peering in the window, swaying slightly, his eyes already bleary with drink.

124 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL DE COURTRAI DAY

It's noon now on a sweltering hot day. The windows are wide open, to no particular effect, the net curtains hanging limp in the absence of a breath of air. RIMBAUD, his expression melancholy and exhausted, moves slowly round the room, gathering up his effects and stuffing them in his decrepit suitcase. The door suddenly bursts open to admit VERLAINE, plainly in a state of over-excitement.

RIMBAUD

Where have you been?

VERLAINE

Out. I went, I went to the Spanish Embassy again, to see if they would change their minds. But they wouldn't, it's ridiculous, it's fucking ridiculous I'm willing to fight, I said, and die for your cause, you can't afford to turn away volunteers. But they said they weren't taking on any foreigners. Then, I said, you deserve to lose the fucking war and I hope you do.

124 Continued

RIMBAUD

And were you at the Spanish Embassy
all morning?

VERLAINE

No.

RIMBAUD

You're drunk.

VERLAINE

I have yes had a few drinks.

He suddenly notices what RIMBAUD is doing.

VERLAINE

What are you doing?

RIMBAUD

Packing.

VERLAINE

Where are you going?

RIMBAUD

I'm going back home to Roche, I'm
going to finish my book and I'm
going to have it published.

VERLAINE

Oh, published? I thought you were
far too important for that.

RIMBAUD doesn't answer, refusing to rise to the bait.

VERLAINE

Anyway, listen, we're going back to
London.

RIMBAUD

We are not going back to London.

VERLAINE

Yes, look, I've been thinking it
over, it's by far the best idea.

RIMBAUD

Then why did you go to the Spanish
Embassy?

VERLAINE

I didn't.

124 Continued

Silence. RIMBAUD pushes some more clothes into his suitcase.

VERLAINE

Don't go. Think it over.

RIMBAUD

I've thought it over.

VERLAINE paces for a moment. He seems increasingly agitated.

VERLAINE

Do you realise what day it is tomorrow.

RIMBAUD

Friday.

VERLAINE

It's my wedding anniversary. And I haven't seen her, my wife, since we made love here, in Brussels, nearly a year ago. She won't answer my letters. Do you know, I wrote to her last week and told her if she didn't come to Brussels within three days, I'd commit suicide? And she didn't even answer.

RIMBAUD

Ah, but then you didn't commit suicide.

VERLAINE

I suppose you think that's funny.

RIMBAUD

No, it's pitiful. How many people did you write and tell you were going to commit suicide? I'm surprised you didn't send out invitations.

VERLAINE

How can you be so callous?

RIMBAUD

Callous? You abandon me in London and then summon me to Brussels and expect me to hang around while you decide whether you're going to go back to your wife, join the army, or shoot yourself. Then, when you

124 Continued

RIMBAUD (Cont)

fail to achieve any of these aims,
as you undoubtedly will, you want
me to go back to London with you.
I'm not going to. It's all over.
I'm leaving you.

VERLAINE

You can't. You can't.

VERLAINE stops pacing. He takes RIMBAUD by the arm, trying
to engage his attention and distract him from his packing.

VERLAINE

Look, it's summer. Don't you remember
last summer, when we set out, how
wonderful it was? I remember evenings
...Why don't we go south? Late summer
on the Mediterranean, we could dedicate
ourselves to warmth. Or Africa, I know
you've always wanted to go to Africa.
Just for a month and then make up your
mind. Look at the sun.

125 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

As Scene 57, the sun-baked plains far below and the distant
sea.

126 INT. ROOM IN THE HÔTEL DE COURTRAI DAY

RIMBAUD opens his eyes, maintains the silence a little
longer.

RIMBAUD

No.

VERLAINE

Why not?

RIMBAUD looks at VERLAINE, his expression serene, his voice
gentle.

RIMBAUD

I can't. It's no good. It's too
late.

VERLAINE

It's not. I promise you it's not.
You know if you leave me, you'll
kill me. I can't bear to be alone.

126 Continued

VERLAINE (Cont)

I don't exist without someone else.
I don't care if you stay with me
out of pity, as long as you stay.

RIMBAUD

I can't.

VERLAINE

Why not? Don't you care? Have
you no idea what this means to me?

RIMBAUD

Oh, for God's sake, stop whining.

VERLAINE goes over to look out of the window. He mops at
his brow with a greyish handkerchief.

VERLAINE

It's very hot.

RIMBAUD

Take your coat off.

VERLAINE

I will.

He slips his coat off, walks over to the door and hangs it
up.

VERLAINE

I did some shopping this morning.

He fumbles in the pocket of his coat, finally getting hold
of something.

VERLAINE

I bought a gun.

He points the revolver at RIMBAUD, who looks at him,
perfectly unmoved.

RIMBAUD

What for?

VERLAINE

For you. And for me. For everybody.

RIMBAUD

I hope you bought plenty of ammuni-
tion.

VERLAINE reaches for a chair and puts it in front of the
door; then he sits astride it, pointing the revolver over

126 Continued

the back of it at RIMBAUD. RIMBAUD leans against the far wall, grinning.

VERLAINE

I'm not going to let you go, you know.

RIMBAUD

Well, this is rather an entertaining number. We haven't seen this one before.

VERLAINE

I'll kill you!

RIMBAUD

Oh, pull yourself together.

VERLAINE

I read your letter. You begged me to come back. You said you were crying as you wrote. I could see your tears on the paper!

RIMBAUD

Well, that was before I thought of pawning your clothes.

