

BREATHING UNDERWATER

by  
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Inspired by the short story,  
"Fin Boy" by Christopher Herrmann

FADE IN:

OVER BLACK:

I am a man upon the land,  
I am a selkie in the sea.  
- The Grey Selkie of Sule Skerrie  
(from Irish/Scottish Folklore)

1 EXT. RIVER - DAY 1

A mysterious, dark MAN strides along the bank of a small river. The sun is blinding, we can barely make him out.

FLASH of an aquatic animal. Maybe a seal.

WOMAN (V.O.)  
You stay away from that river,  
Ron... Ron...

2 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - RON'S BEDROOM - DAY 2

A teenager's room. Knickknacks clutter the dresser. One is a seal figurine. Posters of music and sailing cover the walls. Clothes are strewn about the floor.

DRIP. DRIP. Water drips from an overturned glass on the dresser to the floor.

A young man with dark hair lies in bed, staring at water as it drips. Is he tired or troubled? This is RON MORGAN.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
Ron. Ron! Breakfast.

3 INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 3

Ron, seated at a dining table, shovels down a plate of eggs. He downs a glass of water, ignoring a glass of orange juice.

A tall, tired looking woman in her 40s bustles around gathering school supplies and shoving them into a backpack. This is ALENE MORGAN.

ALENE  
What's your final today?

RON  
A.P. Biology.

Alene sets down one folder and grabs another.

4 EXT. PARK PATH - DAY - FLASHFORWARD 4

Ron leans on a fence near a wooded area. Around him are three other high schoolers: BRIAN, a scruffy guy with glasses, and JESS, an airy blond girl. Then there's ERIN. She's a cute brunette, but has that serious look of a librarian.

BRIAN

God, I'm so glad that's over with.

ERIN

Oh, it wasn't that bad. Was it, Ron?

Ron smirks at her.

5 INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY 5

Ron sits hunched over a test on his desk. Pencil in hand. He thinks for a second, then starts writing fervently.

6 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY 6

Alene hands Ron his backpack.

ALENE

Good luck.

RON

I'll need all I can get for UCLA to accept the credits.

ALENE

You know you don't have to go to school so far away, Ron. There's always the local college.

Ron gives her a look.

7 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK 7

Ron and Erin sit on the floor across from one another, sealing large envelopes. Erin holds up a glass of wine.

ERIN

Here's to UCLA!

8 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

8

Ron heads for the door.

RON

Oh yeah, some friends and me are gonna head over to the park after school today.

ALENE

The park?

RON

Mom... Don't worry.

9 EXT. PARK PATH - DAY

9

Brian gives Erin a sneery look.

BRIAN

It's easy for you to brag, Erin, you're addicted to books.

RON

That's better than being addicted to beer.

BRIAN

Speaking of which...

Brian pulls a six-pack from his backpack.

JESS

Brian. Don't do that here.

BRIAN

Right. C'mon.

He leads everyone into the woods. Ron hesitates. Erin takes his hand.

10 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

10

Alene gives Ron a stern look.

ALENE

You know what'll happen if I catch you at that river.

RON

You'll ground me for a lifetime and...take away my porn?

Alene doesn't look impressed.

RON (CONT'D)

You won't pay for my college.

ALENE

I just need to know I can trust you.

11 EXT. RIVER - DAY

11

Brian, Jess, Erin, and Ron exit the woods to face a small river. Ron stops by the trees.

ERIN

What's the matter?

RON

Nothing.

ERIN

You sure?

RON

I'm just not supposed to be here.

BRIAN

Oh, yeah. Your mom's all paranoid you're gonna drown or some shit.

JESS

(smacking Brian)

Jesus, Brian! That's how his dad died.

BRIAN

Oh, right. Sorry, man.

RON

It's cool--

Brian suddenly grabs Ron and drags him towards the river.

12 OMITTED 12

13 EXT. RIVER - DAY 13

Brian marches Ron up to the river. Erin and Jess follow.

BRIAN

Look, man. You gotta face your  
fear. Head on.

RON

I'm not afraid. It's my mom.

BRIAN

Whatever. I'm just showin' you it's  
no big deal.

RON

Right. I get it. Let's go.

BRIAN

Okay.

Brian abruptly shoves Ron. Ron lands in the river on his ass.

Sudden FLASHES of oceans, seals, and the mysterious man hit  
Ron as he sits there, frozen.

