

# FILM NOIR

Adapted for the Screen by  
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From his original Radio Play  
*"Film Noir"*

Episode 2.3  
The Frightmare Theatre Podcast

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A SAXOPHONE croons a MELANCHOLY JAZZ NUMBER, as we...

FADE IN:

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - 1948 - CITY STREET - NIGHT

Rain beats down heavily. Cars slosh through the flooding city streets.

SUPERIMPOSE:

**"Chicago, 1948"**

An ELEGANT CAR pulls up to the curb. TWO MEN, one at the wheel and one in the back seat, peer through the windshield at the grandiose movie house across the street.

ACROSS THE STREET - Brilliant neon letters running down the ornate facade read, "THE BROADMOOR", and a dazzling marquee reads, *"Charles RUSSELL & Mary Beth HUGHES - INNER SANCTUM!"*

Taking shelter under this marquee awning, is ETHEL BRADBURY (30s). She stands stoically in front of large gilded doors.

INT. KENNETH'S CAR - NIGHT

In the rear seat of the dim car, MANNY FERGUSON (40s) collapses backward, bellowing an exasperated sigh.

FERGUSON

Jesus Christ. What's she doing here?

In the front, KENNETH TODD (60's), addresses his passenger without taking his eyes off of the woman across the street.

KENNETH

Miss Bradbury insisted on being present for your arrival.

FERGUSON

Hmph. I'm sure she did.

KENNETH

Mr. Ferguson, do be kind to her. Ethel's been through quite a lot these past few weeks. We all have. You may not have been too keen on Mr. Anger, but your cynicism isn't shared by as many as you might like to believe.

FERGUSON  
 Alright, Alright, Kenny--

KENNETH  
 --Mr. Todd.

FERGUSON  
 --*MISTER TODD*. Don't flip your wig.  
 I'm not gonna ruffle the lady's  
 feathers, I promise. Unless of  
 course, the lady *wants* to get her  
 feathers ruffled.

Belying his age and sense of propriety, Kenneth almost  
 launches over the seat.

KENNETH  
 Mr. Ferguson! I will not have you  
 besmirch that fine woman's  
 reputation b--

Stifling laughter, Ferguson holds his hands up in surrender.

FERGUSON  
 --Cool down, Kenny, ol' pal. I'm  
 only raggin' ya a little.

KENNETH  
 Miss Bradbury served Mr. Anger  
 faithfully on every one of his  
 pictures over the past twenty  
 years. She was by his side through  
 all of it, Mr. Ferguson. When you--  
 when that review of yours sealed  
 the coffin of his career and broke  
 what was left of that titan of man  
 into a thousand shattered pieces.  
 She-- *WE* were the only ones left to  
 pick up those pieces. ...Words have  
 consequences, Mr. Ferguson.

FERGUSON  
 Well, I dunno what to tell ya,  
 Kenny. That picture was a bomb. A  
 stinker. The worst in a long line  
 of stinkers. Jackie P. Anger may  
 have been an artistic genius when  
 he was churnin' out the likes of  
 "The Darkest Hour" and "Night  
 Bird," sure. But that spark fizzled  
 out long ago.

KENNETH  
 Who can argue with the Tribune?

FERGUSON

Hey, I call 'em like I see 'em,  
pally. I get paid a hell of a lot  
to do it too.

KENNETH

Vultures; the lot of you.  
Sustaining yourselves by picking  
the carcasses of greater men. How  
you critics sleep at night, I'll  
never know.

FERGUSON

Like a angel, pally. Like a baby  
angel.

KENNETH

Somehow I doubt that. You're the  
worst of them all, Mr. Ferguson.

FERGUSON

Aw, Kenny, you're gonna make me  
blush.

He grabs a satchel from the seat, and slides to the door.

FERGUSON (CONT'D)

Well, the storm's only starting. We  
may as well get on with this.

KENNETH

My apologies, Mr. Ferguson. Though  
I've enjoyed immensely the pleasure  
of your company, I am now to inform  
you, this is where we part ways.

FERGUSON

Wait. What?

KENNETH

The last will and testament of Mr.  
Anger clearly states that you,  
Emmanuel J. Ferguson, are to sit for  
a specially private screening of  
Mr. Anger's, yet to be released,  
final cinematic masterpiece,  
"Anaíresi" (*an-AIR-ee-see*).  
Following the film's conclusion,  
presuming you've sat through the  
entirety of the piece, you will be  
awarded your bestowal in it's  
entirety.

FERGUSON

A hundred grand. One hundred  
thousand clams just for sittin'  
through Anger's last hoorah.

KENNETH

Correct, Mr. Ferguson.

FERGUSON

Well, Kenny ol' pal, let's just  
hope sufferin' through another self-  
indulgent "masterpiece" of the late  
great Jackie Anger is worth it,  
huh?

He slaps Kenneth on the shoulder, and opens the door.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - 1948 - CITY STREET - NIGHT

Ferguson steps into the pouring rain, slamming the car door  
behind him. He flashes Kenneth a quick smirk and pulls his  
overcoat collar high and his hat brim low against the rain.

Kenneth watches Ferguson slosh across the busy street. For  
the briefest of moments, a cloud of remorse darkens his face.

He drives off into the glow of the city lights.