VERLAINE springs to his feet, shaking with rage. He raises the revolver and fires at RIMBAUD, then, apparently stunned by the noise of the report, fires again into the floor. RIMBAUD, meanwhile, is clutching at his left wrist, staring at it in amazement and horror, as the blood pours down over his hand. He shies away, as VERLAINE moves towards him.

VERLAINE

Oh, God, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

RIMBAUD

Look what you've done.

VERLAINE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

RIMBAUD

Look.

VERLAINE bursts into tears. He tries to give RIMBAUD the revolver.

VERLAINE

Oh, for God's sake, kill me, kill me, shoot me.

126 Continued

RIMBAUD

What?

VERLAINE

Shoot me.

RIMBAUD

How can I, you silly bugger, you've just blown a hole in my hand.

VERLAINE drops the revolver as if his fingers were burnt; RIMBAUD begins to laugh hysterically.

VERLAINE

Oh, God, what have I done?

RIMBAUD

You missed.

127 EXT. PLACE ROUPPE EVENING

RIMBAUD's arm is bandaged and in a sling. He and VERLAINE, who's still wearing his heavy overcoat, are crossing the square on their way to the station. RIMBAUD carries his old suitcase in his good hand. A few paces in silence, then VERLAINE turns to RIMBAUD, his face working.

VERLAINE

What can I say to make you stay?

RIMBAUD completely ignores him. Something seems to snap in VERLAINE. All of a sudden, he hurries a few paces ahead, turns and begins to fumble in his pocket.

VERLAINE

All right, watch this!

After a second's hesitation, RIMBAUD turns and makes a run for it. VERLAINE sets off in hot pursuit, struggling to free his revolver, which he finally succeeds in doing. RIMBAUD ducks and weaves across the crowded square, occasionally checking back over his shoulder to see if VERLAINE is gaining on him. At a certain point, when he's doing this, he cannons directly into a uniformed POLICEMAN; who is immediately aware that something untoward is occurring and grabs RIMBAUD by his unbandaged arm.

POLICEMAN

What's going on?

RIMBAUD

He's trying to kill me!

127 Continued

The POLICEMAN turns on VERLAINE who skids to a halt and, after a moment's reflection, starts trying to stuff his revolver back in his pocket.

128 INT. COURTROOM IN BRUSSELS DAY

VERLAINE stands humbly in the courtroom facing the magistrate, JUDGE THEODORE T'SERSTEVENS, a figure of icy severity.

JUDGE

What exactly are you doing in Brussels?

VERLAINE

I was hoping my wife might come and join me here, as she had already done on one occasion since our separation.

JUDGE

I fail to see how the departure of a friend could have cast you into such despair. Did there perhaps exist between you and Rimbaud other relations besides those of friendship?

VERLAINE

No. This is a suggestion slanderously invented by my wife and her family.

The JUDGE contemplates VERLAINE through narrowed eyes.

129 INT. PRISON HOSPITAL DAY

VERLAINE is escorted into the plain room, his expression apprehensive. There are two DOCTORS in the room, one of whom is putting on a pair of rubber gloves. The other indicates a kind of shelf running along one of the walls at waist-height.

DOCTOR

Take all your clothes off and lie on this, face down.

130 INT. SURGERY IN SAINT-JEAN HOSPITAL DAY

CLOSE ON RIMBAUD, his face contorted with pain. He gasps in sudden agony and there's the SOUND of a metallic clang.

130 Continued

This turns out to be the bloodstained bullet, dropped from between the SURGEON's forceps into a kidney-bowl. He nods briskly to RIMBAUD to signify the ordeal is over.

131 INT. COURTROOM DAY

The JUDGE peers at VERLAINE over the top of his glasses.

JUDGE

Both doctors have testified that on the basis of their examination they are satisfied that you have recently indulged in both active and passive sodomy.

VERLAINE

Have they?

JUDGE

So do you deny you are a practising sodomist?

VERLAINE

The word is sodomite.

JUDGE

Whatever the word may be, the activity it describes is not one which is encouraged in Brussels.

132 EXT. SAINT-JEAN HOSPITAL DAY

RIMBAUD emerges from the hospital, his arm in a sling, carrying his cardboard suitcase. He stands for a moment, looking one way then another, blinking in the blazing sunlight.

133 INT. COURTROOM DAY

VERLAINE rises to his feet and stands facing the bench. JUDGE T'SERSTEVENS clears his throat.

JUDGE

Paul-Marie Verlaine, the court finds you guilty under Article 399 of the Penal Code of grievous bodily harm and sentences you...

The JUDGE glances at VERLAINE, his eyes suddenly sparkling with malice.

133 Continued

JUDGE

...to a fine of 200 francs and 2 years' imprisonment.

VERLAINE is staggered by the severity of the sentence, his mouth drops open in shock.

134 EXT. COURTYARD OF THE RIMBAUD FARM AT ROCHE DAY

It is another blazing hot day. RIMBAUD, carrying his case, his arm in a sling, shuffles across the dusty courtyard.

135 INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN DAY

MME RIMBAUD, ISABELLE, VITALIE and FRÉDÉRIC are all sitting at the table, eating lunch. RIMBAUD's chair is empty. They all look up as RIMBAUD opens the door and appears on the threshold, and variously react to his haggard, wild-eyed expression. It's his mother who finally speaks.

MME RIMBAUD

Now what's the matter?

RIMBAUD drops his suitcase and advances a couple of paces into the room.

RIMBAUD

Verlaine.

