

(Yet Another) Mask

by Marc Lowe

One day, a few months after he had turned 30, he decided that, finally, it was time to don a different mask. A darker, more sinister mask. One that would allow him to live his life freely and without guilt. The moment he put the dark, cool mask on his face he immediately felt better. Suddenly, his sex drive increased threefold, his chest sprouted hair, and he began to sing beautifully. Now, he was the man he'd always fantasized about becoming, a darker, mirror self. This was who he would be from now on, he decided. This was realer than the real him, his conscious and subconscious minds merged.

But once he got out into the world, he found that no one acknowledged the mask. He was just another face in the crowd, just another guy. There was nothing unique, nothing special about him at all. All of the other men around him were wearing similar masks, it seemed, had seemingly been wearing them all of their lives. How to distinguish himself? How to make his intentions known to the world? He began to drink heavily, to smoke, to go to clubs and try to attract women with his well-groomed appearance and his wild moves on the dance floor. But no one paid him any attention. No one cared.

Finally, after months of this, he decided that the mask was no longer worth the trouble. It had become ugly; he no longer liked it anymore. He would exchange it back for his old mask. But when he tried to remove it, he found that it was completely stuck. His true face was now *this* mask, not the old one. He began to hit the side of his face against the sink with great force, but the mask would not come off, would not crack. It was solid, more solid even than the old one had been.

In frustration, he picked up a hammer and slammed it straight into the center of the mask. The mask immediately burst into bloody pieces. The man fell to the floor, clutching what little was left of his head, realizing at that moment that a mask is ultimately just a mask. It can neither hide nor change the person hiding beneath it. As this

thought penetrated his entire being, he died, alone, in the bathroom of his apartment, single, aged 30.

