

Catherine Diamond

The Mermaid's Dream

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

Scene 1

(dark, sounds of bubbles and surf, back light reveals grotto. Dyesebel swims in shadow with other sea creatures)

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

(Fredo and Gildo search with flashlights for fossils)

Fredo *(points)* Here. *(Gildo digs, Fredo sifts, picks up something)* Look! *(picks up 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.

Gildo Too dangerous.

Fredo I have a feeling...

Gildo In your bones?

Fredo Exactly.

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

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

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

Fredo Keep digging. (*they keep searching*)

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

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

Gildo Pittance.

Fredo 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.

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

Fredo 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.

Gildo Us?

Fredo 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 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 continuous inhabitants on the islands, but they're not the first to have evolved on these islands. I just know it.

Gildo So that's really what this is all about! Not the first Filipinos, but the first *homo sapiens* in Asia? Fredo, anything 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 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 gill slits, 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, 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 beautiful with above water*) Why did he call 'Lucia?' What's he doing here? So 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

Melba *(throws a fish net, sees something 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)*

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 What's this sea horse shape building?

Juan A marine science center! Our underwater restaurant 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 beauty contest. The girls will be lovely. You just have to make sure about the cameraman keeps the restaurant in view and doesn't get sentimental scrappy fishing boats.

Don 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. 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?

Don Juan Yes, who are you?

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

Don Juan Indeed. Have you found anything....interesting?

Ava He means marketable?

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

Don 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.

Don 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! *(flirts with Ava)*

Juan Well, can you catch her?

Gildo *(pointing to Melba)* Melba's brother has a boat. I think together we can, if we can 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?

Don 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 the 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?

Don 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.

Don 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?

Don 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 3

(*Buboy is outside the room, eavesdropping*)

Pasco (*enter carrying a folder*) I can'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 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 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?

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

Alvin (*laughs*) No, no, I'm not interested in 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...I must be going crazy. Let's get to the caves.
Black out

Scene 5

(*lights up in house as Alvin addresses the audience as if it were the barangay*)

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 this way if we want to remain fishermen on this island and keep our way of life.

Alvin 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 islands. I am overseeing the system a try. 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.

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 is already acquainted with those regulations and procedures.

#2 If the sanctuary brings more fish, we'll have more 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?

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.

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, he pulls away)*

Fredo *(Fredo and Gildo step outside on the beach)* That Alcano fellow has really moved quickly.

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 in the Manila aquarium. They'll believe the most absurd idiocies, but a valid theory that might change our understanding of human origins 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. Looks like 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 baragay 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 the skull to prove my theory, and I need to find her to...

Alvin 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 I don't think that physically 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 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.

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

Don 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*)

Don Juan Here you get a splendid view of the corals.

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

Don 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?

Don 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.

Don 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.

Don 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.

Don Juan But not for long. Here we will have the world's only captive mermaid. (*Alvin
 trembles*)

Guada Mermaid! Have you caught one?

Don 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 young man?

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

Don 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.

Don Juan She'd be safe in here too.

Alvin There she could live happily.

Don 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. Here we not only see her, but she watches us too—sees how we live and enjoy ourselves.

Guada 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.

Don 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.

Don 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?

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

Fredo Perhaps you should just ask what she wants.

Don 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 sanctuary. We know your famous aquarium in Manila educates the city public, but I'm sure you agree it's important to protect marine life in the seas, for the health of 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, would you then help 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. 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 want 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 7

One year later

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.

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 came last week, 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)*.

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 diving lodge?

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 8

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's 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.

Guada Oh no, I want to save the world. The fish are so pretty swimming about. City people need this kind of entertainment. 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.

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)* 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 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. We can only meet in the shoals and caves, where the water meets the land, 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 water and for you on land that we share the same divine spark. I'll meet you, under the full moonlight 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, 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 always dreamt I lived underwater. That's why I feel so comfortable in my aquarium. But suddenly, it all seems more real, as if I could jump overboard...and swim home. (*she begins to stand 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?
Black out

The End