He reaches his seat at the table and subsides on to it. ISABELLE is watching him intently, as he speaks again.

RIMBAUD

Verlaine!

He puts his arms on the table and buries his face in them. His body is shaken with sobs. The others watch him in constrained silence.

136 INT. HAYLOFT DAY

RIMBAUD sits at his makeshift desk, writing with his child's pen. After a moment he looks up and stares out into space, lost in thought.

137 EXT. PRISON AT MONS DAY

VERLAINE, in his blue canvas prison uniform, shuffles alongside the other prisoners as they exercise, moving in a slow,

137 Continued

dispirited circle around the narrow confines of the prison yard.

138 INT. HAYLOFT DAY

RIMBAUD writes on, concentrating intently.

139 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

As Scene 55: the jolting progress, the flap of white canvas.

140 INT. PRISON WORKSHOP DAY

VERLAINE is one of a long row of prisoners painfully pushing needles through the coarse hemp of yet another mailbag.

141 INT. HAYLOFT DAY

RIMBAUD paces up and down, pen in hand.

142 EXT. SEA DAY

The sun beats down on the surface of a glassy sea.

143 INT. PRISON CELL NIGHT

VERLAINE sits alone in his cell, indirectly lit, motionless except for his right hand, which slowly tells the beads of his rosary.

144 INT. HAYLOFT NIGHT

RIMBAUD works on by candlelight, crouched over his desk.

145 EXT. DECK OF A DHOW DAY

The sea again, seen from a prone position on the deck, with the elegant curve of the dhow's sail cutting into the margin of the image.

146 EXT. COURTYARD AT ROCHE DAY

ISABELLE stops in her tracks: what's stopped her is a terrible animal howling from the loft above the barn.

147 INT. KITCHEN NIGHT

A candle casts a pools of light across the wooden table as MME RIMBAUD, her back straight as a rod, turns the final page of RIMBAUD's manuscript and finishes reading. RIMBAUD, his eyes feverishly bright, watches her from an armchair near the door. ISABELLE also sits in a corner, but she is watching RIMBAUD. MME RIMBAUD looks up from the manuscript.

MME RIMBAUD

What does it mean? I don't understand what it's supposed to mean.

RIMBAUD

It means exactly what it says, word for word, no more, no less.

MME RIMBAUD looks at him, sceptical, unblinking.

148 EXT. COURTYARD AT ROCHE DAY

A POSTMAN trudges across the courtyard, carrying a parcel. RIMBAUD bursts out of the house and intercepts him, snatching the parcel from him.

Over this, the voice of the adult ISABELLE.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

My mother paid for his book to be published, you know...

149 INT. HAYLOFT DAY

RIMBAUD impatiently rips the parcel open and takes out one of several copies of a slim pamphlet-sized volume of not much more than fifty pages, the title in red on a buff cover, the title-page arranged as follows:

A. RIMBAUD

UNE

SAISON EN ENFER

PRIX: UN FRANC

He reaches for his old knife and begins to cut the pages.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

...and even though, as far as I know, it only sold six copies...

He cuts the pages with increasing eagerness and, as it's a slim volume, he's soon finished; then he opens the book at random and begins to read. It takes only a few seconds, for

149 Continued

the excitement to vanish; clearly it's replaced by a wave of cruel disillusionment. He extends his arm, disgust in his eyes, and lets the book drop on to the floor.

150 EXT. FARMHOUSE AT ROCHE DAY

RIMBAUD alone, no luggage, strides away from the farm. ISABELLE stands in the doorway, watching him leave.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

...that should prove to you we're not opposed to his work becoming known.

151 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

VERLAINE shifts uncomfortably; he can't quite see where the conversation is leading and it's making him uneasy.

VERLAINE

No, of course not.

ISABELLE

All the same, my mother and I are determined to get hold of all his writings.

VERLAINE

I don't quite...

ISABELLE

The point is, M. Verlaine, to speak frankly, a number of the poems he wrote in extreme youth were quite... indecent and, in some cases, even profane. He would never have wished to be remembered for them.

VERLAINE

So...

ISABELLE

Yes: my mother and I plan to, as it were, separate the wheat from the tares and destroy those of his works we feel he would have destroyed himself.

Silence. VERLAINE is appalled.

VERLAINE

I see.

151 Continued

ISABELLE

What you may not know is that Arthur was converted.

VERLAINE

Converted?

ISABELLE

I reasoned with him and prayed for him for weeks while he was ill and eventually he asked to be confessed. God kept him alive long enough to repent, so that he could be saved.

VERLAINE is moved. He sips at his absinthe, then looks up at ISABELLE.

VERLAINE

The last time we met we spoke of religion. I hadn't seen him for a couple of years: I'd been away... staying at a monastery in Belgium; and he had that teaching job in Germany. I tried very hard to convince him of the truth...

He breaks off. ISABELLE is looking at him, her expression sceptical.

152 EXT. BLACK FOREST NIGHT 1875

A clearing in a pine forest close to Stuttgart on the bank of a narrow tributary of the Neckar. There's a full moon in a cloudless sky, snow on the ground and thin ice on the edges of the river. RIMBAUD appears, a little better dressed than is usual; VERLAINE, swathed in a capacious Inverness cape, follows a few paces behind. Their breath rises on the frosty air; both are a little the worse for drink.

VERLAINE

You must understand, I've changed completely. All I want now is to lead a quiet, simple life with God. It happened quite suddenly, the day the governor told me Mathilde had been granted her divorce. I lay down and looked at my life and there was nothing, nothing. It seemed to me the only thing I could do was to submit myself to God and ask Him to forgive me and help me face my

152 Continued

VERLAINE (Cont)
situation. And He did. I promise
you, He did.