ERIN

Way to be a dick, Brian.

Erin rushes to Ron. He's unresponsive. She shakes him.

ERIN (CONT'D)

Hey. You okay?

Ron looks at her. Accepts her help to stand. She leads him  
away from the river.

Jess smacks Brian again.

JESS

You're a real asshole sometimes.  
You know that?

BRIAN  
 (crushing beer can,  
 belching)  
 Yeah.

14 EXT. MORGAN HOUSE - NIGHT 14

Ron and Erin walk up to the front gate. Ron keeps touching his throat and swallowing.

ERIN  
 Sure you're okay?

RON  
 Yeah. Just thirsty.

ERIN  
 Okay. We have history tomorrow, so you'd better get some sleep.

Erin leans in to kiss him. It takes him a second to kiss her back. Then he steps towards the house.

15 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT 15

Ron drops his backpack on the floor. Goes straight for the fridge. Alene's voice emanates from upstairs.

ALENE (O.S.)  
 Hi, Ron. Everything okay?

RON  
 Yeah.

ALENE (O.S.)  
 I'm going to bed. Goodnight, honey.

RON  
 Night.

He pulls a filtered water jug from the fridge. Grabs a glass. Sloppily pours the water. Chugs it. Gets another. And another. The filtered water is gone.

Ron takes his glass to the sink. Turns the faucet on. The water splashes over his hands. He drops the glass. Drinks straight from the tap. The water pours over his face as he laps it up.

But then he stops. Slowly turns the water off. He stares at the faucet as it drips.

16 INT. BATHROOM - THE NEXT DAY 16

Ron turns the shower on. And he stands there, mesmerized by the flowing water.

ALENE (O.S.)  
You'd better hurry up, Ron. You're going to be late.

Ron steps in. But just stands there as the water washes over him.

17 INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER 17

Alene passes the bathroom with a stack of towels. She checks her watch. Knocks on the door.

ALENE  
Ronan. You're really pushing it.  
Ron? Answer me.

She tries the handle. Locked. She pounds on the door.

ALENE (CONT'D)  
Ron? Are you okay? Ron!

A moment later, Ron peeks out.

RON  
What's the matter?

ALENE  
What were you doing in there?

RON  
Taking a shower.

ALENE  
That was one long shower.

RON  
I gotta get going, Mom. Don't wanna be late.

ALENE  
I know. That's what I--

Ron shuts the door.

ALENE (CONT'D)  
(stalking away)  
Teenagers...

18 INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 18

Ron stares at the shower head as it drips.

19 EXT. STREET - DAY 19

Ron rushes up to Erin, who is impatiently standing there with her backpack. They walk.

ERIN  
Are you trying to ruin both our college careers?

RON  
I'm sorry. I don't feel...right.

ERIN  
Obviously.

RON  
Can we argue later? I really want to get our finals over with.

ERIN  
Me too. But it's hard to do that if we're not there.

RON  
You didn't have to wait for me.

ERIN  
But I did. So you'd better take me out somewhere nice tonight to make up for it.

RON  
Okay. But I'll have to go home and change first.

Erin smiles and kisses Ron on the cheek.

20 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT 20

Ron heads for the bathroom. Passes Alene.

ALENE

Want me to iron a nice shirt for your date?

RON

Sure. I'm going to take a quick shower while you do that.

ALENE

Don't see why you need one after that marathon shower this morning.

Ron keeps walking.

ALENE (CONT'D)

The shirt'll be on your bed. I'm going to go watch a movie in my room.

RON

Maybe it's time we got you a date, too.

Alene just LAUGHS. Then sighs.

- 21 INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 21
- Ron turns on the shower. Touches the water. The ocean FLASHES into his mind. Ron switches the flow of the water to the bathtub faucet.
- 22 INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 22
- Ron lies back in the tub, now full. He closes his eyes and lets himself slide deeper in.
- 23 EXT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT 23
- Erin, dressed really nice, checks her watch, then huffs. She pulls out her cell phone.
- 24 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - ALENE'S ROOM - NIGHT 24
- Alene lies in bed, immersed in a film. The phone RINGS.
- ALENE
- Hello? Hi, Erin... I thought he was with you.

25 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER 25

Alene pokes her head in. Ron's nice shirt lies on the bed.

