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ORMOLU DEATH CLOCKS

LOGLINE: An 18th century clockmaker's best client is a pawnshop owner from the future who is willing to trade the clockmaker's life for a profit.

FADE IN:

INT. MARC FRERE'S BEDROOM, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- NIGHT

A MANTEL CLOCK ticks in a dark room. The only light comes from moonlight streaming through a very small window on one wall. An eerie glow appears under the closed bedroom door and JAQUES FRERE, mid thirties, bursts into the room, flames behind him.

JAQUES

Marc, son, they're coming! It will  
be the guillotine for us. Awake!  
We must go!

Jaques drags MARC, nine years old, out of bed.

Marc, ill formed and stunted, groggily rubs his eyes.

Jaques hears ANGRY VOICES nearing the room. He looks around in despair, grabs the clock off the mantel, and breaks the window with it. Then he holds the clock out to Marc.

JAQUES (CONT'D)

Go. Take this, my last work. You  
can fit.

Marc hugs Jacques.

MARC

No! Papa!

JAQUES

Go! Be brave.

Marc nods, grabs the clock, and squeezes out the window, just as REVOLUTIONISTS burst through the flames and grab Jacques.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF MARC'S HOUSE, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- NIGHT

Marc turns back to the house. He grips the clock much like another child might hold a prized stuffed animal. The house is not on fire at all. TWO MEN load Jacques into a carriage marked "Charenton, Lunatic Asylum".

SUPERIMPOSE: "20 YEARS LATER"

EXT. RURAL FRANCE, 18TH CENTURY -- DUSK

The sun sets over a small cottage - "Horlogerie, Clockmaker".

INT. CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- CONT.

Marc, older now, but not much taller than when he was nine, dabs a liquid gold paste onto a silver colored boudoir clock.

SHOUTING erupts outside the shop, followed by POUNDING on the shop door.

Marc lays down his work, hops off the chair, and walks over to the door. When he opens it, TOWN CHILDREN outside pelt him with rotten produce.

TOWN CHILDREN  
Freak! Monstre difforme!

Marc slams the door and bolts it shut.

Fruits and vegetables smash through the windows, knocking over the display clock, his father's clock. Then the noise dies down.

Marc takes a handkerchief out of his pocket. He kneels down, picks up his father's clock, and wipes it with great care.

MARC  
I'll take care of it, Papa. I'll  
be brave.

SUPERIMPOSE: "200 YEARS LATER"

EXT. LAS VEGAS PAWNSHOP, PRESENT DAY -- DAY

A line, probably FIFTY PEOPLE deep, wraps around a dirty downtown pawnshop. A SECURITY GUARD stands at the door to manage the crowd. When one customer is escorted out, another is allowed inside. This is a popular place.

INT. PAWNSHOP, PRESENT DAY -- CONT.

JOE, a young pawnshop employee, wipes a MANTEL CLOCK in the showroom. It is the same clock Marc was wiping and hasn't aged a bit.

A rough looking guy, a HAGGLER, at the counter argues with RICK GARLAND, the middle aged pawnshop owner.

Rick turns an antique gun over in his hands. He has a keen eye and always knows what he's looking at. This is the real deal.

Rick speaks with a slight french accent.

RICK

Look, I'll give you two thousand for it.

HAGGLER

Three thousand, or I walk. I need gambling money.

RICK

Have a nice walk. If you change your mind, my offer has dropped to eighteen hundred.

The haggler gets flustered and confused.

HAGGLER

This is a genuine Remington Model 1858! I won't take a penny less than fifteen hundred.

The haggler puts out his hand and Rick deposits fifteen one hundred dollar bills in it, one by one. The haggler leaves, proud of his bargaining.

Rick hands the gun to Joe.

RICK

Mon dieu! Every time I think I've found the rock bottom of customer intelligence, there's another dungeon of stupid awaiting me. Put this in the storeroom, yes?

Joe heads to the back with the gun.

A WELL DRESSED WOMAN enters the store. She scans the room. Her eyes settle on the MANTEL CLOCK.

She walks over to the masterpiece and picks it up. The outline of dust it leaves on the shelf shows it's been there a long time.

WOMAN

How much?

RICK

Not for sale, that one. You wouldn't want it anyway. The hands move backward.

WOMAN

Do you realize what this is? It's an ormolu death clock.

Rick takes a better look at the woman and acts unconcerned.

RICK

Except it's broken. The hands move backward.

The woman turns the clock over in her hands, fascinated.

WOMAN

Pity, something so exquisite hides such a sinister past.

Rick just grunts in reply.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

The clockmakers all died by the age of forty. They gilded these by dipping them in a mercury solution and dabbing them with gold powder.

Rick wipes the counter.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Then they burned off the mercury in a kiln, breathing in the fumes the whole time. The process was outlawed when all the clockmakers went crazy and then died. These are rare. Are you even listening?

RICK

Look, you want something or not? I know my business. I know what that is. I know what it's worth. This is what I do. I've sold them before. I don't much care who it killed to get here, long as it sells.