EXT. DOWNTOWN CHICAGO - OUTSIDE THE BROADMOOR - NIGHT

Ethel Bradbury keeps dry under the illuminated awning of The  
Broadmoor. She turns to see Ferguson emerge from the  
unending downpour.

ETHEL

Mr. Ferguson.

FERGUSON

Miss Bradbury.

ETHEL

Kenneth didn't think he'd actually  
be able to drag you here. But I  
knew you were just the kind of  
greedy sonuvabitch who couldn't  
pass up that kind of money. Even if  
it meant swallowing his pride and  
reneging on his vow to, what was it  
again? *"Never waste another moment  
on the pathetic over aggrandized  
work of the once-great, Jonathan P.  
Anger."*

FERGUSON

Ya know, my words sound a little sweeter than intended, comin' from those lips of yours.

He lights a cigarette.

ETHEL

You really are a bastard, Manny.

FERGUSON

That's what my mother tells me.

She pulls an envelope from her purse, handing it to him.

ETHEL

Here is your ticket, complements of the "once great" Jonathan P. Anger.

Written across the front of the sealed white envelope, are two simple words, "For Manny." He chuckles.

FERGUSON

A ticket? Why so formal?

ETHEL

Jackie always did have an eye for detail. One of the reasons his films were admired by so many. He loved the movies. Not just making them, Mr. Ferguson, but watching them.. in grand old cinema palaces like The Broadmoor, here. He always said movies held their own special magic; that a good story could cast a spell over an audience. Jackie would have Kenneth drive him here every Saturday for a double feature. That is, until your scathing review of "Mercy to the Fallen" forced him into reclusion abroad.

He picks stray tobacco from his tongue and flicks it aside.

FERGUSON

Yeah, I heard a little somethin' about that.

ETHEL

You disgust me--

FERGUSON

--Europe, was it? A decade spent reconnecting with his roots, soul searching, or some other desperate stunt to spark the public interest and cling to the remains of his bygone fame?

Ethel's eyes are black penetrating ice.

ETHEL

Something like that.

Ferguson chucks his cigarette down and stamps it out.

FERGUSON

Well, it's been a real gas catchin' up, Ethel, but there's money to be made. And we got ourselves, what is sure-to-be, quite the doozy to sit through here. So, if you'll allow me, my lady...

He removes his hat, and reaches for the gilded lobby door.

Ethel quickly steps backward.

ETHEL

NO.

FERGUSON

Wha- Oh, you're not tellin' me you're gonna make me sit through this thing all by myself?

ETHEL

Jackie's final film wasn't meant for me.

FERGUSON

What the hell does that mean?

ETHEL

"Anaíresi" (*an-AIR-ee-see*) is Jonathan P. Anger's most personal project. To say he poured his heart and soul into it is an understatement. His last days were spent perfecting every frame; every nuance of this final cinematic masterpiece. He wanted- he needed to share it--

FERGUSON

I get it. The old man needed the world to understand--

ETHEL

--you, Mr. Ferguson. It's all for you.

FERGUSON

Look, why you bustin' my chops, lady. The man's career was dyin' long before I reviewed "Mercy to the Fallen". What's the point in all you sycophantic Jonathan Anger worshipers tryin' to push this little stunt on me, huh? To prove to me I gave the man a bum rap in a column I wrote ten years ago?

ETHEL

No. We're simply carrying out the final wishes of a man we loved. An icon who changed the face of cinema, only to be betrayed by the very industry for which he gave his life. Your "bum rap" had consequences far beyond your intentions, I'm sure. But that doesn't wash the red stain from your hands. You make your living by criticizing the life's work of others, and the public praises you for it. You pass yourself off as an expert in a subject you've only ever viewed from the spectator box. You couldn't possibly understand the depth of passion and courage it takes to fragment your very soul in an effort to communicate something so personal, so beautifully raw, and then present that naked vulnerability to a jaded and uncaring world. True art cannot be viewed passively. It must be experienced. It is Jackie's final wish that you, Manny Ferguson, renowned film critic, finally really *experience* the true power of cinema.

FERGUSON

I take it you've already *experienced* this "cinematic gift"?

ETHEL

No. This is the only film of Jackie's that I will never experience. "Anaíresi" (*an-AIR-ee-see*) was created for you to behold, Mr. Ferguson. *Only you.*

FERGUSON

Well, if this ain't the most cockeyed scheme I've ever... Whatever, lady. If I gotta watch this stinker by myself, so be it.

He yanks open the lobby door and turns back to her.

FERGUSON (CONT'D)

As long as I get what I'm owed.

He disappears through the door.

ETHEL

Oh, don't worry, Mr. Ferguson. You'll get everything you deserve.

A dark smile creeps across her face.

LIGHTNING STREAKS & THUNDER BOOMS high above the city.

INT. THE BROADMOOR THEATER - LOBBY - NIGHT

The SQUEAKS from Ferguson's soggy shoes echo in the empty extravagant lobby, as he makes his way across it's expanse.

At the far end of the hall, a young theater usher, KIMBERLY, stands in wait. She vibrates with excitement.

FERGUSON

Hiya, kid.

KIMBERLY

Manny Ferguson! Wow! Gosh, I read your column every week. When Mr. Moskowitz informed me we'd be staying open late for a special guest, I didn't think in a million years it would be THE Manny Ferguson of the Chicago Tribune. Holy Cow!

Ferguson removes his hat and looks around, taking in the place.