

The Mermaid's Dream

The Mermaid's Dream is an adaptation of *Dyesebel*, a Filipino graphic novel character, conceived by Mars Ravelo and drawn by Elpidio Torres in 1975.

Characters:

Dyesebel, *mermaid (shadow puppet)*
Alvin Alcano, *marine biologist*
Fredo, *doctoral student in anthropology*
Gildo, *Fredo's assistant*
Don Juan, *rich owner of Reef World Resort*
Ava, *former beauty queen and Don Juan's wife*
Melba, *sister of fisherman, Paolo*
Buboy, *Melba's little brother*
Madam/Sir Pasco, *barangay chief*
Joseph/Josephine, *Madam Pasco's assistant*
Dona Guada, *crazy millionairess who owns an aquarium*
Community members
Total: 5 women, 5 men

Scene 1 *In a marine cave.*

(dark, sounds of bubbles and surf, back light reveals grotto. Dyesebel swims in shadow with other sea creatures. Dyesebel's mother, Lucia, is a former mermaid who became human.)

Dyesebel:

Lucia! Lucia! Mother, where are you? Why don't you come when I call? *(swims, exits)*

Fredo:

(Fredo and Gildo search with flashlights for fossils in a cave on the shore. Fredo points) Here. (Gildo digs, Fredo sifts the sand and picks up something) Look! (picks up a bone)

Gildo:

Human?

Fredo:

(sarcastic) No, chicken.

Gildo:

It looks old.

Fredo:

We won't know till we send it for K-Ar dating. *(he carefully wraps the bone)*

Gildo:

(hopefully) Enough for today?

Fredo:

Keep digging. We're on to something. I'm going into those back caves.

It looks too dangerous.

Gildo:

I have a feeling...

Fredo:

In your bones?

Gildo:

Exactly.

Fredo:

That's what I like—bone to bone communication. Forget the brain, forget previous research...

Gildo:

I'm not forgetting anything. I'm exploring what hasn't been explored before.

Fredo:

High tide comes in soon...and in here, it will come fast.

Gildo:

Keep digging. (*they keep searching*)

Fredo:

(*shakes his head*) Obsession. You don't have the money or the equipment to do this right.

Gildo:

If I did, you wouldn't call it an obsession. At least I got the grant to pay you to be my assistant.

Fredo:

Pittance.

Gildo:

These caves have secrets. They might be the site of the earliest humans in Asia. Fox said the Tabon Man had to be at least 22,000 years old, but we already know the layers below us show signs of human presence 40,000 years ago.

Fredo:

I really don't feel more significant just because my ancestor is 20,000 years older than before.

Gildo:

But Otley Beyer's migration theory pushes that back to 250,000 years. Doesn't that get your sluggish pulse racing? It would put us on par with the oldest *homo sapiens* in the world.

Fredo:

Us?

Gildo:

You know I had to put a nationalist twist on the proposal to get the grant. Of course, I support Dr. Jocano's theory of local evolution on some of the islands...

Gildo:

Otherwise you'd be laughed at as the lunatic fringe.

Fredo:

But I can't dismiss Beyer's idea of the first Filipinos migrating from Borneo...

Gildo:

Look, even if Beyer is right—a big *if*—and his 'Dawnmen' 250,000 years ago crossed land bridges from Borneo, they left long before anyone else came.

Fredo:

Indonesia and China have their Java and Peking Man. Why can't we have our Palawan Man?

Gildo:

I'd be happy with Palawan Woman at the moment. Absolutely no evidence has ever been found.

Fredo:

That's why we have to find it.

Gildo:

Besides, there aren't even any geologic signs of "land bridges." The whole theory is fanciful.

Fredo:

I think both Beyer's and Jocano's theories are incomplete—the first humanoids might have migrated from the mainland, but there's an in-between stage not accounted for. The 'out of the Africa' theory says that modern humans migrated from the savannah 200,000 years ago, but I think they didn't get here by land bridge or rafts...

Gildo:

Yeah?

Fredo:

They swam.

Gildo:

I take back what I said. You *are* on the lunatic fringe.

Fredo:

The Luzon Aetas might be the earliest aboriginals living continuously on the islands, but they're not the first to have evolved on these islands. I just know it.

Gildo:

So that's what this is really about! Not the first Filipinos, but the first *homo sapiens* in Asia? Fredo, anything that existed in these caves was washed out long ago.

Fredo:

That's why we have to dig deeper...and further in. I need bones.

Gildo:

Clay pots and stone tools won't do?

Fredo:

I need a human-like skeleton...without legs.

Gildo:

Whoa, man! Are you talking about some kind of ancient torture?

Fredo:

No, our most ancient marine ancestor developed legs as it emerged from sea to land.

Gildo:

Like a frog from a tadpole?

Fredo:

Something like. We came from creatures that had the capacity to live in water but came up onto land to mate, like seals and penguins. Then they returned to the sea, spreading throughout the oceans before again living on land. That explains their dispersal from Africa and why no land fossils have ever been discovered.

Gildo:

What? From land to sea and *back* to land?

Fredo:

Something must have changed in the environment that provoked them to change.

Gildo:

You're going off the deep end.

Fredo:

The 'aquatic ape theory' suggests that humans are descended not from tree-dwelling chimpanzees but some kind of marine mammal.