WOMAN

If you find more of these in this sort of condition, I'll make you a very wealthy man.

Rick perks up.

RICK

Come back Friday. I'll get your clocks. Working ones, even.

The woman places the clock back on its shelf. She nods at Rick, not looking at all like she believes him. She leaves the store.

INT. PAWNSHOP, PRESENT DAY -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The store closed, Rick walks over to the clock and opens the face of it. He studies the hands. They do move backward.

He looks around, then goes to windows and closes the blinds.

When he returns to the clock, he forces the hands to move forward instead. One, two, three times around.

Everything blurs.

EXT. OUTSIDE, BEHIND CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- DAY

Marc inserts the last of a group of powdered clocks into a kiln and shuts the door. He dusts his bare hands across his apron, leaving streaks of gold. His hands tremble.

RICK (O.S.)

How many do you have in there?

Marc startles and ducks out of habit, used to avoiding the town bullies. He holds his hands over his head in defense.

MARC

If you're here to throw things at me, go ahead. Then just leave me to my work, for the sake of God!

Nothing happens.

Marc lifts his head and sees Rick.

Rick is dressed in appropriate historical attire.

RICK

Don't you remember me, mon ami?  
Are things so bad as that?

Marc sighs in relief. He stands up.

MARC

Ah. Oui. Yes, of course I  
remember you dear friend. My best  
customer. My only customer, of  
late. Welcome. Come inside and  
let me pour you a drink. What sort  
of clock do you need?

Marc starts toward the shop door.

RICK

All of them.

Marc halts, turning back.

MARC

They will cost you a fortune! You  
cannot have so much money as all  
that. Even when my father made  
clocks, Louis XV could only buy  
one.

RICK

I want them all. In two days time.  
I'll be back. If the clocks are  
not ready, I'll tell everyone you  
are selling me what you don't have.  
You will be beaten and thrown in  
prison. Do you think they would  
hesitate?

Marc shudders at the thought.

Rick stalks away, seeming to fade into the trees.

INT. CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- DAY

The broken windows have been boarded up. The clocks in the shop TICK as Marc bends over in a coughing fit and trembles afterward. As he looks around the shop, the TICKING grows louder and louder. He puts his hands over his ears.

MARC

Stop!

The ticking dies down to a normal level again.

There's a KNOCK at the door.

More cautious this time, Marc opens it only slightly and peeks out. TWO VILLAGERS with clubs burst into the room.

FIRST VILLAGER

You been scaring our kids, Freak.

The first villager shoves Marc into a wall. Then, together, both villagers ransack the shop, destroying clocks with their clubs. Clocks meant for Rick the next day.

MARC

No! Please!

As the villagers come toward him, clubs in hand, Marc dives for the clock on the display shelf, his father's clock. He pulls it to himself, curling around it on the floor as the two men beat and kick him.

INT. PAWNSHOP, PRESENT DAY -- DAY

Rick whistles as he wipes down the counter at the pawnshop.

The door chimes as Joe arrives for the day.

JOE

You seem happy.

RICK

I'm busting out of this place, Joe.  
Just one more big deal and I'm  
gonna live the high life. Travel.  
Women. A yacht. Tomorrow's the  
day.

Joe shrugs and puts his things behind the counter. He goes to shine up the things in the showroom.

JOE

Hey Rick! You sold that clock,  
huh? That what this is about?

Joe gestures to the empty shelf where the clock once sat. There's not even an imprint in the dust where the clock used to sit.

Rick runs over to the shelf and then starts running around the store looking high and low for the clock.

RICK

She stole it! Call the cops, Joe!



Rick grabs the phone from the counter to hand to Joe, but his hands tremble involuntarily and he drops it.

INT. CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- DAY

Marc sits in a chair at his kitchen table. He is battered and bruised. His feet don't reach the floor. His hands tremble on the table.

A FRENCH POLICE OFFICER surveys the damage to the shop.

MARC

It's all destroyed. Even my  
father's clock. I have nothing.

The police officer says nothing. He leaves the shop.

Marc continues talking, to no one in particular, and starts pulling at his hair with both hands.

MARC (CONT'D)

It's all a conspiracy. Papa! Oh,  
the clocks are ruined!

EXT. OUTSIDE FRONT OF CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- DAY

A carriage marked "Charenton, Lunatic Asylum" arrives and TWO MEN approach the police officer.

OFFICER

No one beat him. He destroyed his  
own shop. The bruises are by his  
own hand. You've got your work cut  
out for you.

The two men disappear into the clock shop and soon return with Marc held between them. They have to hunch over to allow Marc to walk.

MARC

I'm not crazy! I'm not!

INT. CLOCK SHOP, 18TH CENTURY FRANCE -- CONT.

The remains of Marc's father's clock lay on the ground. The face is cracked, the body is broken, but the mechanism suddenly recovers and starts ticking. It's the only ticking in the room now. The hands move forward.

FADE OUT.