RIMBAUD
And now you want us to love each other
in Jesus, am I right?

VERLAINE
I want you to follow my example.

RIMBAUD stops in the clearing and utters a harsh bark of
laughter. VERLAINE puts a hand on his arm.

VERLAINE
I hope you didn't think, all this time,
I might be angry with you.

RIMBAUD
No.

VERLAINE
I know you had no idea I might be put
away for so long; I certainly forgave
you for it.

RIMBAUD
I didn't forgive you.

VERLAINE
What for?

RIMBAUD
For missing.

VERLAINE laughs uneasily; but RIMBAUD doesn't appear to be
joking. He's looking out across the river now; VERLAINE
watches him uncertainly for a moment, then shivers suddenly.

VERLAINE
Not very warm, is it?

RIMBAUD
Why did you come here?

VERLAINE is taken aback by the hostility of his tone.

VERLAINE
Well...because I want you to find
some direction in your life. I want
God to help you achieve your aims.

RIMBAUD
Aims? I have no aims.

152 Continued

VERLAINE
I mean your writing.

RIMBAUD
I've stopped writing.

VERLAINE
I don't understand...

RIMBAUD
Then let me put it another way: I
no longer write.

VERLAINE
Why not?

RIMBAUD
Because I have nothing more to say.
If I ever had anything to say in
the first place.

VERLAINE gapes at him, completely bewildered.

RIMBAUD
I used to have some idea that what
I did would make a difference, you
know, change the world. I thought
nothing would ever be the same
again. But it's no good, the world
is too old, there's nothing new, it's
all been said.

VERLAINE
Not in the way you can say it. You
have a gift. It's no good throwing
it away because your expectations
were unrealistic. It's the expect-
ations you should change.

RIMBAUD
It's my gift, I can do what I like
with it.

VERLAINE
But...what else is there?

RIMBAUD
Anything that comes along. Anywhere
away out of this mortuary: Europe.
You can't change corpses, they have
their own rhythms. So, somewhere
newer.

152 Continued

VERLAINE

You can't give up, you've hardly begun.

RIMBAUD

Don't worry, I'll be very good at it, no one will be able to touch me: the master of silence.

VERLAINE

If we don't, who's going to tell the truth?

RIMBAUD

Three years ago, you said the truth was this and the truth was that. Then along comes an angel of the Lord and the next day the truth is something completely different.

VERLAINE

But I've changed: change, I thought that was what you wanted.

RIMBAUD

You've changed, have you?

VERLAINE

Yes!

Silence. Eventually RIMBAUD turns to face him.

RIMBAUD

Then here, in the wilderness, I offer you at archetypal choice: the choice between my body and my soul.

CLOSE on VERLAINE: He's caught in an agonising dilemma.

RIMBAUD (O.S.)

Choose.

VERLAINE

Your body.

He's spoken very quietly: and RIMBAUD's response is a wintry, contemptuous smile.

RIMBAUD

See, the ninety-eight wounds of Our Saviour burst and bleed.

VERLAINE stretches out a hand to touch his cheek.

152 Continued

RIMBAUD

Don't.

VERLAINE

Aren't my sins a matter for my own conscience?

RIMBAUD

They would be if you had one.

VERLAINE

Why should it matter to you?

RIMBAUD

Because I hate your miserable weakness.

VERLAINE

I see no clash between loving God and loving you.

RIMBAUD

Come on, let's go back.

He starts to move off, but VERLAINE catches at his sleeve.

VERLAINE

No, listen, I sat in my cell and thought how happy we could be, it should be easy, it should be the easiest thing in the world, why isn't it?

RIMBAUD

It never worked for us. And it will never work for either of us.

VERLAINE

I wanted us to go away together.

RIMBAUD

Yes.

VERLAINE

What am I going to do?

RIMBAUD

You'll have to go and find somebody else.

VERLAINE

I can't. Please.

He puts his arms round RIMBAUD, pinioning him.

152 Continued

VERLAINE
Please.

RIMBAUD
Let me go.

VERLAINE clings on to him: RIMBAUD speaks, as he has throughout this last exchange, with great weariness.

RIMBAUD
Let go.

VERLAINE
Please.

RIMBAUD wrenches free one of his arms and hits VERLAINE in the face, stunning him. Then he hits him again, hard, several times, methodically, until he collapses in an untidy heap, sprawled out across the cracking ice. RIMBAUD hauls him back on to the bank and kneels beside him, straightening out his body in an oddly tender way.

153 EXT. RIVER BANK DAY 1870

As Scene 40: RIMBAUD kneels, holding the hand of the dead Prussian soldier.

154 EXT. BLACK FOREST NIGHT 1875

RIMBAUD, on his knees, props VERLAINE against a tree. Blood from VERLAINE's nose makes black streaks on the snow. When he's arranged the body, RIMBAUD waits a while, looking down at his unconscious friend. Then he leans forward and kisses him on the top of his high forehead, and rises to his feet.

RIMBAUD
Good bye.

He turns and walks away, leaves the clearing, not looking back.

155 EXT. MAIN SQUARE IN HARAR, ABYSSINIA DAY 1883

An abrupt CUT; and RIMBAUD is still walking away from the CAMERA, across the deserted square, towards the fiery ball of the morning sun. Strange, percussive MUSIC; which, as he turns a corner proves to be emanating from a spectacular procession. Everyone, man and woman, is in dazzling white robes, with the exception of the priest and his retinue, who wear rich regalia, heavy with gold thread; and are sheltered

155 Continued

under exquisite azure parasols with gold fringing carried by acolytes. The MUSICIANS play large flutes, bells, heavy drums. The entire procession turns into the Coptic cathedral, ready for the Christmas mass.

