

FOREVER RED

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY

LAPPING of waves.

A cloud of blood and ash diffuses into water.

A scrap of paper drifts amid the mix -- it's stained red, whatever was written there no longer discernible.

EXT. PIER ENTRANCE - DAY

Gulls SCREECH. A ship's horn BLARES in the distance.

PASSERSBY shuffle to-and-fro, taking in the sights.

Among them stands ANNE PARLOURE, late 50s, a tired face that hasn't found reason to smile in a long time. A silk scarf covers her head, no sign of hair beneath.

Her eyes search the pier, coming to rest on a fisherman at its far end.

She tightens her grip on a clutch bag.

EXT. PIER'S END - DAY

Anne steadies herself on the rail, peers over the side.

A short way from her stands the fisherman: BARKER, late 50s, trim frame, unshaven. His rod leans against the rail, line trailing out into the water.

Barker stares out to sea, joyless, waiting.

ANNE

What do you hope to catch?

BARKER

Ain't up to me.

ANNE

Will you eat it?

BARKER

I might.

Barker looks around, cautious, instinctive, assessing the other folk on the pier.

ANNE

I'm alone.

He feigns a smile, returns to his rod.

ANNE

I want to know where he is.

Barker stares at the waves.

ANNE

My train leaves at six.

Barker blinks, weary. He looks back to see her settle on a bench-seat, waiting patiently.

MOMENTS LATER

They sit together beneath a rain shelter. Barker keeps an eye on his line.

BARKER

Don't think I didn't see you get outta the cab. Too much to hope for a coincidence.

ANNE

Wouldn't that be something.

BARKER

Little point in asking how you found me.

ANNE

Everyone owes someone.

On this she holds his gaze for just a moment too long.

BARKER

I don't know that I can help you.

ANNE

I'm very much beyond help, of this I've been assured.

His eyes shift to the silk scarf.

Anne musters a thin smile.

BARKER

I'd never lie to you, Anne.

ANNE
That's why I never asked.

INT. BARKER'S VAN - DAY

Barker drives. Anne rides passenger.

She scans the interior: a dog-eared photo shows a group of heavily armed MARINES posed around a Union Jack, circa the Falklands War.

A plastic bulldog toy dangles from the rear-view mirror.

BARKER
Where'd it go, eh?

ANNE
I like to think we make the most of it.

He glances across at her, at her hand. There's no ring.

BARKER
You ever, you know..?

Anne frosts. She watches the fields roll past the window.

BARKER
I gave it a go, wasn't for her.

ANNE
I expect the fishing helps.

BARKER
Was the fishing what done it... Did we? Make the most of it?

ANNE
We had our moment.

He sends her a look, expectant, hoping for more.

EXT. FARM TRACK - DAY

Wild meadows surround a dirt track. Barker's van pulls to a halt. It's quiet here, far from the beaten path.

INT. BARKER'S VAN - DAY

Anne and Barker sit in silence.

He thumbs the key -- still in the ignition.

BARKER

It's steep. One way down, you'll
get your boots dirty.

ANNE

They're only boots.

He exits.

She watches him cross to a cutting in the brush. He looks back, waiting.

Anne slips a small lock-knife from her clutch, stows it inside her coat pocket. She takes a steadying breath.

EXT. WOODLAND TRAIL - DAY

Anne follows Barker down a rough path. She moves slow, tiring with the effort. He pauses to let her catch up.

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY

The pair emerge onto a sheltered coastline. A strip of sand hugs a wide swathe of mud leading to the sea. It's deserted.

ANNE

However did you find this place?

Barker shrugs.

BARKER

It's what they paid me for.

He gestures for her to lead.

Barker trails Anne along the beach. She looks uneasy. Her eyes scan the brush-lined cliffs overlooking the bay, secluding them from view.

BARKER

Was a quarry up the coast, barges
used to float in here to unload.
Mostly you'd never know. Flats are
riddled with quicksands. Mud takes
everything down here.

Anne winces at this.

BARKER
How long they give you?

ANNE
Let's say I've taken to dining out.

BARKER
Alone..?

ANNE
Sometimes.

Barker looks hurt. He glances out over the flats: a barnacle encrusted mooring-post rises from the mud a hundred yards from the shore.

BARKER
Sad to hear.

ANNE
Why? The pity ensures impeccable service.

She stops, turns.

ANNE
How much farther?

BARKER
A little more.

Anne tightens her collar to the cold. She tucks her hands into her coat pockets and keeps going.

Barker watches her closely.

BARKER
Was offered a role as a security consultant, some emergent shit-hole. Former soviet block of course.

ANNE
Of course. Sounds like a wonderful opportunity.

BARKER
Wanted to know was I familiar with social media...

ANNE

Are you not?

Ignoring her quip...

