

Corrado Costa

THE DODO OR THE SCHOOL FOR NIGHT

for Didi

(A picks up a notebook from the ground, he looks at it and rings a bell, the first video-intercom answers him):

I – Who is it? Who is it?

A – Madam, great news! You’ve won a prize.

I – Madam’s not here.

A – Fine. Then you’ve won the prize.

I – What kind of prize?

A – It’s a kind of anthology.

I – Biography?

A – More than a biography it’s a one of a kind volume. More than an actual volume it’s a notebook bound in leather. It’s a manuscript with interesting notes and illustrations from the newspapers.

I – No, no, no. I’m home alone.

A – Fine. Then I can leave the prize with you.

I – No, I’m in the middle of giving a lesson.

A – I don’t believe it.

I – Go away! Stop it.

A – And the prize?

I – I don’t believe the prize.

A – What do you mean you don’t believe it? Let me in!

I – Let me see what’s on the first page!

A – On the first page there’s the Dodo.

I – The Dodo?

A – From the Portuguese “doudo.” Do you know Portuguese? It means idiot in Portuguese.

I – And who’s the idiot?

A – Raphus Cucullatus. The Dodo is a bird of the Raphae family.

I – Is it big?

A – It’s big as a peacock.

I – Peacock’s aren’t really that big.

A – It’s bigger than a peacock and a lot heavier to carry.

I – They carry it?

A – They carry it by the feet like all plucked poultry.

I – Then it doesn’t have its train anymore?

A – But it’s not a peacock, it’s a dodo.

I – Where does it live?

A – It doesn’t live, they killed it. They massacred them all in 1681.

I – How do you know all this?

A – It’s right here in the illustration. I’m a visual operator, an artist specializing in extinct creatures.

I – Why’s it extinct?

A – Because it was incapable of flight.

I – Was it its fault?

A – Not its fault but the fault of others. It didn't fly because it had no natural enemies.

I – Serves it right, that way it'll learn.

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

I – Wait a minute! If the animal's extinct, what kind of prize is it?

A – The prize is this little notebook bound in leather! It goes to whoever buys one of my works.

I – Which is the picture of a Dodo?

A – Right.

I – The Dodo's the one that lived in the Mauritius Islands?

A – How do you know?

I – I was there. I won a round-trip to the Mauritius, and they showed me that there were no more Dodos.

A – They made them extinct? Good, then next time they'll learn to fly.

I – Hey, please, you're supposed to let me say that!

II – Miss, miss!

A – Turn off your intercom, please, I was talking to the young lady!

I – It's the little girl. I told you I was giving a lesson!

A – But the little girl's talking on the intercom from the second floor.

I – I give her lessons over the intercom. It's better that way. We don't have to leave the house.

II – Miss, I lost my diary!

A – What diary? What does all this have to do with a diary?

II – I lost my diary...

A – I hope I’m not supposed to stand here listening to the story of a little girl who’s lost her diary. Now if the little girl has lost her diary, she’ll just have to skip her lesson.

I – This whole thing is very strange!

A – Like a fairytale.

I – What fairytale?

A – Maybe the one about Snow White. I’m the Queen’s democratic mirror: “My dear lady, you are beautiful, but Snow White is more beautiful than you.”

II – Miss, miss, who is it?

I – It’s a monster!

A – I’m not a monster, you want to see, you want to see?

I – Don’t open! Don’t open!

A – But if I found your diary. It was right here on the ground. Open up, Snow White!

PEACOCK -- Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

I – Leave the girl alone!

II – It’s not true you found my diary. I don’t believe you!

A – Want me to read you what it says here? Do-do. It says that they carried it by the feet with its head down, like a featherless peacock. So you see it’s true. Will you let me in?

II – It’s not true. It’s bigger than a peacock.

A – It has fewer feathers and a much bigger head.

II – It’s not true! The head’s like a peacock but it’s the beak that’s real big.