RIMBAUD pauses for the merest instant; then moves on, against the flow of the procession, heading away from the cathedral. He's 28 now, lean and tanned, his cropped hair already flecked with grey.

Over this, a caption:

VI L'ECLAIR.

156 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

RIMBAUD strides, at punishing speed, across a savage, rocky terrain. The CAMERA pulls slowly up and away to reveal his isolation in the immense, empty, pitiless landscape.

157 EXT. MARKETPLACE IN HARAR DAY

RIMBAUD walks through the bustling marketplace, crowded with women in dazzlingly colourful robes. He's the only white man in the crowd and seems, moving purposefully through the hubbub, even more isolated than in the previous scene.

158 EXT. COURTYARD OF THE TRADING POST AT HARAR DAY

The trading post run by RIMBAUD is a modest general store, the business of which spills out into a dusty courtyard. RIMBAUD moves across the courtyard, nodding brusquely to one or two of his assistants, who are engaged in various transactions in and around the entrance to the store. RIMBAUD's destination, however, is not the store, but an extraordinary dark, wooden house. Lowering over one end of the courtyard, its style a kind of Indian Gothic, its windows glazed with panes stained different primary colours in an apparently random design. RIMBAUD disappears into the house.

159 INT. RIMBAUD'S HOUSE IN HARAR DAY

RIMBAUD's houseboy, DJAMI, a boy of about 15, kneels to pull off RIMBAUD's high leather boots. A handsome young SOMALIAN WOMAN brings him a bowl of cool water.

160 INT. DINING-ROOM IN RIMBAUD'S HOUSE EVENING

RIMBAUD sits at the plain table: the SOMALIAN WOMAN serves

160 Continued

him a meal: some kind of meat and lentil stew with unleavened bread.

161 INT. BEDROOM IN RIMBAUD'S HOUSE NIGHT

A large room, empty except for the single bed in the corner, strangely lit by the moon shining through the panes of stained glass. RIMBAUD makes love to the SOMALIAN WOMAN, dim shapes, white on black.

162 EXT. COURTYARD OF THE TRADING POST DAY

RIMBAUD has set up a heavy camera on a tripod in the centre of the courtyard. He finishes instructing a giggling DJAMI and makes his way to the entrance of the trading post, a dark breach in the crumbling stone wall. He rests a hand on the door-jamb, signals; and DJAMI presses the button, startled by the mild explosion of the magnesium flare.

163 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

CLOSE on VERLAINE's hand, as it moves among a number of black and white photographs of RIMBAUD, mostly awkwardly posed, sometimes in Harar, sometimes against tropical vegetation, in the later ones wearing a vestigial moustache, his features ever more taut and skull-like.

VERLAINE

Of course, it's seventeen years since I last saw him: but I wouldn't have recognised him from these. All that time, we heard nothing, except that he was travelling.

ISABELLE

Oh yes, he travelled a great deal: Aden, Alexandria, Batavia, Cyprus...

VERLAINE

Batavia.

164 EXT. PLAINS OF THE OGADEN DAY 1883

CLOSE on RIMBAUD: he's on horseback, riding fast, wearing a loose cotton shirt and canvas trousers.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

And Abyssinia. He opened a trading post there about ten years ago.

164 Continued

RIMBAUD'S P.O.V.: he's coming down on to a vast stretch of savannah, dotted with gum trees and mimosa. In front of him, moving with exaggerated care through the long grass are dozens of ostriches.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

He explored the whole country. Places no white man had ever been. He rode across the Ogaden.

RIMBAUD rides through the ostriches, which scatter indignantly in front of his horse. He smiles to himself, as the high grass parts before him.

165 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAWN 1891

It's almost dawn and RIMBAUD wakes on his bedroll by the ashes of his fire. He springs to his feet. Not far off is the edge of the plateau. RIMBAUD starts moving towards it, striding fast in his traditional fashion. He wants to reach the edge of the precipice in time to see the sunrise.

Suddenly, he gasps in shock. He's caught his knee on a broken branch jaggedly protruding from a dead-looking thornbush.

He strides on; and soon reaches the sheer drop at the edge of the plateau. Below, revealed, is the sea; and, as he watches, the disc of the sun slowly begins to appear.

RIMBAUD looks down at his leg: through the slashed canvas of his trousers blood is beginning to well.

He looks out across the sea again. As he stares at the sun, ISABELLE's voice again.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

About a year ago, his trouble started.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

What was the matter with him?

ISABELLE (V.O.)

He had a tumour on his knee.

166 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

VERLAINE's head jerks up: he looks shocked.

VERLAINE

That's very strange.

166 Continued

ISABELLE pauses in the act of gathering up the photographs.

ISABELLE

Why?

VERLAINE

Because that's what I have: a tumour
on my knee.

167 INT. TRADING POST AT HARAR 1891

RIMBAUD, his face pinched and haggard, lies on a couch installed in his store, between the counter and the window. His right leg, the knee visibly swollen, is stretched out on the couch; the left foot is planted on the floor. He's watching the comings and goings out in the yard, where one of his assistants pours coffee beans into a sack standing on a weighing machine.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

It would have been all right if he'd done something about it, if he hadn't been so conscientious about his work. There was no doctor in Harar, but he insisted on staying until the pain became unbearable.

