

A.R.P.

A short film
By Daniel Parkes

PRIME MINISTER WINSTON CHURCHILL

(speech broadcast on September 11, 1940)

When I said in the House of Commons that I thought it improbable that the enemy's air attack in September could be more than three times as great as it was in August I was not of course referring to barbarous attacks upon the civil population but to the great air battle which is being fought out between our fighters and the German Air Force... This wicked man, this monstrous product of former wrongs and shame, has now resolved to try to break our famous island race by a process of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction. What he has done is to kindle a fire in British hearts, here and all over the world, which will glow long after all traces of the conflagration he has caused have been removed. He has lighted a fire which will burn with a steady and consuming flame...

FADE IN:

EXT. BRIGHTON RESIDENTIAL ALLEYWAY -DAY

BLACK. An air raid siren is wailing. There is the sound of distant bombing. A man is breathing -nervous and tense. Suddenly an aircraft engine can be heard whizzing overhead, and the whistle of a falling bomb. A bomb explodes loudly in the distance. People can be heard running, some shouting, as they evacuate.

FRED BAXTER (V.O)

We speak of it in ignorance, with condescension. And yet, the reality of it defies some awkward literary description. That is because fear, the most indescribable of human emotions, is not really an emotion, or even a feeling. It is a reaction.

EXT. BRIGHTON RESIDENTIAL ALLEYWAY - CONTINUOUS

BAXTER is half-walking, half-running down an alleyway checking that it is clear of people. He is in a warden uniform, a hard helmet with the white letters ARP on it, a whistle around his neck. He is in his mid-twenties, young and on-edge.

FRED BAXTER (V.O.)

My name is Fred Baxter. I am an Air Raid
Precautions Warden. Unlike my older
brother Eric, I chose this path, rather
than serve in the armed forces. Few understand.
But it is a choice, not a reaction.

It is midday, on an overcast day, Friday, September 20, 1940. A few residents, some with gas masks, rush past in the opposite direction. BAXTER finds a DRUNK MAN almost unconscious on the ground. Trying to lift him to his feet, the DRUNK MAN refuses BAXTER's assistance, pushing him away.

DRUNK MAN

Where's the bloody front line?...
you crazy ... coward...

Muttering under his breath, the DRUNK MAN stumbles down the alleyway.

The alleyway is now completely clear, but then BAXTER spots a small figure in the distance. It is TOM, no older than four years of age, crouched low, innocently playing with some marbles on the ground. BAXTER quickens his pace.

BAXTER

Oi! You there!

TOM looks up in fright. Upon seeing a man in a helmet running toward him, he quickly gathers his marbles and runs down the alleyway and into the first house he sees. BAXTER follows, blowing his whistle.

INT. RESIDENTIAL ROOM -DAY

Entering the hallway, BAXTER peers through a gap in the jammed door into the room. At first he can only hear news of the air raid playing over a wireless radio in the distance, but then his eyes adjust to the room. Suddenly, a shadow moves, revealing the boy's presence. BAXTER begins struggling with the door.

BAXTER

Hello? ...Hello?!

Are you in there?!

The door finally gives way and BAXTER bursts into the room. It is an ordinary room, pictures on the wall, half-eaten food on the table, next to which is an ARGUS newspaper. The noise of bombing is increasing outside. There is debris scattered across the room. The radio has now changed to light music, softly playing in the background.

But what finally grabs the warden's attention is a large metallic cylinder impaled in the floor. It is an unexploded bomb, tail fins pointed upwards, smoke filling the air. He can hardly take his eyes off it, even as he frantically searches the room for TOM. He checks behind the radio, under the table and is almost about to give up when he spots a marble on the floor. Picking it up he examines it for a moment, realising the boy must be in the room.

BAXTER

(nervously)

Alright, where are you?

I know you're in here.

From the boy's POV, we see BAXTER with the marble. Thinking he is spotted, the boy moves, causing a piece of debris to fall, exposing his position.

BAXTER follows the sound and finally spots TOM obscured by rubble, right next to the bomb.

BAXTER

(more confidently)

I'm not going to hurt you.

We've got to leave! Quickly!