BARKER

Landlocked. A deal-breaker for me.
Gotten to like the way it sounds
out here, the sea that is.

ANNE

It's a job, just a means to an end.

BARKER

Whose...

She turns, stares him down.

ANNE

I think we've come far enough.

He halts, looks out to the mooring-post, they're near level
with it now.

She follows his lead, breaks from him.

BARKER

It was true, about him.

Anne stares at the post.

BARKER

Couldn't be trusted. I doubt he
knew whose side he was on anymore.
So caught up in it all. If it
hadn't been us it would've been the
Russians. An' if not them, someone
else. Serbs perhaps.

ANNE

What did you do?

Barker looks away.

ANNE

(forceful)

What did you do?

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DUSK - FLASHBACK

A pile of clothes in the sand.

Two figures stand facing one another. One straight, serious. The other dressed in his underpants, hunched with cold.

BARKER (V.O.)
Gave him a choice... Take a walk
with or without me.

HUNCHED MAN, 40s, struggles through the mud towards the sea.

A YOUNGER BARKER, 30s, watches him, a gun held at his side.

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - MOORING POST - DUSK - FLASHBACK

The Hunched Man grips the post, legs sunk in quicksand to his thighs. He glances back at Barker on the distant shore.

The tide laps about his waist...

BARKER (V.O.)
Like I said, the mud takes
everything.

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY - PRESENT

Anne shudders.

The knife blade peeks from her fist.

Barker, behind her, doesn't see.

ANNE
Who gave the order?

BARKER
There was talk. Interrogation,
worse. They wanted to make an
example--

ANNE
A name!

Anne waits. The wheels turning, truth slowly settling off his silence.

BARKER
For all I knew he'd turned you.
You'd know better than me how they
work an angle.

She gazes at the post, refusing to let him see her tears.

BARKER
Suicide's preferable, missing
better still. Few raised eyebrows
from the top floor--

ANNE
That's enough.

BARKER
I had to. To protect you.

ANNE
Not like this.

He looks away, shamed.

ANNE
Is he..?

She falters, can't bring herself to ask.

BARKER
You come here to settle it?

ANNE
Not while I've a breath left in me.

She summons her strength. Turns to face him.

ANNE
I need you. It's a sad truth,
you're all I've got.

Barker looks up --

INT. BARKER'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

Barker sits at a table. His fishing reel dismantled on newspaper before him. He carefully cleans the components.

INT. ANNE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Anne sits at a desk. She seals an envelope, places it to one side. She carefully tears a scrap of paper into a square.

She picks up a RED marker pen.

INT. BARKER'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY - PRESENT

Barker oils the reel's winding mechanism.

A doorbell RINGS.

He sits there a moment, unsure.

Barker takes a biscuit tin from a cupboard. Opens it, removes the top layer, pulls out a revolver.

INT. BARKER'S COTTAGE - HALL - DAY

Barker approaches the door, the revolver held out of sight.

He opens it to a COURIER, 20s, uniformed, a shrink-wrapped package under his arm.

INT. BARKER'S COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

On the table rests a cardboard box. It's about a square foot in size, carefully sealed, the words HANDLE WITH CARE printed on each side.

Barker stares at it from across the room.

He takes up a knife and slices open an envelope...

INT. ANNE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Anne picks up a phone, dials, listens as it RINGS...

It answers to silence, then:

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Yes?

Anne tenses. She balls her fist, trembling as a wave of pain racks her body. She finds her voice:

ANNE

I was hoping to reach someone in the archives...

A brief silence, before:

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Yes?

ANNE
(in Russian)
I found an old friend today.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
(in Russian)
Tell me...

LATER

The BBC World Service plays in the background.

Anne stirs something into a glass of red wine.

She stands at a window, glass in hand. She gazes out into the night. Raises the glass to her lips.

INT. BARKER'S VAN - DAY - PRESENT

The plastic bulldog pendulums as Barker guides the vehicle over the rough farm track.

He looks grimly to an object wrapped in a plastic bag on the passenger seat.

INT. ANNE'S HOUSE - STUDY - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The BBC World Service continues in the background.

A broken glass. Red wine soaks into the carpet.

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY - PRESENT

SCREECH of gulls. Distant RUMBLE of surf.

Barker trudges along the beach, plastic bag in hand.

He stops. Looks out to where the top of the mooring-post rises just above the water-line.

Barker pulls a cremation urn from the bag.

Kneeling, he gently turns its contents out into the water.

He tilts his head: a small square of paper floats amid the ashes -- a 'hammer and a sickle' drawn in red ink.

He looks out to sea.

Barker slowly rises to his feet. Quietly accepting --

THUT! A bullet punches a hole between his shoulder blades.

He topples into the surf.

Blood mixes with ashes. The scrap of paper spins on the surface, ink bleeding into the water.

FADE OUT