RIMBAUD moves to catch one of his assistants' attention, then grimaces in agony.

168 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

VERLAINE's hand shakes a little as he pours water into his next absinthe.

ISABELLE

He couldn't ride any more, so he designed himself a litter.

169 INT. RIMBAUD'S HOUSE AT HARAR 1891

RIMBAUD has had a day-bed set up in an upstairs room, by an open window with red and yellow panes. He hands out neat drawings of the skeleton of a tented litter to his Abyssinian assistants. In the background the SOMALIAN WOMAN looks on anxiously.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

Then he hired sixteen men to carry him to the coast.

170 EXT. COURTYARD AT HARAR DAY

Several of RIMBAUD's assistants work with wooden battens and canvas sheets: atmosphere of intense concentration.

171 INT/EXT. RIMBAUD'S HOUSE DAY

RIMBAUD, black circles of pain below his eyes, watches intently.

His P.O.V.: down in the yard, the litter is taking shape.

RIMBAUD watches, his eyes burning.

172 EXT. COURTYARD DAY

The courtyard, for once, is quite deserted. Only the litter, seen from above, ramshackle and bizarre under its canvas roof, stands in hyper-real isolation, as if it has just landed from space.

173 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

ISABELLE closes her eyes briefly, as painful memories crowd in.

ISABELLE

The journey took more than two weeks.

VERLAINE thinks about this, glass in hand.

174 INT. RIMBAUD'S HOUSE DAY 1891

DJAMI and two other servants lift RIMBAUD from his day-bed: he cries out. They carry him, as gently as they can, out of the room.

In the background, watching, is the SOMALIAN WOMAN: but she doesn't accompany them. Instead, she moves over to the day-bed, lies down on it and turns her face to the wall.

175 EXT. COURTYARD DAY

It's raining. DJAMI and the servants lower RIMBAUD into the litter. He cries out again, clearly in terrible pain. DJAMI leans across and kisses his forehead. The sixteen BEARERS, all in white, take up their positions and the litter is raised. From within it, another groan of unbearable agony.

176 EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF HARAR DAY

The BEARERS moves as fast as they can, slipping and sliding on the wet red earth as they carry the litter down a steep slope. It's still raining. Behind the litter is a small procession: a few camels, carrying supplies for the expedition. Now, the litter lurches horribly as one of the BEARERS slips: and RIMBAUD cries out in anguish.

177 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU EVENING

An appalling storm is in progress. The BEARERS have taken what shelter they can under a huge eucalyptus. The litter stands, out on its own, in the torrential rain, buffeted by a howling wind.

CLOSE on RIMBAUD: the canvas is completely ineffectual shelter and the slanting rain lashes down on RIMBAUD.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

He was always searching for a
solution, a place, a formula.
Do you think he ever found them?

A flash of jagged lightning and a tremendous thunder clap.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

Oh, yes.

RIMBAUD's face is screwed up with pain and misery: it's impossible to tell if it's rainwater or tears coursing down his cheeks.

178 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

The strange SHOT from Scene 55: as in RIMBAUD's dream, the jolting movement, the canvas flapping IN and OUT OF SHOT.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

Yes, I know he did.

179 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAY

The astonishing view of rock face and coastal strip and silver sea, as in Scene 57: the landscape is violent and unforgiving, but of an unearthly beauty.

CLOSE on RIMBAUD, as he looks out and down at the vista spread before him. Finally he turns his head and speaks.

RIMBAUD

On. On!

179 Continued

His face starts to sway and pucker with pain as the BEARERS raise the litter and move on.

FADE

180 EXT. SEA DAY

As Scene 142: the sun beats down on the surface of the sea.
Over this, a caption:

VII MATIN.

181 EXT. DECK OF A DHOW DAY

As Scene 145: the sea seen from the deck, part of the dhow's sail curving down the edge of FRAME.

ANOTHER ANGLE reveals RIMBAUD, who lies on a stained, filthy, thin mattress on the deck, inadequately shaded from the pitiless sun. Pain has wasted him, he looks ethereal, transparent.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

I shall return with limbs of steel,
a dark skin and a wrathful eye. I
shall have money: I shall be cruel
and idle. I'll be saved.

182 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

ISABELLE is looking across at VERLAINE, uncertainly.

ISABELLE

What?

VERLAINE

Something he wrote.

ISABELLE frowns, evidently unfamiliar with the passage.

ISABELLE

Well, of course, he was saved. But
not right away.

183 INT. OPERATING THEATRE AT THE HOSPITAL OF THE IMMACULATE
CONCEPTION IN MARSEILLES DAY 1891

CLOSE on the harsh, set mould of MME RIMBAUD's features.

183 Continued

ISABELLE (V.O.)

First, as soon as he arrived, he went into hospital in Marseilles.

A WIDER ANGLE shows most of the plain, white room. MME RIMBAUD, in her invariable black, stands against one of the walls. RIMBAUD is stretched out on the operating table, his bare right leg disfigured by an enormous, discoloured swelling, his head propped up on a bolster, his hands outstretched and secured in linen slings. The SURGEON, who is wearing a kind of butcher's apron, finishes rolling up his sleeves and picks up an instrument like a fine-toothed hacksaw.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

And they cut off his leg.

RIMBAUD's hand flutters, opens, reaches out towards his mother.

MME RIMBAUD sees, but does not respond. She stays where she is, her expression stony.

