

The Underneath

By

Grant Chemidlin

[gchemidlin@gmail.com](mailto:gchemidlin@gmail.com)

INT. SURGEON'S ROOM - DUSK

The room is bleak. A dim light hangs from the ceiling, accompanied by a few flickering candles. At the center of the room, a DOCTOR (70) hovers above a wooden operating table. He's wearing a black mask, devoid of any likeness to a human face. It's cold and lifeless, like a black hole tugging at your soul.

A BOY (17) lies below him on the table. He too wears the same mask.

DOCTOR  
Try to be still.

The doctor holds black thread and a bloodstained needle pressed against the boy's scalp, where mask meets skin.

As soon as the needle plunges into the boy's scalp...

BOY  
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

The ear-splitting scream slowly fades into a school bell.

CUT TO BLACK:

STUDENT #1 (V.O.)  
What are you scared or somethin'??

EXT. SUBURBAN ROAD - DAY

BOY (17) rides his bike down the sidewalk on his way home from school. He's dressed like all the other kids: white short-sleeve button-down, tie, and slacks. And the black mask of course, identical to everyone else in this small community. Also identical: the houses. The street is lined with neat, grey boxes, indistinguishable from one to the next. And not a car in sight.

BOY (V.O.)  
Hell no! I just...I don't know...It's a big step!

Boy passes a masked man mowing his lawn in a shirt and tie.

STUDENT #2 (V.O.)  
It's *the* step. I've been looking forward to this since year 5...I've literally been counting down the days.

The bike cruises down the street. Boy watches a group of 8 year olds, all wearing masks, playing in an open field.

(CONTINUED)

STUDENT #1 (V.O.)  
Yeah yeah, we all have.

BOY(V.O.)  
I--

STUDENT #2 (V.O.)  
It's about time we're taken  
seriously around here.

STUDENT #1 (V.O.)  
And no more school, means no more  
boring lectures by the Makers.

Student #2 grumbles like an old man.

STUDENT #2 (V.O.)  
*Resist...or succumb to the evils of  
the world...*

A masked woman waters a dead bush in her front lawn. Then we CUT to a masked child swinging. Even he's wearing the shirt and tie.

STUDENT #1 (V.O.)  
Yanno my sister knew this girl from  
her year...just days before their  
ceremony...she did *the*  
*unforgivable*...and no one's seen  
her since...just poof...gone.

The bike whizzes by two men holding identical briefcases crossing the street. They stop to stare at Boy after he passes.

STUDENT #2 (V.O.)  
I bet she's in a ditch out there in  
that forest.

Boy sits on his parked bike at the edge of the road. He looks out at the vast forest in front of him, an after school ritual.

STUDENT #1 (V.O.)  
C'mon man...

BOY (V.O.)  
Maybe she just...I don't know...ran  
away...to whatever's beyond the  
woods.

STUDENT #2 (V.O.)  
HA, ain't nothin' but twigs and  
berries out there my friend. Twigs.  
And. Berries.

Boy grabs his handlebars and turns to ride home.

INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Boy sits at a square kitchen table, fiddling with a wooden fork. He sits across from MOTHER (40), stiff and soft-spoken, like she's afraid of being overheard.

MOTHER  
I'm proud of you.

Mother forces conversation but is disengaged, her mind wandering elsewhere.

BOY  
For what?

MOTHER  
You've made it. The  
temptation...it'll all be gone  
after tomorrow. Trust me.

Boy sits slumped in silence as Mother get's up to move toward the counter. She stops mid-step, her back turned away from Boy.

MOTHER  
Dad's proud too...I'm sure of it.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Boy creaks down the hall. He stops at his father's room and peaks through the crack. FATHER (40) is sitting in front of an easel. Surrounding him are dozens of huge canvases, each covered by grey bed sheets.

From a distance we notice his neck, just below his mask, is disfigured with burn scars.

Father takes notice of Boy watching him, jumps up from his seat, and closes the door.

INT. FATHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

From behind the door Father pauses, his head hangs low, hand pressed against the wooden door.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Boy flops back onto his bed. He looks up at the ceiling, his arms sprawled out. Then, he turns to his side and curls up into a ball. We start to hear the faint sound of a newborn baby crying as we...

