

**STORMSHIFTER**

by

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EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Over black we hear muffled street sounds. A ship passes close by. Basslines bounce, basement to basement, the sounds of drunken men and soothing girls.

Then a flicker of neon in Mandarin, we're moving.

A beautiful voice cuts supernaturally through--

VOICE

*Like one that on an ancient road  
doth walk in fear and dread--*

Strange lights blink in and out playfully as music pushes gently around the words.

VOICE (CONT'D)

*--and having once turned round  
walks on and turns once more his  
head--*

From above we see BEN FROME leaning on a brick wall in an alley, removing the hood of his jacket. He is indistinct, head down, streetlight behind. Muffled sounds are wide and dizzy, a huge neon crab claw points down at him.

VOICE (CONT'D)

*--because he knows a frightful  
fiend--*

Close now behind Frome's head. It blurs out to reveal another man, BLAYNE, seated at an outdoor cafe 20 steps ahead.

VOICE (CONT'D)

*--doth close behind him tread.*

Much closer now, we watch Frome remove his headphones in silhouette. The voice disappears and the sound of everything else crashes in hard. We haven't seen his face yet.

EXT. CAFE - NIGHT

BLAYNE has an espresso in front of him and a folded Chinese newspaper on the table. His tattoos are hand drawn and cryptic.

He blinks at a beep and a phone slides smoothly into his hand. He looks around before he studies the face of a man on the screen. The words "Ben Frome" appear below the picture.

FROME (O.S.)

Hiya Blayne!

Blayne starts in the glow of the phone's screen as Frome slides into the seat opposite, eyes lock hard.

FROME (CONT'D)  
 Don't you love a first date?

Blayne double takes to Frome's picture on his phone with a shifting scowl. He looks up to see Frome's backpack on the table. The darkness under the backpack is aimed at his belly. Blayne's hand freezes halfway into his jacket.

FROME (CONT'D)  
 Must admit I'm real hungry but I  
 got a nice quiet hotel I'd love to  
 show you first.

INT. ROADHOUSE RESTROOM - DAY

Red dusty light dancing, we are thousands of miles from the harbour.

Frome is scratching his chin in front of the mirror. Thoughtful at first, then preening. We pull back slowly as he speaks to HALLIDAY.

FROME  
 And so now I'm totally addicted to  
 podcasts. You know how it is in our  
 profession, so much hanging around.  
 It started with "The History of  
 Rome"--

He splashes water on his face, pulling back.

FROME (CONT'D)  
 (shaking his hands dry)  
 Then the histories all kind of  
 blurred. Now I'm way into these  
 Buddhist lectures. Recorded on  
 phones, soo sexy. Man I tell you,  
 it's just what I need. Living. In.  
 The. Moment.  
 (looks around)  
 I've been so angry lately.

A wider view of the grimy restroom shows a smashed mirror and a door hanging crazily from its cubicle.

Frome looks very closely at his face, his eyes, a few grey hairs in the mirror.

Halliday watches silently. He has a surprised look on his face, he is dead. Sitting on a trashcan by the basin.

EXT. ROADHOUSE - DAY

FROME emerges from the restroom pulling his hat down hard. Maybe he's protecting his face from the red dust clouds blowing through.

INT. ROADHOUSE COUNTER - DAY

The blank eyed cashier is playing a game on his phone. Behind him on a security screen we see Frome take a bag from the trunk of a car. He checks inside the bag and walks out of frame.

EXT. ROADHOUSE - DAY

On dashboard cam we see Frome walk around the front of a 4WD. He walks well. A car door slams and the camera shakes as the bag lands on the seat. We drive off into a red storm.

INT. A HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

We're watching a surveillance video of Frome walking around a dirty 4WD. It's the reverse of the shot we just watched. Frome pauses at the car door and flips a finger at the camera, face still covered.

An OLD MAN hands away the Ipad and blinks. He sits on a bed as an ASSISTANT shuffles off with the device. He smooths his suit on his thighs.

OLD MAN

If nobody is afraid of me, I'm  
meaningless.