26 INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER 26

Ron is almost completely submerged in the tub. He's still. Even with the pounding on the door.

ALENE (O.S.)

Ron. Ron! Ronan Morgan. What the hell is going on in there, young man?

We hear her futz with the handle. CLICK. Alene rushes in.

ALENE (CONT'D)

Ron!

She pulls him out of the water. Shakes him.

ALENE (CONT'D)

Oh my God! Ron... What're you... Are you trying to kill yourself?!

RON

What? Do you see any blood? I'm just taking a damn bath. Could I get a little privacy, please?

He tugs the shower curtain shut.

Alene backs out of the bathroom.

ALENE

Ronan, if there's something wrong, you can tell me.

RON

Mom. There's nothing wrong with me.

27 EXT. STREET - DAY 27

Ron faces Erin on the street corner. She looks pissed.

RON

I think there's something wrong with me.

ERIN  
I'd say so.

RON  
No. I mean it. I feel... Different.

ERIN  
Me too. I've never been stood up  
before.

RON  
Look. Could you just help me?  
Please?

ERIN  
What do you want me to do? What's  
the matter?

RON  
I don't know. I'm just.  
Feeling...weird about water.

ERIN  
Have you told your mom?

RON  
No way. You know how she is. She'd  
just freak out.

ERIN  
Well. Maybe you should go to the  
doctor.

RON  
Could you just help me look some  
stuff up? That's what you're good  
at.

ERIN  
I really don't have time for that.

RON  
But you have time for dates.

Ron turns and walks away.

Ron pours over books about water, medical books, science books. He tears books off the shelves. Slams them down. Plops on the floor and hides his face in his hands. Then his hands move to his throat. He licks his lips.

29 EXT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER 29

Ron takes a drink from the water fountain. A long one. Then he sticks his hand under the flowing water. He closes his eyes and waits a moment. Then he walks away.

30 EXT. PARK - DAY 30

Ron shuffles through the park, downcast. But then he spots a fountain basin up a head. He runs to it, only to find that the fountain isn't running. The basin is empty. Ron runs his fingers along where the water should be.

31 EXT. STREET - DAY 31

Ron walks. Not paying attention. He stops. Looks back. Sees a puddle. He walks over to it. Places his hand in it.

The strange FLASHES of oceans and the mysterious man hit him. Clearer than ever is an image of a seal.

32 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - RON'S BEDROOM - DAY 32

Ron looks up "SEALS" on his computer. He clicks through website after website. Doesn't seem satisfied--until a strange word catches his eye: "SELKIE." He clicks on it. As he reads, his expression becomes one of complete wonder.

RON

(reading)

"Selkies were said to be seals that could become human. This was mainly done to mate... No matter how strong the selkie's ties with their mortal family, they would always pine to return to the sea..."

(looking away  
thoughtfully)

Selkies...

- 33 INT. BASEMENT - LATER 33
- Ron searches through old, ratty boxes. He finds one that has "TRASH" scribbled on it. It's a box of old books. He rummages through it. He pulls out a book titled "THE SELKIE."
- 34 INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER 34
- Ron tries to creep by Alene, who's curled up on the couch, reading a book.
- ALENE  
Where're you going?
- RON  
To study with Erin.
- ALENE  
Where's your backpack?
- RON  
It's... I don't need it.
- He walks out. Alene gets up. Hesitates. Sits back down.
- 35 EXT. RIVER - DAY 35
- Ron stands on the bank. His feet are bare. The book lies beside him on a rock. He lifts a foot over the edge. Hesitates. Takes a deep breath. Then plunges his foot in.
- The images of oceans and seals FLASH into his mind with the most intensity yet. The mysterious man is clearer than ever.
- 36 EXT. MORGAN HOUSE - DAY 36
- Alene checks the mail. She flips through a stack of envelopes. Stops suddenly. She stares at an envelope addressed to "RONAN MORGAN." There's no return address. She opens it up. Unfolds the letter inside. Her eyes widen.
- 37 EXT. RIVER - DAY 37
- Ron wrenches his foot from the water. Falls back on the rocks. He kicks the book away. Then he hugs his knees to his chest, shaking his head.

RON  
No way... No way...

38

INT. MORGAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

38

Ron steps in only to find Alene waiting there for him. She notices that his pant legs are damp.

ALENE  
You're not going to UCLA.