FADE TO BLACK

[THE FOLLOWING THREE SCENES WILL BE INTERCUT]

INT. NURSE'S ROOM - NIGHT

We are seeing up from the eyes of a crying newborn baby. Our vision is slow and blurred. A MAKER, wearing a 50s nurse cap, hovers above us. She goes in and out of focus while she starts to lower a tiny black mask over our face.

Immediately, the baby stops crying, comforted by the presence of the mask.

MAKER

Shhhh. It's alright. You're okay now.

INT. CLASSROOM - NIGHT

Boy sits at a desk in the center of a black abyss. A fog swirls at his feet. A dim spotlight shines from above.

Three masked figures appear draped in black cloaks. Surrounding Boy, they shout twisted rants.

MAKER #1

It's brought us *unity*.

MAKER #2

Underneath, live your greatest fears.

Their demeanor is stern and threatening.

MAKER #3

Don't be like your father now...

Their masks are overwhelmingly close, smothering Boy.

(CONTINUED)

MAKER #1  
Alone we are WEAK!

MAKER #3  
BURN HIM!

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Boy stands before an old battered mirror. He slowly takes off his mask, revealing nothing but blank skin. No eyes, no nose, no mouth.

Boy tries to scream out, fingers frantically tearing at skin. Then-

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Boy jolts up from bed, his chest heaving with labored breaths. Shirt soaked with sweat. His fingers scan his mask: still there.

Crouching on the ground, Boy lifts up a loose floorboard from beside his bed. He pulls out a small box and opens it. Inside: a large silver spoon and a tattered scrap of paper.

Boy picks up the spoon and wipes away a smudge with his thumb. He gazes at his distorted reflection.

Then, he picks up the paper: a faded Medusa. But the image has been torn just above the nose. Boy stares at only her eyes. She gazes back. A ringing school bell fades in.

EXT. SUBURBAN ROAD - DAY

Sunlight breaches a patch of clouds, bouncing off the wheels of a bike.

We pass an intercom perched on the corner of a building. It announces on repeat:

MAKER (V.O.)  
There cannot be I or Me, only Us  
and only We.

Boy with his backpack riding down the street. He notices on the sidewalk: a mother finishes tying her son's shoelace and pulls him in for a big hug. Then-

Pulling back from the woods, Boy stands at the edge of the road. He throws his bike down and treks forward.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Boy wanders through the woods admiring each unique feature.

A hand feels the coarse bark of an oak tree. Sunlight bounces between bundles of green leaves. A caterpillar slinks along a branch. Two Blue Jays soar through open air.

Boy lies in the grass looking up at the clouds.

Next, he's kneeling in front of a pool of water collecting at the bottom of a stream. He looks around: coast is clear.

Gazing at his reflection, he starts to take off his mask.

BUT then he pauses in hesitation. He secures his mask back onto his face as he stands up. Boy looks down at the ground, his thoughts stricken with turmoil. After a beat he looks up. Then turns around to walk back towards home when-

A twig CRACKS. Boy lunges back and grabs a nearby rock. He holds the rock up over his head, ready to defend himself. Then-

He sees her.

Hidden in the bushes, icy blue eyes watch with caution. GIRL (22), a mask-less vision, steps out from her coverage. Red curls hang by her shoulders.

Boy is captivated; it's the first human face he's ever seen. He takes notice of its curvatures, her freckled cheeks, chapped pink lips.

A long pause. Both are statues.

Boy struggles to articulate, his mind baffled.

GIRL

It's okay.

BOY

Who are you?

GIRL

A friend. Who are you?

Boy hesitates to answer. He clenches the rock in his fist.

BOY

Where did you come from?

(CONTINUED)

GIRL  
Originally? Same as you.

BOY  
But your...

GIRL  
Mask? No, that's gone.

BOY  
Why?

GIRL  
Something tells me you might  
already know. Otherwise, you  
wouldn't be out here.

BOY  
But...why are you out here?

GIRL  
I'm waiting for someone.

BOY  
Who?

Girl takes a few steps closer to Boy.

GIRL  
Anyone brave enough to leave.

BOY  
No...no I couldn't. Without the  
masks we're...

Boy fumbles over the words of his teachers.