Gildo:

Like dolphins?

Fredo:

No, an aquatic ape. It's the only way to explain our...

Gildo:

Our fins?

Fredo:

Why we're hairless bipeds who can swim.

Gildo:

Dogs can swim and elephants are hairless.

Fredo:

But we can breathe underwater. And our subcutaneous fat...

Gildo:

I could do with a little female subcutaneous fat right now...nicely covered in a bikini.

Fredo:

...is attached to the skin as it is only in marine mammals. My version of the aquatic ape theory...

Gildo:

A quack hypothesis.

Fredo:

...our existence in the water explains both how *homo sapiens* migrated out of Africa to Asia *and* why we're different from our primate ancestors.

Gildo:

Awfully farfetched, Fredo.

Fredo:

But so wonderful. Perhaps all these deep feelings we have for the sea are really based in something so...

Gildo:

Elemental? Like amniotic fluid?

Fredo:

Yes! We have to understand our water consciousness, our strange bodies, our underwater breathing, our embryonic gills, our vocalizations, our tears, our...

Gildo:

Big questions.

Fredo:

And the answer might right there, in those back caves.

Gildo:

But we have to go. The tide's already coming in...

Fredo:

All right. You go ahead. I'll follow. (*Gildo goes. Fredo turns back shines his light in back cave, goes behind screen*). What? (*He fishes out a skull. Lucy in the sky with diamonds music*) I don't believe it. Whole, intact, a beautiful Homo Filipinesis, the earliest human on the islands, perhaps in Asia, perhaps the world. Oh my darling. My Lucia, Lucia, Lucia....ah! (*he kisses the skull and the tide comes in and knocks him over. Dyesebel swims in.*)

Dyesebel:

Lucia? Mother! Mother! Is that you? What? (*She rescues him and holds his head above water*) Why did he call 'Lucia?' What's he doing here? So beautiful with his eyes closed. Perhaps I could wake him. (*kisses him, he opens his eyes*).

Fredo:

(*panics, looks around for he skull*) Lucia! Where are you? Who are you? What happened to my Lucia?

Dyesebel:

Your Lucia?

Fredo:

My skull! No, her skull. The most beautiful skull in the world.

Dyesebel:

You must have hit *your* skull on the rock.

Fredo:

(shakes her) Did you steal it? No, sorry. Who are you?

Dyesebel:

Dyesebel.

Fredo:

Dyesebel? I've heard that name somewhere. You saved me?

Dyesebel:

Yes. Don't you consider yourself lucky?

Fredo:

No, yes, yes, you're very lovely, but my skull...I must find it.

Dyesebel:

Well, go ahead. *(about to leave, he sees her fish tail)*

Fredo:

Wait, don't leave. Who...what are you?

Dyesebel:

Isn't it obvious.

Fredo:

A sirena!

Dyesebel:

I want to know why you cried out for my mother, Lucia.

Fredo:

Your mother! My God, this gets more wonderful. You're an ancient humanoid creature of the seas.

Dyesebel:

(insulted) I beg your pardon.

Fredo:

But my darling, you're a real sirena, not a myth. You'll help me prove my theory. You're my true ancestor.

Dyesebel:

I don't know if your brain was addled before the wave struck, but you are certainly mad now, and no relative of mine. Crazy, but awfully cute. The tide is receding. It's safe for you to go.
(she turns to leave)

Fredo:

Don't go beautiful creature, goddess. How can I find you again?

Dyesebel:

I'll come to the cave, but not often. There are many who don't wish me well. (*she swims off*)

Black out

Scene 2 *On the beach.*

Melba:

(*She throws a fish net, sees something out at sea and gasps*) Sirena!

Gildo:

(*enters*) Melba, where's your brother? Fredo's still not well enough to go out but I want Paolo to row me to another cave.

Melba:

(*throws a rock*) Cursed creature. Stay away from us.

Gildo:

What is it?

Melba:

Can't you see? A sirena!

Gildo:

You're joking! A real sirena? Wow! She's drop dead gorgeous. Oh, where's Paolo and his damn boat? I want to go out there.

Melba:

Stay away from her...she's bad luck.

Gildo:

No, wait. She's going to bring us good luck. Come with me. (*exit*)

Black out.

Scene 3 *By a hotel pool.*

Ava:

(*in a swimsuit, looking at plans, lying on chaise lounge*) This entire complex? It's awfully ambitious, Juanito. Are you sure your Singaporean partner has lined up enough investors?

Juan:

They're lining themselves up to be part of Reef World, the world's first underwater resort. We're just waiting for the engineers to work out the kinks. Look! Did you see the casino?

Ava:

This seahorse-shaped building?

Juan:

No, that's the marine science center! Our underwater restaurant over here is only the first step. If the structure holds up well and the tourist flow keeps growing, we'll expand next year. I'm only worried that we don't have anything quite "grand" enough for the Grand Opening. You disappoint me, Ava, dear. I thought you'd come up with something really spectacular.

Ava:

I stick by my swimsuit beauty contest. The girls will be lovely. You just have to make sure that the TV cameraman keeps the restaurant in view, and doesn't get sentimental about the scrappy fishing boats and shacks over there.

Juan:

Ah, those boats. I told Madam Pasco to keep them away. A few add local color tourists like, but there are far too many. And I can't have them dynamiting the corals right in front of us.