I – Stop talking to him and don’t let him in!

A – Can you tell me what gift you’ve selected? Would you let me in?

I – I've seen everything, you know. Go away! Go away!

A – What do you think you've seen on your video-intercom? Some maniac who's going to slit your throat and the little girl's?
Or who's going to grab you and crush you to death?
Go ahead, live in terror!
Locked up in a room, both of you, huddled against the wall!
Afraid of the door, uh. Maybe it will open.
Maybe now you're afraid of the sound of the doorknob turning.

I – Leave the little girl alone!

A – And what do you want her to do?
Not open the door so she won't get eaten?
Help, the monster's coming to eat your little hands!
Help, the monster's coming to devour your little belly!
Help, the monster's coming to devour your little legs!

I – What are you talking about?

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

A – Me, nothing. I was just reading a poem written here in this diary. It must have been dictated at school.

I – Well, if you've found the diary just leave it at the door and go.

A – Huff! Huff! I'd like to be Ezekiel the bad wolf who knocks the house down blowing through the intercom.

I – Stay away from my intercom. I know what you're up to. I know who you are.

A – So who am I?

I – Voyeurs! Voyeurs! Everywhere, nothing but voyeurs! Where there's a hole there's a voyeur. What are you looking at, tell me? What do you want to see? My ass? Like this or like that?

III – Ah, ah! You took out the bulb, uh? Now you can do your dirty little business down there in the dark....

I – Never, never! You can't find a secret little spot, a hidey hole, no place at all without some freak creeping around! Alright, how should I stand for you? Like this or like that?

A – Do whatever you like.

III – What are you doing down there in the dark? We need the bulb.

A – As a matter of fact, I brought a polaroid.

I – What did you bring? Pig!

A – It takes pictures without a negative.

I – Put that stupid camera away, immediately!

III – Dirty pig. You think the young lady is here for your pictures?

A – What do you have to do with this? I didn't ring the third floor. You have nothing to do with my pictures.

III – Dirty pig! I'll show you who rang the buzzer!

IV – Bravo! Bravo! You're right to intervene, professor.

III – I'm not a professor.

IV – Don't be so modest, madam teacher!

III – I'm not a teacher! You see? He does this just to start an argument.

I – I can't understand how a man like you decides to bring such a totally senseless thing like a camera.

A – I don't understand half of our totally senseless conversation.

I – Shut up, you pervert, and let them argue in peace.

IV – At Treviri, in Germany, in ancient Germany.

III – Do you hear what he's saying, he's doing it to get me mad!

IV – At Tre-vi-ri.

III – It's all mumbo jumbo, stupidities.

IV – At Carthage. At Car-thage, in Tunisia.

III – Who knows why he goes on, I ask myself.

IV – Even at Genoa, yes, even at Ge-no-a, my dear.

III – What should I do? I don't know. I listen out of compassion. Every night he yells and moans, he's ruining my nerves. Why do you yell? Why do you tell these absurd stories?

IV – If you keep on like this, you're going to offend me.

III – No, don't be offended. What I'm saying is not meant as an offense. What do you think I am? Feeble, crazy, or some child who still believes in fairy tales? Snow White?

II – Miss, miss! Where's Snow White?

I – Let them argue. It's not good to interrupt our landlord when he's arguing with his girlfriend.

IV – Young lady, I'm afraid of you. I keep you here out of compassion because I don't have the strength to fight back. I'm ill because there's no one to defend me, and this one here wants to raise her hand against me.

III – That's not true!

IV – You, young man, aren't you going to do anything? Hold her back. Can't you see she wants to hit me?

III – Don't start in again with your nonsense, I've never laid a hand on anybody in my life.

IV – Yes, it's true. And now I've been offended and I'm going away.

III – It's not even true that you're going away.

IV – I'm not going away but tonight I won't say a word.

I – That’s not true either. You talk and you talk and you keep talking. Imagine, just yesterday he was telling me that his son...