BOY  
...exposed. Possessed by hate.

Girl looks down at her feet as she carefully chooses her words.

GIRL  
Underneath that mask is a face,  
your face. And they'll do anything  
in their power to convince you  
otherwise.

BOY  
Face?

Girl holds her hands to her cheeks.

GIRL

It's what you call this. Right here. Eyes, mouth, nose, ears.

Boy drops the rock.

BOY

But...

Girl looks back into the depths of the woods.

GIRL

Look, I know this is a lot to process. But *trust* me. The world is a whole lot bigger than you think.

Boy's mind burns with a thousand questions but the first to emerge is...

BOY

Are you real?

A silence settles between them.

Girl looks at Boy like no one ever has before. Like she can see the hidden face beneath his mask.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Boy bursts through the door, passed Mother, and runs up to his room.

MOTHER

Where have you been? Everybody's already heading over. We're going to be late!

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Boy grabs the silver spoon from underneath the floor. He paces back and forth. Then throws the spoon onto his bed. At that moment, we hear a CREAK from the door.

Boy spins around to see Father standing in front of him. Neither says a word. Father notices the spoon on Boy's bed and picks it up.

BOY

Before your initiation, you got caught taking off your mask...didn't you?

Father looks up. After a beat, he gives a quiet nod.

(CONTINUED)

BOY  
And...The Makers, they...burned  
your face off...didn't they?

Father gives another sad nod. A long beat. Boy goes and looks out the window.

BOY  
What if I left and wanted to come  
back?

Boy turns to see his father's response, even though he knows the answer. He shakes his head.

BOY  
Can't you come with me?

Again, Father shakes his head.

BOY  
Well is there anything even out  
there? Am I just going crazy?

Boy paces back and forth.

BOY  
Just tell me what I should do!  
PLEASE...TELL ME!

Boy sounds like he's on the verge of tears. Father pulls him into a hug. Then quietly exits, leaving Boy sitting alone on his bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

MOTHER  
All ready?

Boy gives an unconvincing nod. Mother shepherds him out the door.

EXT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

Boy stands at the front of the line of eager teens. A huge black door separates him from a permanent surgery.

A MAN gestures to Boy that it's his turn to go inside.

Boy takes a step forward but then stops in his tracks. He takes a deep breath.

Boy turns to face his peers and slowly removes his mask. Gasps fill the air. Kids lurch back in horror. Then, he takes off running.

Mask in hand, Boy sprints down the street. We still trail behind him, yet to glimpse his face. Only the back of his head is visible.

INT. FATHER'S ROOM - TWILIGHT

A shot of grey bed sheets falling through the air, like graceful autumn leaves.

EXT. STREET - TWILIGHT

Boy passes two kids. They scream and begin to run away.

INT. FATHER'S BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

We see flashes of canvases. A man's face, painted over and over. Self-portraits: some realistic, others abstract. Colors flood the room.

EXT. STREET - TWILIGHT

Boy runs by a startled older woman. She puts her hand up to her mask, where her mouth should be.

EXT. FOREST - TWILIGHT

Without hesitation, Boy jumps the border and sprints into the woods.

He darts through the trees, ducking under branches.

INT. FATHER'S BEDROOM - TWILIGHT

Father kneels in the center of the room, surrounded by sheets and torn up paintings. His head sinks into his arms.

EXT. CLEARING - TWILIGHT

Boy stops. From behind him we see a figure, out of focus and blurry, standing a few yards away. The figure appears to be Girl.

Boy drops his mask onto the dirt.

C/U of Boy's pale face. His striking hazelnut eyes, drunk with intensity.

GIRL (V.O.)  
Don't you want to know?

Girl reaches out her hand, gesturing Boy to follow her.

C/U Boy's hand slowly reaching out. It stops mid air. Then-

(CONTINUED)

BOY (V.O.)  
Sometimes...maybe it's easier  
not to know.

EXT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

C/U of the same hand reaching mid-air but no longer out in  
the forest.

MAN  
Go on.

Boy snaps back to reality, his hand dropping to his side.  
Just then - the door opens and Doctor emerges.

He wraps his arm around Boy's shoulders and leads him inside  
the dark room. The door slowly closes and we...

CUT TO BLACK

THE END