Ava:

(looks over her sun glasses) A rather handsome young man is coming this way. He looks very excited.

Gildo:

(coming with Melba) Good afternoon, Madam. Don Juan, sir?

Juan:

Yes, who are you?

Gildo:

Gildo Mendoza, research scientist investigating the local caves for anthropological objects.

Juan:

Indeed. Have you found anything...interesting?

Ava:

He means marketable?

Gildo:

I think I have. This woman here is a local fisherwoman.

Juan:

I've seen her casting her net right here on the beach. You can't stay. You'll upset my guests.

Gildo:

But we've spotted something extraordinary, sir...a sirena.

Juan:

Indeed! Tell me.

Melba:

Out there by the rocks. She's been sighted before, and afterwards there's always trouble, a storm, an earthquake, a sickness. Nobody wants her.

Gildo:

Nobody in the village does, but wouldn't she make a splendid asset for your resort? She could be captured and put in a glass tank. Think of it, a real sirena. Foreigners would go wild.

Ava:

Just stick a fish tail on a model.

Gildo:

But nothing can compare with the unearthly quality of a real sirena, sir.

Juan:

Ava, dear, it just might be what we're looking for. A real sirena! We'd have to come up with a grand way to flaunt her.

Ava:

I know! We'll call the beauty contest, Reef World Sirena Competition! The contestants have to swim in from a boat off shore! Vilma Santos had to learn to swim to play Dyesebel in 1973. A beauty contest promoting water safety!

Juan:

And if they can't swim, you can teach them. *(to Gildo)* My wife swims like a fish, as if in another life she was one. Brilliant, my dear. All those girls emerging shimmering wet from the sea...!

Gildo:

Brilliant! I'm sure she'll outshine them all. *(flirts with Ava)*

Juan:

Well, can you catch her?

Gildo:

(pointing to Melba) Her brother has a boat. I think together we can, if we could have a little per diem to help us get started.

Juan:

Nothing until you bring her in.

Gildo:

But sir, we need to outfit the boat. She and her brother need food while they search for her.

Juan:

They can fish at the same time.

Ava:

Juan, give him a little encouragement.

Gildo:

Thank you, Madame Ava. You won't regret it. Come, Melba.

Juan:

And take a picture of her. I want to see what she looks like.

Gildo:

(outside to Melba) All right, we're in on this together, agreed?

Melba:

We don't have a camera. Will they buy us one?

Gildo:

Maybe. And Paolo is willing to row?

Melba:

He's so desperate for a motor, he'll do anything. He knows he can't keep dynamiting the coral and needs a motor to go further out for big fish.

Gildo:

He'll get his motor if we get the sirena. We're a team, right? And no double crossing. You bring her to me first. You need me to deal with Don Juan and get the payoff. Oh, and not a word to Fredo.

Melba:

It's a deal. (*Don Juan calls, she exits.*)

Juan:

(*enters*) Gildo, I'll let you in on a little secret. My restaurant is only the tip of the ice berg.

Gildo:

Ice berg? Here?

Juan:

Global warming is happening, right? And each time a typhoon hits, it's worse than before. "Preparedness" people say. Then afterwards, it's "Trauma control," "Community rebuilding" because they're always too late. All they can do is yak about terrible 'natural disasters.' But me...I say 'go for it'. Be ahead of the wave, surf the crest. If the tide is rising, dive under it.

Gildo:

Brilliant. But how do you breathe?

Juan:

Dive metaphorically. We build under it, the biggest underwater habitation in the world, a mega-resort 60 feet under the surface. Then the tide can go as high as it likes, we can watch it safely inside our glass bubble.

Gildo:

Brilliant.

Juan:

Imagine it! Restaurants, conference rooms, casinos with huge glass panels—a 270 degree view. You can sit in your lounge chair with a cocktail and see the whole sea swimming around you.

Gildo:

Maybe even a swimming pool?

Juan:

Brilliant! A swimming pool inside the sea. But seriously, do you see the possibilities, Gildo? This is a great future for us, for the Philippines. We're on the cutting edge of ecotourism. Get us that sirena. She'll help make Reef World Resort a reality.

Gildo:

I'm your man. (*exit*)

Black out

Scene 4 *Community Hall, Buboy is outside, eavesdropping*

Pasco:

(enter carrying a folder) I don't believe our bad luck. We've been corresponding with Dr. Alcano for over a year to set up the sanctuary and just before he's due to come explain the procedure to the whole barangay, he gets ill. It's a disaster.

Joseph:

Very ill?

Pasco:

He might not recover.

Joseph:

Poor man. But can't we somehow go ahead with the plans? Can't someone else from his lab come?

Pasco:

He wanted to take a few of the fishermen to Apo and show them how successful the sanctuary is there. He thinks they need to see it with their own eyes. He was also going to introduce us to the NGO that funds the project for the first year.

Joseph:

Can't we contact the NGO ourselves?

Pasco:

They know and trust him. He's our lynch pin for the whole project. All we can do is pray he gets better quickly. *(noise outside, Buboy runs off)* Now what? Go see what it is.

Joseph:

(brings in Melba) She was caught beach seining again. *(Buboy eavesdrops again)*

Pasco:

Melba, I've told you it has to stop. You and your brothers are my biggest headache. If I catch Paolo dynamiting again, I'll confiscate his boat.