We hear a groan, there is movement on the bed behind him.

A well-built guy in a suit gently approaches, SHELDON.

SHELDON

It's time to move again sir. Soon.

OLD MAN

They're coming, I know. Help me.

SHELDON removes the old man's coat and shirt, helps him insert a tube in his arm which pumps red from the body behind him. We hear restraints rattle as we close on the OLD MAN's face.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

They have no idea, the gifts I've  
given them.  
(smiles sadly)

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A small derelict office tower has been converted into a grungy nightclub. It sits alone on a river with beautiful city lights behind. The DJ is winding it up inside.

On an external staircase, Ben and ANNA share a bottle as a SAX PLAYER warms up softly. His quiet demented notes make some sense of the party noise from inside.

BEN FROME

(slowly)

After I left the outback I waited  
in Sydney for word. He'd been  
through Hong Kong, Damascus, Cairo.

He takes a careful slug and passes the bottle to ANNA.

ANNA

He must be nearly gone now. How  
does he still travel like that?

BEN FROME

Ghouls, my dear. You don't want to  
know. He only lives the lives of  
others now.

They pause as the fire door opens a crack. Someone shouts the  
stage time and it shuts again.

BEN FROME (CONT'D)

Anyway, huge storms and I'm stuck  
in Sydney and I get word he was in  
Kiev.

ANNA

World's gone crazy--

She slips on a scary mask as the sax player plays a call and  
response to her line. The music continues crazily into the  
next scene--

EXT. KIEV STREET - DAY

A happy couple is haggling over an amateur but peaceful  
landscape painting. The artist is wearing a Yuri Gagarin tee.

The painting is suddenly whipped away by a huge gust of wind.  
Chaos and worried faces as the wind wreaks havoc. Weather is  
dangerous and unpredictable these days, sometime in the near  
future.

The OLD MAN walks by, hunkered down and protected by  
bodyguards who appear on edge in the sudden excitement.

EXT. A WIDER KIEV STREET - DAY

He shuffles on, oblivious to the strange sunstorm as his  
bodyguards angle around him.

EXT. A CHURCH - DAY

He stops in front of a beautiful Orthodox church. We enjoy a  
few details with him. His bodyguards scan in the background.

OLD MAN

The colors thrill me. So much love.

SHELDON  
It's beautiful sir, unusual.

OLD MAN  
It's wasted on them. If only we  
could enjoy it in private, Sheldon.

A group of tourists takes noisy selfies behind them.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
We will make these cities quiet  
again.

A gust of wind grabs his jacket.

SHELDON  
But first sir there will be a lot  
of noise. Please, let me help you.

OLD MAN  
Noise indeed, my friend. Here--

The old man squints once more into the dazzling colors.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Anna, onstage in her mask, is playing electronic instruments in a maelstrom of noise. Lights crash like lightning through green smoke. The sax player from the balcony is locked in close with the guitarist and bassplayer, all masked. The sound slowly freezes into a huge cloud.

Over this the voice from the opening returns.

VOICE  
*But soon there breathed a wind on  
me, nor sound nor motion made--*

EXT. A COLONADE IN KIEV - DAY

Pigeon wings crackle across the sound of the band.

We track across a bunch of kids flitting toward and around us on skateboards.

The shot continues left into the dark of a colonade and the old man appears, tottering away from us.

VOICE  
*-- its path was not upon the sea in  
ripple and or shade.*

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

In the dark, Frome's face flickers in strobes and music.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Anna on stage. She beckons, Frome likes her.

EXT. A SQUARE IN KIEV - DAY

From above, the old man shuffles across the square surrounded by a careful array of bodyguards.

OLD MAN (V.O.)  
Coleridge, Sheldon. The Rime of the  
Ancient Mariner.

Sped up people flow around them in the square.

SHELDON (V.O.)  
Wonderful sir. You'll be pleased to  
know we found your desert friend.  
He's in Singapore.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Like bats, figures creep out from the dark and close in on FROME, who is lost in the music.

