

THE DODO MAN

extract from screenplay by

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"THE DODO MAN"

FADE IN:

EXT. CARNIVAL - NIGHT

LIGHTNING illuminates falling RAIN. More FLASHES reveal CARNIVAL FREAKSHOW SIGNS, adorned with garish illustrations: the bearded lady, an illustrated man, the terrible alligator boy and -- as THUNDER ROLLS -- a prehistoric looking bird with a glaring eye and fierce, banana-shaped beak:

The Mysterious! The Wonderful!

Dodo Bird from the Exotic Island of Mauritius!

CARNIVAL PATRONS from all walks of life take interest in the sign: street urchins and peasant folk, dandies in high boots, capes and hats and curly wigs.

SUBTITLE: Northern France, 1680.

One DANDY GENT -- Antoine Daquin, an aristocrat (61) with fancy walking stick -- enters the tent. He passes through a tunnel of drapery to peruse pickled creatures in glass jars, odd taxidermy animals, and arrives at small stage where a CARNIVAL BARKER is addressing the crowd IN FRENCH.

CARNIVAL BARKER

(subtitled)

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you one of Nature's mysteries. The fearless feathered creature from a far away island in the Indian Ocean!

The Barker pulls back the curtain with a flourish. A GASP goes up from the crowd.

The Dandy Gent stares, amazed.

CUT TO:

INT. EMILIO'S STUDY - DAY

CLOSE ON

A graphite pencil-tip scrapes on parchment. Short strokes sketch an animal: an eye, soft downy feathers, a thick curving beak. The head of a strange-looking bird takes shape on the page: stubby wings, thick thighs, chunky frame, fluffy tail. A paintbrush daubs watercolors, adding red and yellow to the beak, feet and plumage.

THE ARTIST

bites his lip in concentration. His thick fingers maneuver the paintbrush. Bright, intelligent eyes peer over half-rim spectacles in a paunchy face, his thinning hair unkempt.

EMILIO MARCELINO -- (39) heavy-set, barefoot, Portuguese in a baggy artist's smock and breeches -- steps back from his easel in the window of his study. Light streams around him in the dusty room as he contemplates his work and then adds finishing touches.

SUBTITLE: Faro, Southern Portugal, 1681.

On the easel: a DODO BIRD stands proudly on a tuft of grass. It is a clumsy-looking creature, but Emilio's is a much more sympathetic rendering than the carnival sideshow poster.

ELISABETE
(from another room)
Emilio! Emilio!

Emilio stands, deep in thought, in the center of a room surrounded by the clutter of his studio, which is stacked with ornithological portraits, books, maps, a large globe.

ELISABETE MARCELINO steps into in the open doorway and halts, unwilling to enter Emilio's domain. She is a striking Latin woman in her twenties, her dark hair pinned up, wearing boots, spurs and fashionable riding attire. She views Emilio with distaste.

Emilio addresses her, lovingly.

EMILIO
Good morning, my angel.

Emilio steps back from his work, allowing Elisabete to see. Elisabete ventures into the room and kisses Emilio, unsmiling. He gestures proudly at his painting.

EMILIO (CONT'D)
Beautiful, no?

Elisabete looks her husband up and down, regarding his filthy artist's smock.

She sees he is barefoot.

ELISABETE
No, Emilio. It's ugly.

Elisabete marches out, spurs jangling.

EMILIO

Wait, Elisabete, my sweet, where are you going? I must speak with you. It's important.

EXT. RANCHO MARCELINO STABLES - DAY

Rancho Marcelino is a sprawling family estate on a hill overlooking the Algarve countryside.

In front of the ranch house, GREGORIO, a burly stable-lad, holds an Andalusian stallion. Elisabete adjusts the horse's bridle and kisses the animal's nose, showing her true affections.

Emilio comes out, still barefoot and clutching his painting, looking like a walking circus tent in his smock. Gregorio, accustomed to Emilio's eccentric appearance, makes small-talk.

GREGORIO

Good morning, senhor Marcelino.

EMILIO

Good morning, Gregorio. How are your wife and children?

GREGORIO

Very well, senhor.

With Gregorio's assistance, Elisabete mounts her horse.

EMILIO

Darling, where are you going?

ELISABETE

I told you last night. I am riding into Faro. I will be back for dinner.

EMILIO

But I made arrangements. Today we are visiting my mother. I have something to tell you both. Something important.

ELISABETE

Emilio, go put on some shoes. You... you are ridiculous.

Elisabete rides out. Emilio notices other stable-hands have stopped to stare. Gregorio takes an interest in Emilio's painting. Emilio rolls it up and heads inside.

INT. EMILIO'S STUDY - LATER

Emilio adds papers to an open folio: ornithological sketches, reams of notes, maps and charts, diagrams of bird skeletons. He closes the folio over them, adds it to a crate of books beside other shipping trunks. He is furiously packing, clearing out his study.

Emilio's dodo painting looks on, now in a picture frame.

EXT. RANCHO MARCELINO - DAY

The sun is low. Emilio strides toward a small cottage on the villa grounds, carrying his picture in its frame.

INT. MAMA MARCELINO'S COTTAGE - DAY

A CLOCK TICKS as afternoon sunlight slants in over MAMA MARCELINO -- a tiny, round old woman in her eighties. She appears to be asleep in an armchair, spectacles on the end of her nose, an empty wine glass beside her.

Emilio sits opposite, his hair combed, a full glass of wine in his hands. His new painting is propped up in its frame beside him on the sofa.

EMILIO

Mama? Wake up, Mama.

MAMA MARCELINO

Eh? Mmm? Eh?

Mama opens her eyes and looks surprised to see him.