Melba:

What choice do we have? The fish get fewer and smaller. We can't even afford to buy the fish we catch!

Pasco:

What choice do *I* have? You know Don Juan is about to open his resort. He can't have you casting your nets and dynamiting coral in view of his diners.

Melba:

Yeah, he's promoting "eco-tourism" to protect the environment...and to hell with the people who live here.

Pasco:

I'm telling you for your own good. Some of those foreign divers are radical. They'll cut your nets. Then what'll you do?

Melba:

I just get picked on because I'm easy and poor.

Pasco:

It's not just you, it dozens of 'yous' throwing your nets from the shore in plain view.

Melba:

Yeah, while Don Juan's foreign guests don't see his cousin's trawler scooping up everything for their dinners; he never gets caught. SPO4 Zamora doesn't go after the trawler even when we report it fishing inside our limits. He always has an excuse; his motor is 'out of order,' the waves are 'too big,' 'a storm is coming,' and he can't go out.

Joseph:

As soon as we set up the sanctuary, we'll be more forceful keeping out the trawlers.

Melba:

Paolo's fishing until late every night to save enough money to buy a motor. Then he can go beyond the reef, and won't have to dynamite. Everybody knows soon the local fish will be gone. My catch today wouldn't satisfy a cat.

Pasco:

Listen Melba, I am doing everything I can to improve the situation, but I need your help.

Melba:

My help?

Pasco:

Yours and everybody's. Now go and stay out of trouble for a few days and hopefully our plan will begin. Promise? (*Melba nods and leaves*)

Joseph:

I've been thinking. Perhaps there's something we *can* do...

Pasco:

What do you mean?

Joseph:

You know that young scientist who just arrived with the permit to explore the caves?

Pasco:

Yes.

Joseph:

Well, perhaps if we show him your correspondence with Dr. Alcano and inform him of sanctuary project...

Pasco:

He could impersonate Angel Alcano?

Joseph:

Be presented as his substitute, a colleague from the Silliman University laboratory.

Pasco:

I don't know if such a young fellow could have the same authority. It might be difficult to keep his real identity a secret. And then there's the problem of the NGO money—where's it going to come from?

Joseph:

Dona Guada?

Pasco:

Oh please, don't ask me to get mixed up with that bimbo and her crazy aquarium.

Joseph:

She's rich and she wants to save the world.

Pasco:

Save animals, not fishermen.

Joseph:

Then we have to persuade her that helping one saves the other.

Pasco:

She won't listen to us.

Joseph:

But she might listen to the handsome young colleague of Dr. Alcano.

Pasco:

Ah! *(smiles)* Okay, here's what we do. Phone Dr. Alcano. Tell him our plan, and if he agrees, I'll approach the young scientist. *(exit)*

Buboy:

(calling to sea) Dyesebel! Dyesebel! Come.

Dyesebel:

What? What's happened?

Buboy:

Come closer.

Dyesebel:

No, I don't trust you anymore. I know your sister wants to catch me.

Buboy:

Yes, but you can escape her. You have to change and come on land.

Dyesebel:

Have you found my mother?

Buboy:

No, but the barangay leader needs you.

Dyesebel:

The people hate me; they'll kill me.

Buboy:

You need to change, not just into a human, but a man, a scientist.

Dyesebel:

Oh, you're asking a lot. But then how can I pursue my Fredo?

Buboy:

You'll be his equal. He'll be in awe of you.

Dyesebel:

As a man?

Buboy:

Oh, we'll figure that out later. Right now you have to become Dr. Acala and come help us set up the fish sanctuary. If you become him, you can create the kind of refuge you and the other sea creatures want. Your disguise will also save you from my sister's net. It's your big chance, Dyesebel. Rub your magic shell and change.

Dyesebel:

Are you sure, Buboy? I have only one more transformation on my shell. After that I'll never be able to come on land again.

Buboy:

Do it. I'll find you some clothes.

Black out.

Scene 5

Community Hall, Joseph returns to Pasco

Joseph:

No luck. Professor Alcano is unconscious.

Pasco:

We'll have to do it without his approval. I've asked the anthropologist to come study our plan.

Buboy:

(running in) A man's coming, an official.

Pasco:

Official? Were we expecting anyone?

Joseph:

Only Dr. Alcano.

Alvin:

(Dyesebel dressed as a man and with a scar on her face) Hello, Madam Pasco? I am Dr. Alcano's... son. My dear father entrusted me with his plans for the fish sanctuary. I hope we can move ahead quickly so I can return to him.

Pasco:

Wonderful, Mr...Dr...

Alvin:

Dr. *Alvin* Alcano.

Pasco:

Most welcome. We'll call for a barangay meeting this evening and you can present the project. I'm eager to implement it, but not everyone is ready to participate. That's why your presence is so important. We hope you'll convince them to give it a try. And the NGO...?

Alvin:

NGO? (*glances a Buboy who nods*) Ah yes, that's being taken care of.

Pasco:

Good, good.

Fredo:

(*bursts in*) Madame Pasco, you wished to see me about something. Oh sorry, I didn't see you were busy.

Pasco:

Dr. Fredo, ah, come in and meet Dr. Alvin Alcano.

Fredo:

Pleased to meet you. (*uneasy*) Are you here to look for fossils?

