

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,
"Anairesi" (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. "Anáiresi" (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.