EMILIO

You fell asleep.

MAMA MARCELINO

I did? When? What time is it? My idiot son is coming to visit me today with his bitch wife.

EMILIO

It is me, Mama. It's Emilio. I am here. Elisabete could not be here.

Mama Marcelino scrutinizes Emilio.

MAMA MARCELINO

What are you doing here?

EMILIO

I am saying goodbye, Mama.

MAMA MARCELINO

You're leaving already? Where are you going?

EMILIO

An island off the South East coast of Africa, Mama. One of Papa's trading ports. A sugar plantation.

MAMA MARCELINO

What do you want with sugar? Is this another of your daydreams? You can't fool me with sugar plantations, silly boy. I am not your Papa.

Emilio glances uneasily at a portrait above the fireplace.

An elaborate oil painting of Papa Marcelino, a pompous-looking gent framed by maritime scenery, glares down.

Mama Marcelino tops up her drink from a decanter by her chair. Emilio sets down his wine glass and moves closer to his mother.

EMILIO

It's a rescue mission, Mama.

MAMA MARCELINO

Rescue?

EMILIO

Look.

Emilio unfolds a letter: florid script in French, with an official crest.

EMILIO (CONT'D)

It's from Louis Fourteenth's Royal Physician, in Paris. He corroborated my research. I've been studying this for years. It's a rare bird, maybe the last of its kind. If I don't leave now, it will be too late.

Mama strokes Emilio's face.

MAMA MARCELINO

You are the rare bird, Emilio.

EMILIO

Thank you, Mama.

The CLOCK TICKS as Papa Marcelino scowls.

INT. RANCHO MARCELINO - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Emilio places an envelope with the single handwritten word 'Elisabete' on a pillow. He stands staring at the letter beside one of two beds in the master bedroom. He looks around the room, taking a final look at his home, then leaves.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Emilio is deep in thought, jostled by the motion of the trundling carriage.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE (EMILIO'S DREAM) - DAY

EMILIO'S THOUGHTS ARE SEEN AS FLICKERING, DREAM-LIKE IMAGES RESEMBLING A KINETOSCOPE PROJECTION:

Elisabete rides her horse at a gallop. Her hat flies off and her hair streams out behind her. Another horse carrying Gregorio the stable-hand gallops up beside her. Elisabete laughs and spurs her horse faster. They race, neck and neck.

BACK TO CARRIAGE

Emilio stares restlessly out the window at the darkened countryside.

EXT. FARO HARBOR - NIGHT

A two-mast caravel, Medea, is loaded with crates and supplies.

Emilio oversees longshoremen, who are unpacking his carriage, ordering them about and warning them to take care with his scientific equipment.

A grim-faced sea captain, MENDES, eyes the operation from a distance while checking inventory with his first mate, LOBO. When one longshoreman drops a crate, causing Emilio to cry out in alarm, Mendes intercedes.

MENDES

Senhor Marcelino? You sail with us
in the morning?

EMILIO

Captain Mendes?

MENDES

I am Mendes. I knew your father.

EMILIO

I won't hold that against you.

Emilio smiles and offers a hand to shake. Mendes accepts the handshake, but does not return the smile.

EMILIO (CONT'D)

I thought we sailed tonight?

MENDES

We sail with the tide, Senhor. We can't change that, not even for Eduardo Marcelino's son.

EMILIO

Well, this is my charter and I'd like to leave as soon as possible.

MENDES

Are you in trouble?

EMILIO

Trouble? Oh, no. No trouble.

MENDES

My men will stow your bags. Mister Lobo will show you to your cabin. We sail at dawn. Welcome aboard, Senhor.

Lobo leads the way to a gangplank. Emilio grabs one bag and follows onto the ship, very unsteady.

INT. MEDEA - EMILIO'S CABIN

Lobo shows Emilio into a small, windowless cabin containing a flip-down desk, a chair and a bunk the size of two apple boxes. Emilio squeezes past Lobo and sits on the bunk, which is as hard as wood, then he stands and bumps his head on a lamp.

Lobo takes a bite from a hunk of tobacco, chews thoughtfully and offers it to Emilio. Emilio declines and starts unpacking. Lobo exits.

Emilio folds down the desk and sets out a journal and three small framed pictures: a portrait of his wife, a portrait of his mother and a sketch of a dumpy, long-beaked bird.

INT. RANCHO MARCELINO - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lit by moonlight, Emilio's note to Elisabete sits untouched on the pillow. THUNDER ROLLS and rain begins outside.

INT. BARN (EMILIO'S DREAM) - NIGHT

FLICKERING, DREAM-LIKE IMAGES:

Elisabete falls backward into straw, damp and disheveled, her bodice partially unbuttoned. The sound of RAIN drums on the roof and lightning flickers outside.

Gregorio is backlit by the lightning as he removes his shirt, staring down, wet with rain. He lowers in for a kiss as THUNDER ROLLS again.

As the lovers embrace, a shadow appears at the barn door, backlit in the rain. The RUFFLING of feathers, then a soft TRILLING and the tip of a long banana-like beak and a beady yellow eye peek in: the DODO. LIGHTNING flashes.

INT. MEDEA - EMILIO'S CABIN

The CRASH OF THUNDER wakes Emilio from his dream. He is perspiring and disoriented. The sounds of CREAKING and CRASHING continue through the hull and the vessel rolls. Emilio unfolds himself from his bunk and ventures out.

EXT. MEDEA DECK - DAWN

Emilio steps out onto the deck, blinks against early morning light and steadies himself against a railing. No sign of rain or thunder, clear skies overhead, as the caravel leaves Faro far behind.