The SURGEON arrives, saw in hand, rests his other hand for a moment lightly on RIMBAUD's thigh, fearsomely high up. He nods to his ASSISTANT, who steps forward, pours some chloroform on to a wad of cotton and lays it across RIMBAUD's mouth and nose.

RIMBAUD's eyes, which have still not left his mother, glaze and close.

BLACKOUT

184 EXT. COURTYARD AT ROCHE DAY

ISABELLE hurries across the courtyard. Once again, a terrible howl of anguish, this time from the main house rather than the barn. ISABELLE breaks into a run, disappearing into the house. It's a dark, cloudy day, rain in the air.

185 INT. RIMBAUD'S BEDROOM DAY

RIMBAUD lies on a single bed in a small, pleasant, simply-furnished room. There's a vase of flowers on the bedside table. RIMBAUD is shivering, his face is running with sweat. ISABELLE hurries into the room and over to him.

ISABELLE

What's the matter?

185 Continued

RIMBAUD

Can you see those carriages, driving
across the sky?

He's pointing to the window. ISABELLE takes his hand and
sits next to the bed.

RIMBAUD

I have to help others, you see: it's
my duty.

ISABELLE

I know you do.

She starts to sponge his face with a damp flannel. He says
something to her in Arabic; then repeats it, his expression
agitated.

RIMBAUD

I don't want money, unless it's drenched
in blood.

ISABELLE

Ssh.

RIMBAUD

Maybe the sea can wash away the stains.

ISABELLE

Maybe.

RIMBAUD

There's one thing, Isabelle, you must
promise me, it's very important, will
you promise?

ISABELLE

What?

RIMBAUD points to the corner of the room, where an
artificial leg is propped.

RIMBAUD

Never let them amputate.

186 EXT. COUNTRY LANE NEAR ROCHE DAY

It's overcast and blustery. RIMBAUD, manoeuvring heavy
crutches and wearing his wooden leg, moves unsteadily,
laboriously down the straight road. At every step he
winces with effort, his progress agonisingly slow.

187~~8~~ INT. RIMBAUD'S BEDROOM DAY

ISABELLE helps RIMBAUD off with his shirt; he grunts with pain, as the shirt comes off to reveal pulpy red wounds in his armpits caused by the wooden crutches.

188~~9~~ INT. ISABELLE'S BEDROOM NIGHT

ISABELLE starts awake at the SOUND of a heavy crash and cry of pain from RIMBAUD. She scrambles out of bed, fumbling for the bedside oil-lamp.

189~~0~~ INT. RIMBAUD'S BEDROOM NIGHT

ISABELLE lets herself into the room and her lamp reveals a horrifying image: RIMBAUD, one-legged, naked, lies face down on the carpet. ISABELLE drops to her knees beside him.

RIMBAUD

It's time to go.

ISABELLE

What do you mean?

RIMBAUD

It's dawn. The caravan is leaving for the coast: the ivory, the musk. Saddle my horse.

ISABELLE

You're dreaming, it's the middle of the night.

RIMBAUD looks up at her, his blue eyes wide open and lucid.

RIMBAUD

No. No, it's the morning.

FADE

190~~1~~ EXT. FARMHOUSE AT ROCHE DAY

A storm is raging. The rain is blown almost horizontal by violent gusts of wind. A crash of thunder.

Over this, a caption:

VIII ADIEU.

191 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

CLOSE on ISABELLE, as she speaks, her voice soft and hypnotic.

191 Continued

ISABELLE

The drugs they gave him for the pain
made him delirious. So he refused to
go on with them.

192 INT. RIMBAUD'S BEDROOM DAY

RIMBAUD groans with pain as he shifts his position slightly.
ISABELLE sits beside him, feeding him soup. Outside, the
storm continues.

RIMBAUD

Autumn already. Time we were leaving.
Let's leave. I need the sun.

193 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

ISABELLE looks across the table at VERLAINE.

ISABELLE

He would only stay at home a month.
He kept saying he had to travel back
towards the sun, that the sun would
heal him...

She breaks off, suddenly aware of EUGÉNIE looming over them.
VERLAINE sits up with a start.

VERLAINE

Ah, Eugénie, this is Mademoiselle
Rimbaud. She's...

EUGÉNIE

I don't care who she is: all I'm
saying, you don't come back tonight,
you'll find your things in the street.

She moves off, abruptly. ISABELLE watches her for a moment,
clearly a little shaken.

VERLAINE

Take no notice.

ISABELLE

I think perhaps it's time I was going,
M. Verlaine.

VERLAINE

No, wait. Please. Just a minute.
Finish telling me about...your brother.

194 EXT. FARMHOUSE AT ROCHE DAWN 1891

A couple of FARMHANDS lift RIMBAUD into the back of a cart, where he sits in a space between two battered suitcases. ISABELLE climbs up next to the DRIVER. MME RIMBAUD stands, motionless, in the doorway to the farmhouse. It's a gloomy dawn, autumnal drizzle and fog.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

I don't think there's very much more to tell.

At a sign from RIMBAUD, the DRIVER flicks his whip over the tired-looking horse, and the cart heaves into motion. RIMBAUD winces, controls himself, lifts a hand to wave good-bye to his mother.

RIMBAUD'S P.O.V.: a jolting, retreating view of MME RIMBAUD. She doesn't respond to his wave, but stands, perfectly still and expressionless, watching her disappearing son.

ISABELLE (V.O.)

He left.

195 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

VERLAINE listens, hanging on every word.

ISABELLE

We got as far as Marseilles; but by the time he arrived, he was so ill, he had to go straight back into hospital. He'd lost the use of his right arm, and soon a large tumour appeared on the inside of his stump.