Alvin:

(*laughs*) No, no, I'm not interested in old skulls and bones.

Pasco:

Dr. Fredo is examining the caves for ancient...

Fredo:

...skulls and bones. Dr. Alcano, have we met before? You seem very familiar.

Alvin:

I don't think so. I'm a marine biologist—interested in living things and maintaining the health of our oceans.

Fredo:

I see. Well, I'm all for that. If I can be of any help, just let me know. Madame Pasco, was there anything else you wanted me...

Pasco:

No, Dr. Alcano's arrival has solved everything. I just wanted you two to meet in case your interests overlap.

Fredo:

Very good. I'd better get back to the caves. So little time before the tide comes in. (*exits and sees Buboy outside*) Buboy, can you take me to the caves? I don't where Gildo is.

Buboy:

He's out with Paolo.

Fredo:
Out where?
Buboy:
By the rocks.
Fredo:
Why? What's there? Did he find anything while I was...indisposed?

Buboy:
You mean not right in the head? No.

Fredo:
Did I say anything strange while I was...indisposed?

Buboy:
Oh yeah! Skulls, Lucia, sirena, swimming apes, ancestors—you mumbled a lot of crazy things.

Fredo:
Yeah, crazy, take no notice. That Dr. Alcano sure seems familiar, but I'd remember that terrible scar on his face.

Buboy:
He told me it was from a stinging jelly fish.

Fredo:
But his eyes, his smile...I must be going crazy. Let's get to the caves.
Black out

Scene 6

lights up in the theatre as Alvin addresses the audience as if it were the barangay. Actors planted in the audience ask questions.

Pasco:
Welcome everyone. I'm happy to introduce Dr. Alvin Alcano who is going to help us initiate our sanctuary. We are going to enforce a ban not only on dynamiting, cyanide use, purse and beach seining, but all forms of fishing in the sanctuary. We all know we cannot continue our present way of fishing if we want to remain fishermen on this island and keep our way of life. Dr. Alvin...

Alvin:
Good evening, everyone. My father, Dr. Angel Alcano, started the first fish sanctuary on an uninhabited island, just to see how quickly the fish stocks would replenish. After that, it took three years of negotiations with fishermen on Apo Island to give the sanctuary system a chance. It has now been reproduced successfully on several islands. I am asking you to give it a try here. It will be your job to protect and oversee the sanctuary, and then reap the benefits.

Pasco:
And Don Juan has generously agreed to part-time hire more people at the restaurant to allow everyone a modest income while the sanctuary recovers.

Alvin:

With the help of visionary barangay leaders, generous donors, sensible businessmen, your goodwill and cooperation and...

Pasco:

And your scientific expertise.

Alvin:

Yes, well and that too, I am sure we can demonstrate that the sanctuary plan is a good long term strategy from which everyone will benefit.

#1:

How long will we have to wait?

Alvin:

One year. We have to let the sea regenerate one full season. If you see an improvement, then it is best to wait one more year before starting to fish the overflow from the sanctuary. But the sanctuary itself must remain inviolate—absolutely no fishing or diving within its limits.

#2:

Ever?

Alvin:

Ever. You'll get a better catch merely by fishing near it.

#3:

We know that Apo was a success because it could act independently. The people allowed no immigration from other islands. They themselves decided what to do with the money earned from diving tourism. But now we have to work within the government framework of NIPA. We can't make our own decisions.

Alvin:

You're right. There will be more compromises with the government, but your Chief here, Madam Pasco, is already acquainted with those regulations and procedures.

#2:

If the sanctuary brings more fish, we'll have more diving tourists, but we won't be able to control the revenue from diving fees. The government will take it and send us back only a small percentage.

#3:

And we'll have to wait so long for it.

#1:

What about poaching...from outsiders?

Alvin:

As we speak a new satellite tracking system is being set up nationally. It will target the biggest trawlers immediately, and smaller ones over the next four years.

#1:

The trawlers are never stopped.

Pasco:

We'll set up our own "bantay dagat" to guard the sanctuary from other fishermen and trawlers. The job of keeping watch can be rotated among us.

Alvin:

I'm donating a pair of binoculars. *(clapping)* Madam Pasco and I will report any infringement and prosecute for fines.

#1:

The fines are too small; the benefits will be too small too.

Alvin:

At first, the benefits will be small, I agree. But they'll get bigger over time. You won't get rich, but your lives will improve. It requires patience, good governance, strong community participation and...

#2:

...lots of financial support. *(laughter)* Who is going to support us while we restrict our catch?

Alvin:

Good question. I have a good answer, but I'm going to reveal that tomorrow night at the Reef World Resort Grand Opening.

#1:

We won't be invited.

Alvin:

I'll make sure you're present for the announcement. I don't say there won't be problems, but with cooperation and good will, those can be worked out. Now I can smell dinner is just about cooked and I'm sure you're all hungry. *(actors in audience come to the stage to eat, local music)*

Pasco:

(takes Alvin aside) I know you have to leave soon, but perhaps you can help us with a new problem. A mermaid has been sighted. Don Juan has been paying Dr. Fredo's assistant, Gildo, to find her. The secret is out and now everyone is trying to capture her.

Alvin:

I know nothing about mermaids.

Pasco:

Do you forget the case at Silliman Marine Science laboratory?