EXT. A SQUARE IN KIEV - DAY

We pull in closer to the old man. Sheldon listens with one eye as they watch a couple ignoring each other on their phones.

OLD MAN  
You know, they're not scared by  
poetry any more Sheldon. They've  
seen it all on their little screens  
in artless detail. Their dirty  
little thoughts aren't private any  
more.

He stops a few feet from the couple and examines them. They are oblivious.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
They're not scared that we watch  
them. Their biggest fear is that  
nobody is watching them.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Same club shot. Frome has disappeared. The assassins trade looks and scan. They make plans with their hands.

The band takes it down deep.

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Frome is running.

INT. CLUB - NIGHT

The crowd is winding up.

EXT. BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Frome is moving away fast. Music ripples off distant buildings.

He crouches and looks back.

EXT. CLUB CARPARK - NIGHT

A man scans around him, nods into an earpiece and presses his phone.

EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

The club explodes!

EXT. BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Frome absorbs the information and moves on quickly.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Wispy clouds, dark grey threatens angrily.

With a rattle, a surveillance drone enters frame. It has a kooky logo on the side.

It whips uselessly in screaming wind, a piece falls off.

As the engine kicks up to compensate we hear a whine--

INT. FROME'S FLAT - DAY

-- which merges with a kettle boiling as Frome stares.

We hear a doorbell ringing, it could have been ringing for hours.

EXT. A VILLA - DAY

Two armed agents wait patiently by a door.

They look at each other, then up at a spot in the sky. A pair of boutique professionals. They kick in the door and enter.

INT. A VILLA - DAY

They work the villa room by room. As they reach the centre they lock eyes and look out to the pool. The kettle is still screaming.

There's a dead guy in a poolchair.

BEN FROME (V.O.)  
(crackly)  
I'm guessing you found my friend in  
Mexico?

More agents enter the villa and confirm the obvious. There's  
a helicopter above now.

INT. FROME'S FLAT - DAY

Still staring at the kettle.

BEN FROME  
Wow that's a whole lot of fossil  
fuel going down right there.

EXT. CABIN OF A MILITARY HELICOPTER - DAY

The copilot smacks the wall in disgust.

BEN FROME (V.O.)  
Not to mention the senseless waste  
of a fine but miss-spent fellow.

INT. FROME'S FLAT - DAY

The kettle stops with a shudder.

BEN FROME  
At least he was waiting in the  
dark. There's a few watts  
compensation at least.

INT. COMMAND CENTRE - DAY

Men in suits blink variously.

Frome's boss SWEDE only sounds a little anxious.

SWEDE  
Nice work Ben. Be more fun gloating  
over a single malt though.

A man in a suit adjusts a bluetooth contraption carefully.

BEN FROME (V.O.)  
Nothing to be proud of, they did  
more damage than me in the end.  
(pained pause)  
But I'm working on that.  
(static breaks his voice  
up for him)

Swede raises his hands to an aide, where is he?

The aide is sweating over screens, baffled.

SWEDE

The old man is untouchable now.  
Saudi Arabia. But he is still  
proactive. We are losing people.

BEN FROME (V.O.)

I know. And it will soon go up  
another click. A man should be at  
your door round about now. He has  
the keys to a room. In fifteen  
minutes another man will tell you  
where this room is.

Men on the fringe spring into action. A confused man is seen  
on a security screen, entering a large foyer.

BEN FROME (V.O.)

In this room is the device I  
recovered from Mexico. And  
instructions on how to find the  
ones in Broken Hill and Singapore.  
From what we can tell they are some  
kind of disruptive weather device.  
We have no idea how many he has out  
there, what they can do. We call  
them nodes and they're deep.

INT. FROME'S FLAT - DAY

Through the window he watches branches wave restlessly.

BEN FROME

I have to go now. He has people in  
your room. Be good.

INT. COMMAND CENTRE - DAY

All eyes glaze professionally and scan the room in the sudden  
silence.

EXT. SAUDI DESERT RESORT - DAY

The old man sits on a balcony in front of a plate of dates.