VERLAINE closes his eyes, briefly, then opens them again.

VERLAINE'S P.O.V. EUGÉNIE is leaving the bar on the arm of a portly, middle-aged MAN.

VERLAINE turns his attention back to ISABELLE.

196 INT. OPEN WARD AT THE HOSPITAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION DAY 1891

RIMBAUD lies in bed with ISABELLE sitting close by, taking dictation from him. The incurables' ward is flooded with sunlight. RIMBAUD's right arm and hand are entirely swathed in a thick bandage. He's unshaven and pale, his eyes glittering with fever. He murmurs inaudibly: ISABELLE leans in close to hear, her pen flying across the paper.

196 Continued

ISABELLE (V.O.)

On the last day, he dictated a letter to a steamship company, booking a passage to Aden. He wanted the sun so much.

197 INT. ANDRÉ'S EVENING 1892

VERLAINE stares into space. Eventually, ISABELLE breaks the silence.

ISABELLE

You have my card, don't you?

VERLAINE

What? Oh, yes...yes, I do.

He fumbles in a waistcoat pocket and produces the card.

ISABELLE

Will you send the manuscripts to that address?

VERLAINE

Erm, of course.

ISABELLE

Please don't forget. And rest assured we shall make a very careful selection of what is to survive.

VERLAINE

You know, from the time he left, it's all just been one long footnote.

ISABELLE's reaction is a thin smile; she rises to her feet and VERLAINE begins, with some difficulty, to struggle up from the table.

ISABELLE

Please don't get up.

VERLAINE

Won't you let me see you to your hotel?

ISABELLE

No, no. It was an honour to meet such a distinguished poet.

VERLAINE

A pleasure to meet you, mademoiselle.

197 Continued

ISABELLE

Goodbye.

She shakes hands formally, turns and resolutely sets off, leaving the bar. VERLAINE subsides into his chair again.

VERLAINE

Absinthe. Two.

If ANDRE is surprised by this order, he doesn't show it. He brings two glasses, sets one in front of VERLAINE, the other opposite. VERLAINE starts to pour the water very slowly over the sugarlump.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

Since he died, I see him every night. My great and radiant sin.

He looks up. Sitting opposite him at the table is RIMBAUD, seventeen again, picking up at the table with his knife.

VERLAINE

Tell me if you love me.

RIMBAUD

You know I'm very fond of you.
We've been very happy sometimes.

He takes a sip of his absinthe.

RIMBAUD

Do you love me?

VERLAINE

Yes.

RIMBAUD

Then put your hands on the table.

VERLAINE

What?

RIMBAUD

Put your hands on the table.

VERLAINE does so.

RIMBAUD

Palm upwards.

VERLAINE turns his hands palm upwards. RIMBAUD looks at them for a moment; then he leans forward and kisses them. Finally, he looks up at VERLAINE, a faint smile on his face.

197 Continued

CLOSE on VERLAINE: he looks across the table, his eyes misty with tears.

ANOTHER ANGLE: RIMBAUD has disappeared and VERLAINE stares out into space.

198 EXT. STREET IN THE QUARTIER LATIN NIGHT

VERLAINE stumbles home, down a deserted street. It's very late and very cold; there's snow in the air. VERLAINE's breath rises towards the night.

VERLAINE (V.O.)
We were always happy. Always, I remember.

199 INT. STAIRWAY TO VERLAINE'S LODGINGS NIGHT

VERLAINE drags himself up the dark, uncarpeted staircase, swaying from side to side, ricocheting off the walls.

VERLAINE (V.O.)
He's not dead, he's trapped and
living inside me.

200 INT. VERLAINE'S LODGINGS NIGHT

VERLAINE lets himself in, fumbles for matches and lights a single candle on his desk.

VERLAINE
Eugenie? Are you there?

No answer. And the candle, when he moves it across the room, reveals an empty bed. He puts the candle down beside the bed, drops to his knees with a sigh and begins to root around, looking for something under the bed.

VERLAINE (V.O.)
As long as I live, he has some kind of flickering and limited life. It's always the same words and the same gestures - the same images: I walk behind him across a steep, ploughed field; I sit, talking to him in a darkening room, until I can barely see his profile and his expressive hand: I lie in bed at dawn and watch him sleeping and see how nervously his hand brushes at his cheek.

200 Continued

During this, VERLAINE has fetched out from under the bed a big folder. He carries this over to the desk, then goes back for the candle, which he puts on the desk, opens the folder and spreads out with his hand its contents: all RIMBAUD's manuscripts, poems, letters, drawings, prose. He contemplates all this for a moment then turns his attention to ISABELLE's card, which he's fetched out of his pocket. By now, there's silence: and he carefully tears up the visiting card, scattering the pieces.

VERLAINE

I remember him of an evening and
he lives.

He smiles a little to himself and moves OUT OF FRAME, back towards the bed.

The desk, the manuscripts, the fragments of visiting card, flickering candlelight.

201 EXT. ABYSSINIAN PLATEAU DAWN

As in Scene 165, RIMBAUD springs to his feet and begins to hurry towards the edge of the plateau. But this time the CAMERA outpaces him, soaring on ahead; and finally over the edge; until it hovers above the dazzling sea.

Over this, the voices of RIMBAUD and VERLAINE.

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

I've found it.

VERLAINE (V.O.)

What?

RIMBAUD (V.O.)

Eternity
It's the sun mingled
With the sea.

WHITE OUT