



The Angel of Bordeaux

(Aka *Aristides - the Outcast Hero*)

Film script by Alice de Sousa
(*Inspired by true events*)

Log Line:

If a man's quality is measured by his deeds, then Aristides was the greatest of men.

'I would rather stand with God against men, than with men against God.'

– Aristides de Sousa Mendes

A mysterious looking woman sits in a Lisbon café staring into emptiness. She has sat immobile for a while when she attracts the attention of a bar tender, who engages her in conversation; which at first is awkward but will eventually flow like water from a fountain. The woman has been visiting a man who is dying a penniless outcast at the nearby pauper's hospital. She asks if the bar tender has heard of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. He hasn't and so, she tells him a remarkable but entirely true story...

It begins in a war torn Europe, in Bordeaux and in May 1940. As the invading German army advance, thousands of desperate refugees surround the Portuguese Consulate hoping to obtain visas to enter into neutral Portugal. The Portuguese Consul, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, pleads with his government for the authority to grant visas. The official reply is a categorical – '*no visas*'. As soldiers surround the Consulate, Aristides orders the doors to be open thus provides diplomatic sanctuary to many desperate people. His wife gives food and drink to as many as possible; whilst the deeply anxious Consul becomes ill and bed ridden. When he emerges three days later, his hair has turned completely white. On the fourth day, 16th June 1940, faced with an ever increasing crowd, Aristides orders an assembly-line to be created and with his sons, secretary and a Rabbi proceeds, for the next three days, to issue many thousands of life saving visas.

On the 19th June the Germans bomb Bordeaux and the mass of terrified refugees flee to the South. Aristides follows them: in Toulouse he orders the vice-Consul to issue more visas and at the border in Bayonne he continues to stamp more documents. Meanwhile, the British Embassy denounces his irregular actions to the Portuguese Fascist government which sends officials to stop him. Undeterred, Aristides makes his way to Biarritz and at the small border point near Hendaye, he escorts refugees across the Spanish border and to safety. In those last hours, he places his signature and official stamp on numerous passports, identities cards, and for those who have no documents even on pieces of newspaper, stating that the bearer had permission to enter Portugal.

On the 23rd June, Aristides is finally apprehended and unceremoniously returned to his homeland; where he is to face a disciplinary process, resulting in his removal from diplomatic office and in political and social disgrace. For the next fifteen years, he tries unsuccessfully to clear his name. Prevented from returning to consular duties and from practicing as a barrister, he is systematically driven into poverty and ignominy.

The mysterious woman says that Aristides died earlier that day, on the 3rd April 1954, a ruined outcast with nobody by his side. As she stands and makes to exit the bar tender says, '*You haven't told me your name?*' The intriguing woman fixes him with a meaningful glance and then leaves.

Further information:

Aristides de Sousa Mendes issued transit visas to some 30,000 families and thus created, where previously none existed, an escape route out of Nazi occupied France - this was used during WWII by an estimated **one million people**. Although posthumously Aristides has received some acknowledgement, he remains largely unknown and his story has never before been told on film. **The Angel of Bordeaux**, the nickname given Aristides by the refugees, will finally bring world wide recognition to one of WWII's greatest humanitarian figures.

'If thousands of Jews can suffer because of a Catholic then this Catholic will suffer in order to save Jews. I shall save them all! – Aristides de Sousa Mendes

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