

A BAYOU MYSTIC FILMS PRODUCTION

BOUDREAUX

THE 13TH SACRIFICE

Written & Directed by Antonio R. Ward Jr. • New Orleans, 1938

CASTING SIDES — SELF-TAPE

THE DETECTIVE

SUPPORTING — FEATURED • AGE: 40-55

THE CHARACTER

A tired, decent New Orleans police detective — thirty years on the job, a rational man in a film that will quietly take his rationality apart. He is the audience's last handhold on the ordinary world: the man who needs the pieces to make a picture, and keeps being handed pieces that don't.

The Detective is the film's conscience and, eventually, its final image of humanity. He carries the weight of what he sees home in his coat, and the role requires an actor who can do enormous emotional work with almost no words — weariness, decency, and the first hairline crack in a lifetime of certainty.

ABOUT THE SCENE

The morning after at the convent. He reads the scene like a cop — grim, gentle, certain — and then hits the one detail his thirty years has no page for. Play the certainty first; the crack only works if the certainty was real. The reader plays MOTHER AGNES.

SELF-TAPE INSTRUCTIONS

- Slate: name, height, location, representation (if any), and the role you are reading for.
- Frame from the chest up, in good light, with a neutral background. Reader off-camera.
- Period voice welcome, but truth first — do not let the accent drive the scene.
- Two takes maximum. Label your file: LASTNAME_FIRSTNAME_THE.

EXT. ST. CATHERINE'S - GROUNDS - MORNING

Morning. And the convent is made to discover what the night left it.

The nuns and the police move in a stunned hush. Two scenes, one dark night. A young nun hanged in the old oak, cut down now and covered on the wet grass. And a priest's quarters standing empty -- a burst travel case, banknotes scattered, a black cassock pooled on the floor, and no priest anywhere on the grounds or the roads or the rail station, gone as though he walked off the edge of the world.

A DETECTIVE, forties, tired, decent, stands with MOTHER AGNES on the chapel steps. And for him, mercifully, terribly, the pieces make a picture. A rational one. A wrong one.

DETECTIVE

(low, grim, almost gentle)

Mother, I'll tell you how this reads, and I'm sorry for it. A young nun's dead in that tree. And your Father David packed a bag in the middle of the night, emptied his tin of every dollar, and vanished before the bell.

(he lets it land)

A man doesn't run like that from nothing. Whatever was between those two -- and I think we both have our guess -- I think he did this. I think he put that girl in that tree to bury it, and I think he's halfway to Baton Rouge by now. And I am going to spend the rest of my year trying to find him.

He is half right. He is looking at a murder, and he has the murderer dead to rights. He simply has the ending wrong -- David never made it past his own doorway, and no jail this detective knows about is holding him now.

Mother Agnes looks at the empty air where a man should be fleeing, and cannot say the thing she feels, because there are no words in her faith for it.

MOTHER AGNES

(quietly)

...and if you never find him,
Detective?

DETECTIVE

(a long beat; he has no
good answer)

Then he's the luckiest guilty man
I ever chased.

(and something flickers --
the first hairline crack
in his certainty, looking
at that empty cassock)

Though I'll be honest with you,
Mother. Thirty years I've done
this. I've never once seen a man
leave his own clothes standing
where he stood and take nothing of
himself with him. I don't have a
page in my book for that. So I'm
going to write "fled," because
"fled" is a word I can close a
file with.

He goes. He believes he is hunting a living man. He will
never catch him, and he will never once guess why -- and
that not-knowing is the mercy the film grants him, and
grants no one else.

And Mother Agnes -- left alone with a dead girl, a
vanished priest, and a dread she has no name for -- makes
the only decision a woman responsible for a house full of
children can make on a morning like this one.

MOTHER AGNES

(to the sisters, her voice
steady over a breaking
heart)

Wake the girls. All of them. Pack
their trunks and send word to
their families -- every one of
them goes home today. I'll not
keep a single child under this
roof one more night, not until I
understand what has come into this
house.

(quieter, to herself,
watching the covered shape
beneath the oak)

And I do not think I ever will.

The nuns move to obey. And across the grounds, in the
stunned grey morning, the students are gathered up and
sent home -- and among them, a girl carrying a coffin no
one can see.

Mother Agnes stands alone between an empty tree and an
empty room, and prays, and is not answered.