BAXTER starts to move towards TOM, but as soon as he does so the child moves backwards, causing the rubble to move, unsettling the bomb.

BAXTER stops and reconsiders. The bombing is intensifying outside. Intermittent flashes of light illuminate the room. Pictures on the wall vibrate.

BAXTER

(nervously)

Please! This is important.

We must get out of here.

Right now.

TOM stares back. A bomb lands nearby to the house, causing BAXTER to jump. At the same time the radio station goes off air, reduced to a hiss of static. The boy shrinks back into his hideaway.

BAXTER

Listen! It's a bomb. It could go off
at any moment! Come on!

TOM is too young to understand.

BAXTER turns in dismay, breathing heavily, and takes a few steps toward the door, away from the boy, when he remembers he has a marble in his hand. He turns around and shows it to the boy.

BAXTER

(playfully)

Look what I've got!

TOM's eyes are fixed on the marble. BAXTER palms the marble into his other hand and magically makes it disappear. Then he 'takes' the marble from behind his ear. TOM smiles.

BAXTER

I know a place where there are many more like these. Children play there. It's lots of fun.

TOM's eyes widen. BAXTER begins inching closer.

TOM

Do they... do they have red ones?

BAXTER

Yes. And blue and green. Any colour you like -especially red!

TOM seems entranced by the prospect.

BAXTER

What's your name, son?

TOM (hesitantly)

I'm Tom.

BAXTER

OK, Tom. You know, I can take you there if you like. It's not far. But we have to hurry or we might miss out!

TOM nods with building enthusiasm. Carefully, BAXTER moves closer to TOM. Part of the debris collapses and BAXTER freezes, flinching as if the bomb could explode at any moment. BAXTER finally manages to get the boy into his arms, giving him the marble and hurries out of the room.

Bombs are now falling in the vicinity outside. The walls are vibrating. A picture of a proud son, in soldier's uniform, crashes to the floor.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL BRIGHTON ALLEYWAY -DAY

BAXTER explodes out of the house with the child in his arms. He comes to a halt. The boy's parents are running toward him, shouting.

MOTHER

Tom! There you are Tom!

The FATHER hurriedly grabs the boy from BAXTER.

FATHER

Hey, conchie, what the bleedin'
hell do you think
you're doing with my boy?!
Clear off!

The FATHER begins running back the way they came, the MOTHER flashes an apologetic smile as they depart. TOM looks back at BAXTER, with a helpless look of confusion, tightly holding the 'magic' marble.

BAXTER, recovering his breath, watches TOM until he disappears around a corner. He smiles briefly. From behind there is a sudden, loud, earth shattering explosion. BAXTER jumps in fright. The house instantly disintegrates, smoke enveloping its remains. Avoiding the falling debri, BAXTER quickly exits back down the alleyway.

FADE OUT

PRIME MINISTER WINSTON CHURCHILL

(speech broadcast on September 11, 1940) cont...

...Every man and woman will therefore prepare himself to do his duty whatever it may be, with special pride and care... We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and

survival and of a victory won not only
for ourselves but for all, a victory won,
not only for our own time, but for the
long and better days that are to come.

"SILVER SCREEN"

(Words and music by DANIEL PARKES / Vocals performed by DEBORAH RAM)

Don't give me Mr. Fred Astaire
Or any Charlie Chaplin skit
With that greased up head of hair
I'll show them who has the wit.
It'll be some Hitchcock fable
End with a Max Miller song
In the arms of Mr Gable
Not just a shelter sing-along.
Name written in white lights
Red carpet all the way to the door
Synch sound is yet another highlight
Matched only by the technicolour
Yes this has been my long life dream
To see myself on that old silver screen.

Light up any Pinewood studio
Fly off to some exotic far land
Better than any Greta Garbo
Move over young Miss Judy Garland
Of course I'll act so cute and coy
More than your Fred and Ginger dance
I bet they'll quickly forget Myrna Loy
Sign a ten picture deal at half the chance
Arrive in either a Bentley or Rolls
Hurry in before the picture starts
Can't hear yourself over the reporter's calls
I've gone and stolen the nation's hearts
Yes, it'll be the grandest thing you've ever seen
When I'm up on that old silver screen.