Alvin:

What? Oh, I ...

Pasco:

When some people claimed a scientist had imprisoned a mermaid and intended to carry out evil experiments her, fishermen stormed the lab. It was your father who had to open the tank area to show them there was no imprisoned mermaid. Now it's the developer Don Juan who wants to put one in a tank for display.

Alvin:

Well, there might be a chance for me to do something about it tomorrow during the Grand Opening. I'll give it a try.

Black out.

Scene 7

Change music while actors change costume for costume ball at the resort. Reef World Sirena Competition banner. Everyone is dressed with a sea theme. The beauty contestants parade out. A singer croons a sea theme song.

Ava:

(Alvin dances with Ava) You dance so well.

Alvin:

So you do.

Ava:

You seem to float above the floor...without any legs at all.

Alvin:

Yes, we're gliding, as if in the water all around us.

Ava:

What do you think of this underwater restaurant?

Alvin:

Very homey.

Ava:

What do you think of the contestants?

Alvin:

(looks around) They're pretty enough, but can't compare with you.

Ava:

Don't flatter me. At my age, it's not good for my heart to go all fluttery. Tell me, what's the secret of your scar?

Alvin:

Does it offend you?

Ava:

No, it's intriguingly attractive. *(she tries to touch it but he pulls away)*

Fredo:

(Fredo and Gildo step outside on the beach) That Alcano fellow moves fast.

Gildo:

(watching Alvin dance with Ava) I'll say.

Fredo:

They've already decided on the area that's to be the sanctuary.

Gildo:

Don Juan isn't happy about it. He wants it here where his underwater diners can watch the fish.

Fredo:

At least nobody will be beach seining or dynamiting corals near his place. He should be satisfied. By the way, what did you do the day I was indisposed?

Gildo:

You mean crazy in the head? I went out to the rocks.

Fredo:

Why? What were you looking for? A sirena?

Gildo:

Don't be absurd.

Fredo:

I'm glad I don't catch you acting on the lunatic fringe. I remember after Typhoon Ondoy people lined up to see a sirena at the Manila aquarium. They'll believe the most absurd idiocies, but give them a valid theory that might change our understanding of human origins, and it can't get a foothold in their imaginations.

Gildo:

We only have two more days.

Fredo:

I need more time. If I've nothing to show, I won't get funded again.

Gildo:

Are you tempted to fake it?

Fredo:

No. I know I'm hot on the right trail.

Gildo:

I heard Alvin and Madame Pasco talking about a mad millionairess. They're hoping she'll compensate the village during the first year of the sanctuary. She's supposed to be coming to the dance. Why don't you ask her too?

Fredo:

(shakes his head) My project isn't flashy enough.

Gildo:

If you dance and hold her close, she might not care.

Fredo:

That's your technique, not mine. I've seen you cozying up to Don Juan's wife, but Madame Ava is smitten with the new arrival.

Gildo:

I've got to do something about that. *(Gildo goes to cut in)*

Alvin:
(*eagerly goes to Fredo*) Aren't you going to dance?

Fredo:
Uh, I don't dance.

Alvin:
A pity. Well, we can talk.

Fredo:
Save your *savoir faire* for the millionairess.

Alvin:
Huh?

Fredo:
Aren't you supposed to persuade Dona Guada to support the sanctuary?

Alvin:
Yes, the barangay leader wants me to put in a word.

Fredo:
You'll have better luck if you put in a dance with her. Lucky you can.

Alvin:
Why so bitter?

Fredo:
I'm losing faith. Maybe it's just a crackpot theory...I came so close to having real proof. I held the skull right in my hand, and then I saw her...

Alvin:
Her?

Fredo:
Umm, yes.

Alvin:
What her?

Fredo:
I wish I could say she was a figment of my imagination, but I think she saved my life...so I don't know what to think. I need to find that skull to prove my theory, and I need to find her to...

Alvin:
(*looks into Fredo's eyes*) To what?

Fredo:
To know if she's really what she seemed.

Alvin:
And what would you do if you found her?

Fredo:
That too, is a problem.

Alvin:
Ask her to marry you?

Fredo:
(*mesmerized*) Maybe. I don't think that is feasible, unless I were a prince and a kiss turned her into princess. I don't know what I'd say.

Alvin:
Why don't you practice?

Fredo:
What? I've always been so involved in my work I've never had much experience with women. Besides, I'm in her debt, and she's the most beautiful (*stutters over the word*) uh, woman I've ever seen.

Alvin:
Pretend I'm her and tell me your feelings. Perhaps I'll be able to cure you of them.

Fredo:
I might be awkward, but I'm not sure I want to be cured.

Alvin:
Try.

Fredo:
(*looks worried*) The problem is I think she might be in love with me.

Alvin:
How do you know?

Fredo:
She looked at me...lovingly.

Alvin:
Like this?

Fredo:
Oh, yes! That's exactly it!

Alvin:
And what did you do?

Fredo:
I...I asked her how old she was.

Alvin:
Probably the worst first line in the history of human courtship!

Fredo:

I know, I know. But I had just been holding the skull that I was hoping would be 250,000 years old. Age was on my mind.

Alvin:

What if she found your precious skull for you?

Fredo:

Then I'd be in double debt to her.

Alvin:

(shakes his head) You need to learn a thing or two about love, my friend.

