

UNMASKED

PILOT:

"L'homme au masque de fer"

By Joseph Bodner

CLOSE ON:

A BODY. Seemingly floating. Naked. Male. The feet. The shin. Moving up now. Torso. Thigh. And now one lone drop of blood across its white skin. Angelic. Quiet.

FEMALE VOICE

What prompts beauty in one over
another?

Moving up to the HEAD -- where the skin has been completely removed. The face now unrecognizable. Nothing but blood and bone. We PULL BACK TO REVEAL --

EXT. PLACE DE GREVE / HOTEL DE VILLE, PARIS - NIGHT

Chaos. The naked man with bloodied face hangs down from the city center for all to see. Suspended in mid-air. The SCREAMS and SHOUTS and petty quarrels of the common people below. A time when only kings and nobles knew of civility.

FEMALE VOICE

There's the Oriental belief in *Xi-Shi*,
who killed every fish in the sea with
nothing but a glance.

INSPECTOR GASTON LEMAIRE (late 50's), stands transfixed by the dead man dangling from above. Lemaire uses a cane to walk. A heavy limp. Fellow OFFICERS block out the CROWD...

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)

The Greeks bow down to Aphrodite,
an ideal for mortals to strive for.

The body DROPS to the FLOOR. *Thud*. Horribly contorted. It provokes the crowd further. A BEGGAR takes the opportunity to pick-pocket an officer. The officer BEATS him in return.

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)

Dazzling as they are, an astute man
could never mistake these fictions
for facts.

The peasants break the officers' enclave. An all out brawl ensues. RISE UP over the dead body. The blood and the grime and the dirt and the terror of 17th century Paris below...

INT. PALAIS DES TUILERIES, PARIS - GRAND SALON - NIGHT

King Louis XIV. The Sun King. Surrounded by his closest ADVISORS. The excessive wealth and splendor that would soon become his demise. Lemaire storms in, SCREAMING.

FEMALE VOICE

Truth be told, the greatest beauty
the world could ever lay claim
to...

Move THROUGH THE WALL to FIND --

INT. PALAIS DES TUILERIES, PARIS - ANTECHAMBER - NIGHT

A WOMAN. Hauntingly pale. Dark brown eyes. Jet black hair. She commands our observation. Like a piece of art. Like she were *created*. Like she were *ageless*.

FEMALE VOICE

Came from the darkest of places.

The muffled conversation of the King seeping in through the walls. She stares out her window, to the chaos on the right bank. The city center now going up in flames. Pleased.

TO BLACK.

CHYRON: **20 YEARS EARLIER.**

The words fade, replaced with --

CHYRON: **FRANCE, 1661.**

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

CLARALISE FORNIER. Her big brown eyes. 13 or 14 years old. Her hair cut short, dressed in boy's clothing. You'd be hard-pressed to believe that she will one day grow up to be the strong woman we met in our opening.

CLARA

(desperately trying)

Help...

Clara collapses to the ground. Her hands chained together. Her feet chained to the wall. She sees a small locket of her own hair stubbed in the wall. Something about it makes her --

CLARA (CONT'D)

SOMEONE HELP!

A SCREAM BACK. Then ANOTHER. Two MALE PRISONERS. The ongoing SCREAMING from the lunatics in adjacent cells that hasn't stopped since she got here.

As she continues to cry, losing her mind we PULL BACK --

INTO THE HALLWAY

The cells are all along the same side, leaving the hallway very narrow. There is no division in the cell bars, only walls within separate the prisoners. We move to --

THE LAST CELL

Where a MAN sits quietly in the dark. We don't fully see his face yet, but we do notice -- he isn't chained. Over the SCREAMS and HEAVING, he sits silently -- exempt from whatever the others were given. We'll know him simply as "M."

CUT TO:

PITCH BLACK

Faintly illuminated by a LIGHT. Moving in the distance. Approaching us. TWO FIGURES. Can't make them out yet.

INT. DUNGEON - M'S CELL - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A BLADE. Small. Slim. Quietly rubbed back and forth against the concrete wall. M's sharpening a knife.

ON M'S ARM -- CUTS. Maybe 20. Self-inflicted.

ON THE WALL -- Maybe 50 MARKS. Small vertical lines.

We HEAR the solitary DRIPPING of water into a puddle. The distant, muffled BARK of a DOG.

INT. DUNGEON - CLARA'S CELL - NIGHT

Clara sits in the corner, her head in her lap. Her ratty hair has grown longer. Time has passed. Then she hears --

FOOTSTEPS. At that, she lifts her head. Blood-shot eyes, she hasn't slept in days. She's lost weight, her cheek bones sharper through her skin. Her eyes shift. Nervous.

She can see the LIGHT emanating from the CANDLE coming closer, reflected in the small PUDDLES OF WATER in the hall.

TWO SETS OF FEET

One much larger and barefoot is covered in MUD. It is missing two toes. Splashing through PUDDLES. Belonging to --