III – He has a son and he never told me?

A – What son are we talking about?

III – Ah, I saw him in a document he was throwing away! You down there, the peeping tom, take a look at the document, what’s it say?

A – It says Dodo, the idiot.

III – Who’s the idiot?

I – It’s his son. Does it say how big he is”?

A – He’s medium size, normal.

I – No, he’s a little bigger than that.

A – Well, a little bigger than normal, a bit stocky and a lot heavier.

III – So he’s medium size?

A – His head’s a little bigger than that.

III – Where does he live?

I – Where’s he live, where’s he live? He’s gone away, permanently. He’s extinct, with his head down!

IV – Brothers, forgive me. I’m a great sinner! I realize this and I must confess. A very serious accusation hangs over my head and a curse is about to fall on me.

III – Say what you want but I don’t have to stay here and listen.

IV – Don’t get mad, madam professor. I live an anomaly, I’m outside your circle, kept away. Have pity on me, an inferior race.

III – And who do you think you’re kidding with your song and dance about an inferior race?

A – Who was that talking?

I – It's our landlord.

IV – Quiet! Quiet, please! A sect, a secret order, a true vow bound us from Treviri to Genoa. An order I never followed. A vow I never kept: to combat the infamous work of women. Assassins. Murderers. You did well keeping up your interference for over a hundred years: battering, exterminating, suppressing, destroying, establishing nothingness.

III – I haven't suppressed anybody.

IV – Look! What is there in my bare room? Nothing. Not even the shadow of a mirror. In my poor life, what do I have? Nothing. Not even the shadow of a woman. Nothing, not even a little bit. And yet I've been a slave and an accomplice to desire. My weakness has won. Why have you killed, seized, executed, tortured? Because I've agreed to be a traitor. I shouldn't have mirrored and multiplied the work of women. This woman! All procreation is a mistake. You're right to intervene. Grab them by the feet and decapitate all of them!

III – I don't want any part of this madness.

I – And I don't believe you have a son. What's he like?

IV – You, mister peeping tom, take a good look. Do you see the picture?

A – I see someone here that's a little heavy set.

I – Can you tell how big he is?

A – His head is kind of large, slightly disproportionate, with a kind of deformed torso. And he's of average height.

IV – To the touch?

A – Soft to the touch.

PEACOCK: Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

I – Is it the Dodo?

IV – It's Phillip! It's Phillip!

III – Where does he live?

A – To tell the truth, he doesn't live. He dies. They crucified him with his legs in the air and his head down.

IV – My son! It's him. When they crucified my Phillip he didn't want to die in the same way.

I – What?

IV – As the crucified. He wanted to die differently.

A – How? By hanging?

IV – No.

A – By firing squad?

IV – He wanted to die crucified but upside-down. I suppose he didn't feel worthy to die in the usual position.

I – I don't believe it.

IV – What don't you believe? They respected Phillip's wishes and he died in this position that I'm going to show you.

III – Ah hah! You took out the bulb, eh! Now you can do your dirty little business down there in the dark.

IV – Be quiet! Have a little respect for someone who died with his head below his feet.

A – You mean in a contrary position?

IV – Not contrary, backwards. Like I'm doing right now. You try it. You put your foot there, good! And your other foot here, good! One hand under here and the other under there. Very good.

III – Then this Phillip wasn't so sure that his first crucifixion came off well?

IV – And why shouldn't it?

III – Because it wasn't done in the right position, backwards, for example. He probably had doubts seeing that things kept happening backwards.

A – You're saying that this world is the mirror image of another?

III – Because he wasn't sure of dying innocent. It's very hard for someone innocent not to die guilty.

A – So what does it matter?

IV – What do you mean?

A – If nobody comes to watch, the innocent can assume any position he wants when he's dying.

I – Voyeur! Get out of here, you lousy voyeur! We can't even die by ourselves, crap out in peace. Everywhere there's a peeping tom. What do you want to look at? My ass? How do you want to see it? Like this or like that?