(Dona Guada enters hideously dressed in a mermaid costume. Don Juan rushes to her and Madame Pasco motions to Alvin)

Juan:

Dona Guada, so good of you to come. What a splendid costume. Let me show you around. *(he offers his arm)*

Guada:

Very nice

Pasco:

Dona Guada, you're looking marvelous. May I introduce our visiting scientist, Dr. Alvin Alcano *(nudges Alvin to offer his arm)*.

Guada:

Very nicer. *(takes Alvin's arm)*

Juan:

Here you get a splendid view of the corals.

Guada:

No good to shine lights on them. They need to sleep.

Juan:

Excellent joke. Sleeping corals. Isn't that funny, Gildo?

Gildo:

Very clever.

Alvin:

...and, of course, absolutely correct. The outside lights go off at midnight, right, Don Juan?

Juan:

Oh, absolutely. And here we have a feeding station. Twice a day...

Guada:

No feeding station. This is the ocean not a theme park. The fish must feed for themselves and keep the balance.

Juan:

But if the visitors don't see fish, they won't come.

Guada:

That, dear sir, is one reason why we must work together to make sure there are plenty of fish everywhere. Save the Ocean. Save the Earth.

Juan:

Indeed. Save the Ocean. I have saved the best for last. Here! (*an empty tank with toy castle and landscape*)

Guada:

It's empty.

Juan:

Alas yes, but not for long. Here we will have the world's only captive mermaid. (*Alvin trembles*)

Guada:

Mermaid! Have you caught one?

Juan:

We were hoping to have her for the opening, (*angry glance at Gildo*) but she has eluded our capture. Yet she's been sighted nearby several times.

Guada:

I'd love to have a mermaid for my aquarium in Manila.

Alvin:

May I suggest, Dona Guada, that a small tank is no place for a mermaid who loves freedom more than life. They die if they are captive.

Guada:

And how would you know that, my handsome boy?

Alvin:

(*embarrassed*) I've read it somewhere.

Guada:

While I've seen on TV—they die for love.

Alvin:

Oh yes, for that too.

Guada:

That's why I've dressed as a mermaid tonight. Love is everything that swims in the ocean and every creature that lives on earth. That's my mantra.

Juan:

A very good...mantra.

Alvin:

The best place for a mermaid would be the sanctuary—safe from dynamite, nets, fish hooks, human waste, and plastic rubbish.

Juan:

She'd be safe in here too.

Alvin:

There she could live happily.

Juan:

How would you know what makes her happy? Look at these girls—they wouldn't be happy living in a place hidden from all eyes. They want to display their beauty—just like a sirena. Why do mermaids always come close to shore? They long to be near us. In here, we would not only see her, but she would watch us too—see how we live and enjoy ourselves.

Guada:

Hmmm...very nice.

Pasco:

In a sanctuary, she can interact with other sea creatures and divers might catch a glimpse of her.

Guada:

Very nicer. Keep the mystery.

Juan:

Scientists from around the world will come here to study her close up.

Pasco:

In a sanctuary she might meet a merman and start a family.

Juan:

She is half human. It will be easier for us to communicate with her here.

Pasco:

How do you know what language she speaks?

Juan:

Why are you arguing with me? You don't even believe in mermaids!

Fredo:

Perhaps you should just ask what she wants.

Juan:

Ask who?

Fredo:

The mermaid.

Alvin:

Ah yes, that would be best. Don Guada, we're asking for you to sponsor the first year of the marine sanctuary. We know your famous aquarium in Manila educates the city public, but I'm sure you agree it's important to protect all life in the seas for the health of the animals and the people who depend upon them.

Guada:

Very nice speech, but what...

Alvin:

Quite right. What's in it for you? What if I promise you a private interview with the mermaid? Dr. Fredo here will take you on a boat to the sanctuary after it is set up.

Juan/Pasco:

You can't do that!

Gildo:

Alcano, you go too far.

Alvin:

(to Fredo) Do you think I go too far?

Fredo:

No, I believe you can.

Alvin:

Dona Guada, if I promise you the interview, would you fund the sanctuary for the first year?

Guada:

And if you don't keep your promise?

Alvin:

I'll drown myself.

Guada:

Oh, no you're much too handsome to waste. You'll marry me. You agree?

Alvin:

I agree...that is, if you still want me after one year has passed.

Ava:

Alvin, no!

Fredo:

I don't agree. I mean, *(whispers)* Are you sure?

Alvin:

Very sure.

Gildo:

We've been looking for the mermaid every day—what makes you so confident you'll find her?

Alvin:

The sanctuary itself will attract her. Once the corals start growing and the fish spawn and grow to be plentiful, she'll know it's safe to come. One year from today, I'll take Dona Guada to meet her. Now, if we are all agreed, I must go. *(he leaves)*

Guada:

(to Alvin) You haven't even danced with me.

Ava:

(to Alvin) You still owe me a dance.

Fredo:

(runs after Alvin) Alvin! I want to thank you for what you've done for me.

Alvin:

You?

Fredo:

You helped me dispel my doubts. I'm sure the woman who saved me was the sirena. Do you think you could arrange for me to see her?

Alvin:

For your theory?

Fredo:

Well...

Alvin:

She's not your aqua ape ancestor.

Fredo:

I know. I just wished too hard for it to be so. I need to see her again.

