

Act III Scene 2



To the sandy deserts and parts of barren villages, the night's rain came softly, and it did not scratch the scarred earth. A truck crossed and re-crossed incipient rivers in its circuitous route through the minefield — Attila and Lara's captors seemed to know their way. Their faces were masked in that inimitable Lawrence of Arabia desert style. And when the rain announced itself, insistently pattering above them, their rushed syllables and jerky gestures seemed to betray excitement. Flasks were hung, rather futilely, out of windows. And when that failed, heads ventured out and tongues out of heads. There was an air of desperation to these antics. Like sailors, idle and adrift in a painted ship on a painted ocean, these masked figures greeted any rain with absurd jollification, which gave way quickly to a ruthless efficiency. Attila thought that the truck's rising and falling added to the nautical metaphor. Before long, a military compound, demarked by sandbag turrets and barbed wire, hove into view.

OOMPH.

A rifle butt crumpled Attila's spine and he fell out of the truck and tasted the sand.

Lara screamed.

"You okay?"

"I'm all right," he choked.

His age was telling. And the story it told was a banal one — a tale of broken bones, of weary joints, of human frailty — "dust to dust" and all that.

Attila's vacant stare did nothing to assure Lara.

"You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah. I'm right," he mumbled, still spitting the parched sand from his mouth.

He got up determinedly.

Guns, held at the hips of the masked men, pointed at them. Lara glanced up at the sky apprehensively, sensing the end. But the guns jerked to the right to indicate a small concrete structure near the barbed boundary.

Attila and his right-hand woman soon found themselves in a small and dire cell. There was a figure huddled in the corner. A loincloth declined to cover the pulsating red lines criss-crossed irregularly on his skin. He was missing multiple fingernails and his right ear. A greasy mop of hair rested atop his head and coursed along his chest to join the coils of rope on the dungeon's floor, with which he had formerly been tied up.



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A commotion began outside. The figure was unmoved. Attila and Lara stood up on tiptoes to peer through the rusted bars across the cell's solitary window. Out the front of the compound, men with bags for heads were lined along the fence.

Rifles cocked.

And though some of the doomed men squirmed, most maintained a brave front. A tattooed man on the side chanted various military incantations. Gun barrels levelled at the men, and glowed in the fluorescent light of the compound's electric lanterns. The broadside rolled out with a painful inevitability. Human limbs assumed impossible positions on the desert floor.

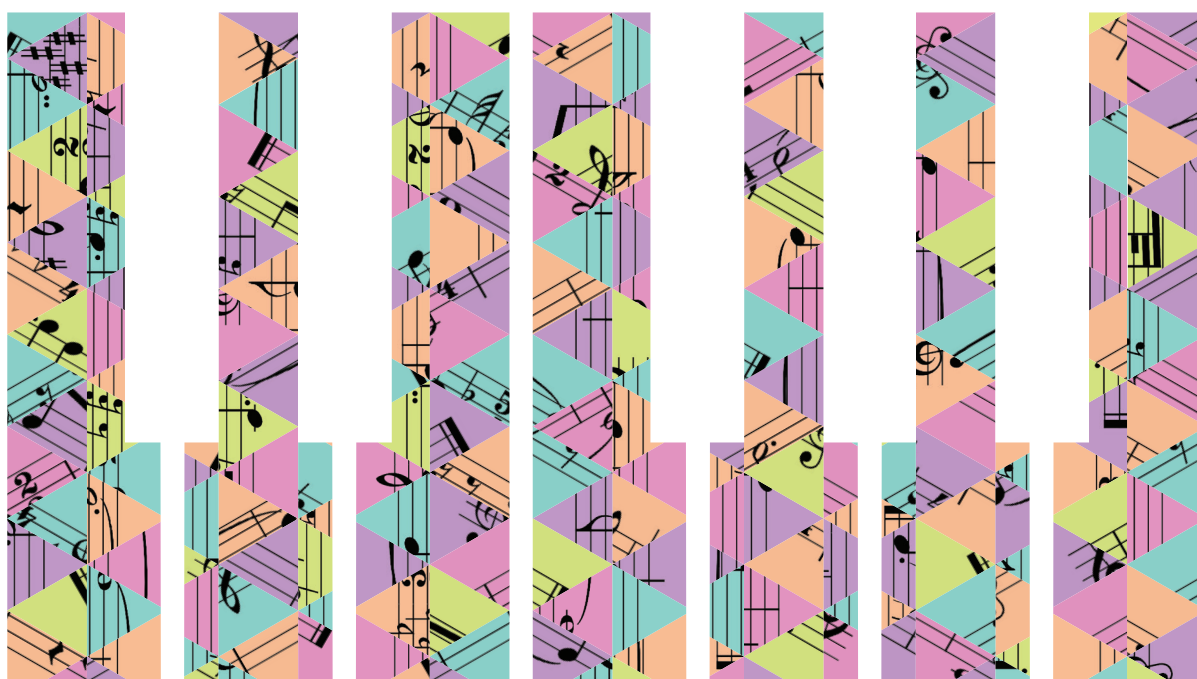
The rifles continued to unload.

And each bullet injected a perverse gasp of life into its target so that the piles of human remains contorted wildly as though invisible medics were desperately defibrillating their liminal patients. At a gruff command, the soldiers stopped the defibrillation. One of them patrolled the line of bodies, prodding them with her bayonet, to ensure no one was left alive.

The spectacle over, Attila and Lara looked at their cellmate to see if the barrage of fire had awakened him. And indeed he was stirring. The man raised himself tentatively on his left hand, bent his knees and launched to his feet. Turning round, he stood, defiant in his nakedness, and faced his fellow prisoners.



A Noteworthy Puzzle



*Red and yellow and pink and green,
Purple and orange and blue.
I can sing a rainbow,
Sing a rainbow,
Sing a rainbow too.*