II – Miss, what are you doing?

I – And you, don't you dare open that door!

III – Easy! Easy now! This is all nonsense! This Phillip was probably crucified but it wasn't his son. His son is the Dodo!

IV – My son is dead. He did his duty. As soon as the terrorism started, I sent him off to fight against me.

III – Do you hear him? Do you hear what he's saying?

IV – I've never believed in war.

A – And this is supposed to mean something?

IV – Yes sir, I've always believed in fascism but I've never believed in war. It was against myself that I said to my son: "Go on, you too go and win. Destroy the guilty. Stick the sword in the belly of your father."

III – But fascism didn't win the war.

IV – Fascism didn't win the war, uh? Then tell me, who lost it?

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

A – How did your son do it, declare war against you?

IV – Who do you think he fought against if it wasn't his parents? Who was he supposed to fight against if it wasn't me? This way he went to his death and I...

III – And then?

IV – Then I took out a policy on his life.

III – Enough! I can't stand it anymore!

I – So what! Stop fighting! Imagine if we always have to be fighting about a son we never had.

IV – He exists, he exists. I mean he did. Listen to a sinner who's humbling himself. I had a son. So noble. So tall. So lordly. I had him in abject poverty, out of love. Even I fornicated in excrement! I reproduced like everyone else. Is there a reproduction of my will?

A – What will?

IV – That book there is my will. My son's dead and I left everything to the Dodo.

III – The man's crazy!

I – Why?

IV – To make this woman here mad!

A – Quiet a minute, please. I ask you to pay close attention. In this book there's a picture of me.

IV – I don't believe it. It's impossible.

A -- Please, have a look.

I / II / III – My God!

IV – Eyes?

A – What?

IV – Eyes.

A – Gray...

IV – No, you're wrong. It's not true.

A – Pinkish.

IV – No, no.

A – Light brown.

IV –

A – Green? Green or blue...

IV – Imaginary?

A – Yes, of an imaginary color, depending on the light, as you see.

IV – We don't see anything. It's dark. There's nothing to see.

III – Ah hah! You got rid of the bulb so you can do your dirty little business down there in the dark!

IV – Teeth?

A – Some missing.

III – We can't believe anything you say.

IV – Distinguishing marks?

A – There aren't many. Really only one. But how is it possible that you don't recognize me? Come on now, open up, because it's written (Luke 15: 20-24):
“But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’”

IV – Idiot!

III – Stupid imbecile! Poor fool.

I – Voyeur! Get out of here! What do you want from us, you lousy spy!

III – Go away! Keep far away from this house! Who sent you anyway, the insurance?

IV – Do they want their money back? I bought this house after you died and I gave these poor people shelter. Get out of here, you bastard! Come back to life someplace else!

III – Cut it out, you swindler. Don't you have any pity for other people's suffering?

I – Peeping toms! Everywhere you look there's a peeping tom! Every hole, every little corner! So what are you watching for? What do you want to see now, my ass? Like this or like that?

II – So we're supposed to tell you that you're dead, are you crazy?

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

A – I'm alive! Alive!

III – Listen to me, spy. You chased after whores. You squandered your inheritance. They hung you by the feet in some bordello. So now, why are you turning up again?

A – Let me in and I'll read you the whole story of my innocent life. I kept a diary.

III – Shut up, fool!

IV – Explain it to me, my brothers and sisters! Why do my sins continue to involve the innocent? Some stranger, some poor soul has gone crazy here on my doorstep. What kind of world is this if I can't be sure that no one besides myself must suffer for my sins?

A – But I'm your son! Your son who's come back to you after squandering his Inheritance.

IV – Don't be offended because I'm not ashamed to say it in front of everybody. Poor fool, I'm one of you! I too feel myself to be of an inferior race.

III – What do inferior races have to do with anything?