Alvin:

Why?

Fredo:

To tell her I love her.

Alvin:

In a year's time go back to where you first met; perhaps she'll be there waiting for you.

Guada/Ava

(running after him) Dr. Alcano, wait! Alvin, don't go. *(he dashes away)*

Black out

Scene 8 *One year later on the beach*

Pasco:

Everything is working out better than planned. Even the most skeptical fisherman can see there's more fish.

Joseph:

Do you think this year they'll be able to fish nearby the sanctuary?

Pasco:

I'm sure of it, as long as it's a controlled catch. I'll persuade the men they can catch enough in fewer hours so that they can spend more time with their families. If this year's catch is good, we'll collect money to rebuild the school.

Joseph

What if he doesn't show?

Pasco:

Alvin? He'll come. He has to write his report. Dona Guada has already booked into the Reef Resort's grandest suite.

Joseph:

Fredo and Gildo have been out in the caves all day, waiting for any sign of the sirena.

Pasco:

Yesterday they came back with a bit of jaw. I know they have to take their findings back to the university to be dated, but I think we should arrange an exhibit of the objects here as well.

Joseph:

Good idea. Then we can also raise the price of cave permits. *(enter Alvin a little wet)*

Pasco:

Alvin! We were just wondering when you'd come. What ferry did you take?

Alvin:

Uh, I hired a private boat.

Joseph:

You must have broadsided a wave.

Alvin:

It's nothing.

Pasco:

Dona Guada is already here. No doubt with a wedding ring.

Alvin:

And Fredo?

Pasco:

He arrived last week, and has been back in the caves everyday.

Alvin:

Please send someone to notify him I'm here. Then I'll need two row boats, one for Fredo and Dona Guada, and one for myself. No motors.

Pasco:

(nods to Joseph who goes).

Alvin:

I'll go tell Dona Guada to get ready. *(leaves)*

Melba:

(enters, angry) I want to bring a suit!

Pasco:

Why? Soon Paolo will be fishing with his new motor.

Melba:

Gildo never gave us the money he promised.

Pasco:

But you're working at the resort, earning decent wages.

Melba:

Like a servant. I don't like it. You're all concerned about the sirena's freedom and dignity, what about mine? I like my freedom too.

Pasco:

Melba, you need to think beyond just surviving today. If you don't like the resort, do you want to work for me at the lodge? I'll need help once the divers start to arrive.

Melba:

You'd hire me? Sure! If I save enough I could get a boat and take divers out.

Pasco:

Good. Each one has to make the sanctuary work for us.

Black out

Scene 9 *They are in a boat near the coastal caves.*

Guada:

(Fredo is rowing) Strange, where's Alvin? There's his boat, but it's empty.

Fredo:

He probably jumped up on the rocks. Look, by the mouth of the cave. See the flip of her tail. The sirena is coming up.

Guada:

Oh, how exciting. I can see her under the water. She's coming toward us. I hope it's not a whale. Oh, sirena, we come in peace. We won't hurt you.

Dyesebel:

(perches on rocks behind the screen) Dona Guada, I've wanted to meet you.

Guada:

You know of me?

Dyesebel:

Of course. You pay people to steal animals from the sea and imprison them in your aquarium. You are not very popular around here.

Guada:

Oh no, I want to save the world. The fish are so pretty swimming about. City people need this kind of education and relaxation. They love the aquarium.

Dyesebel:

Then make it a rehabilitation center, helping creatures that are injured by nets and hooks and plastic bags. Show people what they are destroying without even realizing it.

Guada:

Visitors won't like it, but I'll do as you say.

Fredo

Where's Alvin?

Dyesebel:

He's here in front of you. *(she puts on Alvin's glasses)* Dona Guada, do you still want to marry him?

Guada:

(faint) What? You? No, I don't think so.

Fredo:

But I do. Come back on land, Dyesebel.

Dyesebel:

I can't. I've used up my last transformation to be Alvin and create the sanctuary.

Fredo:

If you won't change, I'll join you. *(he is about to jump in the water)*

Dyesebel:

Don't be silly. You can't live underwater and I can't live on land. We can only meet in the shoals and caves, where our ancestors first met. Our love isn't possible, Fredo, but the dream of it is, and you must keep the dream alive—for us in the sea and for you on land so that we share the same divine spark. I'll come here once a month, under the full moon because the moon is the most powerful conjurer of dreams.

Fredo:

So, have I just dreamed this all?

Dyesebel:

No, you are in *my* dream. Farewell. *(music, Dyesebel dives under and disappears)*

Guada:

That music, it's so familiar. Dreams. Row the boat, Fredo.

Fredo:

Dreams. That music. What does it mean?

Guada:

Ever since I was a little girl, I've often dreamt I lived underwater. That's why I feel so comfortable in my aquarium. But suddenly, the dream seems real, as if I could jump overboard...and swim to my home in the ocean. *(she stands up)*

Fredo:

(holds her down) Sit down. Keep calm. The current is driving us toward the caves. I have to concentrate on rowing or we'll crash into them.

Guada:

Don't worry. There's a buoy.

Fredo:

What? (*reaches for it*) It's not. It's my skull! Lucia!

Guada:

(*she starts, realizing who she is*) Lucia? Yes! Yes! Dyesebel? Daughter?
Fade out

The End