

FOREVER RED

By

STEVE MILES

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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 gaze roams the pier, settling on a fisherman at its 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, a trim frame, unshaven and joyless face.

His rod rests against the rail, the line trailing out into the water. He stares out to sea, waiting

ANNE

What do you hope to catch?

BARKER

Whatever bites.

ANNE

Will you eat it?

BARKER

I might.

ANNE

And if not, you'll put it back..?

Barker looks around, quietly taking stock of the other folk on the pier.

ANNE

I'm alone.

He gives her a polite smile and returns to staring.

ANNE

I want to know where he is.

Barker continues to ignore her.

She watches him, patient -- it's clear she's going nowhere.

Finally he relents, nods.

MOMENTS LATER

They sit on a bench-seat beneath a rain shelter. Barker keeps an eye on his line.

BARKER

Don't think I didn't see you get out of the cab. Was hoping 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

Please, don't insult me with bullshit.

BARKER

Not what I meant.

ANNE

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

Barker glances at her silk scarf.

Anne musters a thin smile.

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 younger Barker among them.

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 steals a glance at her hand -- checking for a ring.

BARKER
You ever, you know..?

Anne frosts at the question. She watches the fields roll past the window, a distance in her eyes.

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

ANNE
I expect the fishing helps.

Barker cracks a smile.

BARKER
Did we, make the most of it?

ANNE
We had our moment.

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

BARKER
I'd never lie to you, Anne.

ANNE
That's why I never asked.

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.

ANNE

Is it far?

BARKER

There's one way down... You'll get your boots dirty.

ANNE

They're only boots.

He exits.

She watches as he crosses 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 stops 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

Good at finding places.

He nods her on.

Barker trails Anne along the beach. She looks uneasy. Her eyes roam 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.
Few signs left here and there,
mostly you'd never know. The mud,
takes everything down here.

Anne tenses 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 protrudes from the mud a hundred
yards from the shore.

BARKER

Sad to hear.

ANNE

It's cheaper, and 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 emerging
shit-hole, former soviet block of
course.

ANNE
Sounds like a wonderful
opportunity.

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

ANNE
Are you not?

Ignoring her quip...

BARKER
Landlocked, that did it for me.
Gotten to like the way it sounds
out here, the sea.

ANNE
And how does it sound?

BARKER
Constant.

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

BARKER
Who's?

She turns, stares him down.

ANNE
I think we've come far enough.

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

She follows his lead, breaks from him, guessing at its
significance.

BARKER
Was true, about him.

Anne stares at the post...

BARKER
Couldn't be trusted, would've
caught up with him eventually, if
not us, the Russians... Not them
someone else, Serbs perhaps. He
took it all surprisingly well, on
the chin as they say.

ANNE
What did you do?

Barker looks away.

ANNE
(forcefully)
What did you do?

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY - FLASHBACK

A pair of handcuffs land in the sand.

Two figures stand facing each other. One straight and serious, the other hunched with defeat. Their faces unseen.

BARKER (V.O.)
Gave him a choice...

The HUNCHED MAN stoops to collect the cuffs.

BARKER (V.O.)
He could take a walk with or
without me.

Hunched Man struggles through the mud towards the post -- the handcuffs swing from his hand.

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

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

The Hunched Man kneels. He threads the cuffs through a thick iron ring attached at ground level to the post.

He CLICKS the cuffs to his wrists securing him in place.

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 stands behind her, doesn't see.

ANNE
You were the only one who knew...

BARKER

Still am... For all I knew you were in it together. Leverage, you'd know better than me how to work an angle. Suicide's preferable, missing better still. Few raised eyebrows from the top floor, but nobody asks questions.

ANNE

You didn't have to do it, not like this.

BARKER

I was protecting you.

Her fist tightens...

She fixes on the post, refusing to let him see her tears.

ANNE

Is he..?

She falters, can't bring herself to say it.

Barker stares at the ground...

BARKER

You come here to settle this?

ANNE

I'll not waste my time on you. Not while I've a breath left in me.

Anne composes herself.

ANNE

I've one final thing to ask of you...

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 and 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 at the other end... then --

MALE 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 found an old friend today.

Silence...

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Tell me...

INT. BARKER'S VAN - DAY - PRESENT

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

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

The BBC World Service plays in the background.

Anne sits motionless in an armchair. Head back. Eyes closed. A peaceful look on her face.

Red wine soaks into the carpet from an overturned glass at her feet.

EXT. COASTAL MUD-FLATS - DAY - PRESENT

SCREECH of gulls. Distant RUMBLE of surf.

Barker trudges along the beach, a plastic bag in hand.

He stops. The tide is in. He looks out to where the top of the mooring-post rises just above the water-line.

Barker pulls a red cremation urn from the bag. He unscrews the lid and unceremoniously dumps its contents of ash into the water.

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

He bristles. Looks out to sea, accepting --

-- THUMP! -- a bullet punches a hole between his shoulder blades.

He sinks to his knees and topples into the surf.

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

FADE OUT