Sheldon enters. The old man smiles and raises his eyebrows  
with a question. Sheldon nods his head sadly.

OLD MAN

Don't worry, he won't be long.  
We're not exactly hiding are we?

Sheldon adjusts a pillow on the back of the old man's chair.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

I'm tired Sheldon, so tired. But  
I'd love to see him. He was such a  
bright boy.

He examines a fruit fly which is crawling across the date in his fingers.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
*He prayeth best who loveth best all  
things both great and small*

He blows gently and bites the date. A strange breeze fills the balcony.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)  
I taught him poetry too, you know?  
But he's not so delicate these  
days.

EXT. DESERT - AFTERNOON

Frome is on a dirty big bike, screaming through heat and haze. Crazy wind grabs dust from the road behind him, a storm is coming.

EXT. RESTAURANT TERRACE - NIGHT

Assorted men in assorted national attire bow as they leave the old man alone at a large table.

As bodyguards watch from the shadows, waiters try to control bits of restaurant flying about in the rising wind.

The old man closes his eyes blissfully and listens to the wind as if it were a symphony.

In a dark corner a bodyguard watches with a hardened face. His eyes widen suddenly and strangely and he slumps in the shadows.

INT. SECURITY GUARD ROOM - NIGHT

Screens black out one by one, lights stop blinking. Three guards watch dumbfounded. They are duct-taped silently together, an explosive device sits at their feet.

EXT. RESORT RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Chaotic movement in the faint light that remains. Wind whirls, bodies slip in and out of shadow. Three men are close on the old man. They calmly move him back into the structure as the storm howls.

Three flashes and they fall.

The old man looks sadly down at them as an emergency light flashes on his face. Things are flying about more furiously now as Frome appears and beckons him toward a fire stair.

They step over a body as they descend into the bright stairwell. The wind is muted now and they remain silent.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A cell phone dances on the tiles for Sheldon. He is lying on the floor watching it with surprised dead eyes.

EXT. CARPARK - NIGHT

The old man winces as he is pushed into a car boot.

It slams shut and we fade to black as the car races off into the dark. The storm is screaming now.

EXT. DESERT - AFTERNOON

A time-lapse morphs to long calm afternoon shadows. Frome and the old man face each other, sitting on the sand.

Frome drinks from a canteen and the old man watches him, rasping softly.

The old man is visibly suffering.

OLD MAN

You were such a beautiful boy, my favorite student. Is it really my fault you turned out like this?

FROME

I guess it is huh.

Frome looks at his watch.

OLD MAN

So vulgar, really?

Frome paints the sand with a trickle of water.

FROME

Don't you want to tell me some more about your toys now?

OLD MAN

They're wonderful aren't they? Fantastically complicated, even for you.

(he coughs a bit)

I think the best way to describe them is that they accelerate arithmetic.

FROME

I guess we'll figure it out then. But why?

Lightning separates the dark horizon.

OLD MAN

They're all sheep. They disgust me.

FROME

You drink their blood! But I'm not afraid of you any more.

OLD MAN

They drink their childrens' blood!

(surprised by his own sudden anger)

They destroy the earth and spend their profits crassly. I can't bear to watch it. For all of my foibles, I have a talent for nurturing talent.

(sad now)

You were such a talent Benjamin.

FROME

You know I could have been many things. I know you've been watching, all my life.

OLD MAN

You have plenty of time. But you will be busy, for now. I'm afraid I've made a much more delicious mess than anybody realizes.

(he trails sand through his fingers)

There's no stopping it. Young people will have no choice but to wake up. There is no such thing as privacy any more. The world won't let them sleep. What we have done to the planet is an existential threat that Coleridge wouldn't have believed. I've just accelerated the delivery.

He puts his parched head back and somehow enjoys the last of the afternoon sun.

Big drops of rain thud heavily into the sand around them.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

There's no secret code, no frightened confession here Ben. It is irreversible. It's just a shame that I'm too tired to watch it blossom. It's going to be beautiful.

There is another thud and the old man sinks to the sand.

Frome races to his car at pace as new rain fractures the setting sun.

THE END