IV – I said this to humble myself before this poor mad man. In fact, I'm like the rest of you. Not of an inferior race, nor a superior one. But like all of us, according to chance, things could've been different.

A – Let me in my house!

I – There's nobody in your house.

A – I'll tell you the story of my innocent life.

I – So you really don't understand that there's nobody anymore.

A – They left the little girl by herself?

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

I – Enough with the little girl.

A – And this thing we hear screeching?

I – They all went away and left the peacock locked up.

A – If there's nobody, I've invented this whole conversation?

I – You haven't told us anything yet. Were you sick?

A – My sickness? I think there are other things we could talk about first.

I – You did right to look for us. Are you a medium? You're very good, you know. Tell me, how did you find us?

A – I extended my arm like this, as it says in the text.
I sprinkled flour in a circle.
I dug a trench a yard-and-a-half deep.
I begun to slay the sheep.

IV – Homer, the visit to the underworld.

I – And what did you hear?

A – Voices from far away. Just voices. Without emotion, the depths of night began to murmur, boiling intensely and a multitude of voices began to say, they were saying...

I – So why don't we catch fire?

III – We must give off a halo, flaring up, with a revolving head in the middle, like a lamp.

IV – Our gleaming light ought to be visible from a long way off.

III – The images should be of a very clear, flimsy, transparent material: a puff that feeds the pain.

I – If we're in hell, why aren't we burning? Instead what do you find: a young woman and a little girl at home. A peacock. Two old people. Nothing else.

A – Wait. I want to hug you. I want to hold you tight in my arms. I want to share the joy of our painful tears.

(A keeps pushing all five buzzers at the same time.)

PEACOCK – Screeeeeeeeee! Screeeeeeeeee!

A – Nobody. There's nobody.

(A pushes the 6th floor buzzer.)

VI – Yes?

A – Casa Appolo?

VI – It's you, Marsia?

A – I'm a publicist for leather.

VI – And what's your proposal?

A – I do publicity for hides, leather goods, upholstery and skins.

VI – Medical work?

A – No. Skins in general.

VI – Whose?

A – On my skin there are drawings of beautiful nudes, still-lives, and a landscape. It's a one-of-a-kind opportunity.

VI – I'm rather interested.

A – You don't want to look at the landscape over the video-intercom.

VI – Describe it, please. Is it large?

A – Very, very large: vast and nocturnal.

VI – And at the top? What's at the top?

A – There's no top, just a heavy thickness.

VI – And below?

A – There's no bottom. Under this thickness there's the end of the thickness. Confidentially, I'd prefer to say this in your ear. Under the skin...

VI – Yes, yes, what's under the skin?

A – A lamp. A luminous globe. Let me in, you don't want to keep an invisible sun waiting on your doorstep. Casa Apollo? Is there anybody home?

VI – Instead I'm going to make you leave. Do you want to see your image?

A – Who are you?

VI – I ask the questions here. Eyes?

A – They continually change color.

VI – Underneath, what color is it?

A – The light from the lamp.

VI – It's not true. You can't see anything. Distinguishing marks|?

A – A scar.

VI – Is it a deep scar?

A – A superficial scar but it's quite long. It goes from the middle of the head, down the cheek, along the neck, splitting the chest in half, barely missing the umbilical and branching off down both legs.

VI – And the penis?

A – It runs along the left side.

VI – And then?

A – My feet are both cut too.

VI – And your scalp?

A – For now it's hanging.

VI – So you stupid salesman, what kind of disastrous image are you trying to sell me?

A – And you, will you tell me why you want to pull me apart like this?

VI – Have you read Ovid?

A – I'm a creator of surfaces, not a superficial artist.

VI – What kind of artist are you if you don't know how to reach for it, how to tear it out of yourself? Marsia, Marsia, my son, you've come home to your Apollo. Try to get a good price for your skin and ring all the bells you want because I'm going to make you dance.

(All the bells keep ringing.)