RON  
I wasn't--

ALENE  
If you can't obey one simple request, then you don't deserve that school.

RON  
A simple request? You've kept me away from bodies of water my whole life. You never even taught me how to swim.

ALENE  
Go to bed.  
(stepping away)  
You're going to be exhausted for your final tomorrow.

RON  
Fuck my finals.

Alene stops. Turns back to face him.

Water drips from an overturned glass on the table.

RON (CONT'D)  
I want to know about Dad.

ALENE  
There's nothing new to say.

RON  
He didn't drown, did he?

ALENE  
Of course he did.

RON  
Did you see it?

ALENE

Your father drowned, Ronan. And I didn't want the same to happen to you. End of story.

RON

Was Dad a selkie?

Alene looks momentarily taken aback. But then takes a deep breath.

ALENE

I don't know where you heard that, but there's no such thing.

RON

(holding up book)

Then why do you have this?

ALENE

...He... Your father...had all these insane ideas in his head about being a seal and having to return to the ocean. I just wanted to know what he was on about.

RON

Was he crazy?

ALENE

I don't know.

RON

Did he pass something down to me?

ALENE

I... No. Ronan. You're fine. Go to bed.

RON

I can't. I can't sleep. I can't eat. All I want is the ocean, Mom. Help me.

ALENE

There's nothing wrong with you. It's just stress from your finals. Please go to bed.

RON

Take me to the ocean. We can do this together.

ALENE

I don't want to hear any more of  
this nonsense.

RON

Mom. I'm just trying to figure  
myself out.

Alene grabs the envelope to Ron from a pocket and tosses it  
on the floor. Then she rushes upstairs.

Ron picks up the letter. Unfolds it. Crudely written on it  
are the words: "TIME TO COME HOME, SON."

39 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - LATER 39

Ron sits on the edge of his bed with a glass of water. An  
open atlas lies beside him. And the letter. He picks up the  
phone.

40 INT. ALENE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER 40

Alene lies awake in bed, listening to her bathroom faucet  
drip.

41 OMITTED 41

42 INT. ERIN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT 42

Erin's cell phone RINGS on a nightstand beside her bed,  
waking her.

ERIN

Ron? What is it?

43 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - RON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 43

We can't hear the conversation, but we see Ron's fingers move  
along the atlas from the yellow 'land' area to the blue 'sea'  
area.

44 INT. ERIN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT 44

Erin's face becomes a look of shock as she listens. Then  
anger.

ERIN  
You... You asshole.

She throws down her phone.

45 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - RON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 45

Ron stares at his phone, listening to the dial tone. Then he stuffs the atlas and the letter into his backpack. As he stands, he downs the glass of water. He notices the seal figurine on his dresser. He walks off.

46 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY 46

Alene stands in the doorway, staring at an empty room.

47 INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY 47

Erin opens her locker. Brian and Jess stand behind her. Erin looks shocked as she pulls out the "SELKIE" book. A note taped to it reads: "THIS WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND." She tosses it back into her locker and slams it shut.

JESS  
What's wrong?

ERIN  
Nothing.

48 INT. MORGAN HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT 48

Alene sits at the dining table, just staring. The phone RINGS. Several times. She picks it up.

ALENE  
Yes?

ERIN (OVER PHONE)  
Ms. Morgan? I wanted to ask you  
about--

Alene hangs up.

49 INT. KITCHEN - DAY 49

Alene sits at the table with a plate of freshly prepared eggs. She stares at the empty seat across from her. She throws her food away.

50 OMITTED 50

51 INT. RON'S BEDROOM - DAY 51

Alene packs away Ron's knickknacks. Takes down the posters.

52 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 52

The doorbell RINGS. Alene opens the door. Erin stands there.

ERIN

Hi, Ms. Morgan. I'm leaving for college tomorrow... And I just wanted to say goodbye.

ALENE

Goodbye.

She starts to shut the door. Erin puts her hand on it.

ERIN

I--I also wanted to say I'm sorry. We should never have taken him to the river.

ALENE

Don't be sorry, honey. It's not your fault.

53 EXT. RIVER - DAY 53

Alene sits by the river's edge, watching the flowing water.

SPLASH. SPLASH.

We stay on Alene as she watches the water. A look of amazement spreads across her face as her head inclines to watch something rise over her.

The river flows calmly downstream.

FADE OUT.

THE END