

MOTHERHOUSE

Based on,  
the real life tragedies of the Grey Nuns of Montreal.

Los Angeles, CA  
(718) 902-5031

**EXT. GOYER FARM- NIGHT**

**MAY 13th, 1752.**

TRUDGING. The sound of FOOTSTEPS struggling through mud. A MAN wading his way across a soaked field. We don't get to see his face yet.

One hand brandishes a FLINTLOCK PISTOL and the other a HUNTING KNIFE.

He's marching towards a small house on the edge of the property. The lights are out.

**INT. ST. JEAN HOUSE- BEDROOM- MEANWHILE**

JEAN FAVRE ST-JEAN (male, 60, stout) sleeps in bed alongside his wife MARIE BASTIEN (female, 60s, stout). He tosses and turns.

KNOCKING at the door. Heavy and loud. Jean JOLTS awake. His wife remains asleep.

He grumbles something inaudible and gets up.

**INT. ST. JEAN HOUSE- CONTINUOUS**

We follow him as he stumbles around in the dark. Eventually, he finds a gas oil lamp.

KNOCKING.

JEAN

One moment!

He manages to ignite it and heads to the front door.

**EXT. ST. JEAN HOUSE**

The small house stands against the night. At a distance, we see The Man's full body as he waits for the door to open. His back to us.

Slowly, the front door opens.

JEAN

Oh, Monsieur Goyer, how may-

BAM! A SHOT rings out. The Man marches forward into the house. And SLAMS the door shut behind him.

A light in the bedroom FLICKERS on. Movement in the home. The sounds of furniture being thrown. The CRASHING of glass.

THE MAN

The money! Where is the money?

A SCREAM rips through the quiet of the night.

MARIE

No, no! Please, no! Ple-

The plea is cut off and replaced by garbling. BLOOD sprinkles the bedroom window.

**EXT. GOYER FARM- DAY**

The Man's hands are bound to a CARRIAGE WHEEL. His head hangs low. We don't get to see his face yet.

His arms and legs bend in JAGGED shapes. He WHEEZES and **he mutters to himself.**

THE MAN

I did it. I did it.

WHAM! A HAND from offscreen comes down on the side of his head.

TORTURER (O.S.)

You have confessed to the murders of Jean Favre dit St-Jean and his wife Marie Bastien. Your sentence is death.

A tall BROWN WOODEN CROSS is placed behind the wheel. **Goyer keeps muttering.**

**EXT. GOYER FARM- DAY**

The cross, now PAINTED BLOOD RED, stands over a fresh grave. WORKERS can be heard trodding across the land.

**EXT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- ENTRANCE- MORNING**

**DECEMBER 2nd, 1917.**

The shadow of a cross across cobblestone. Where the wooden cross and grave used to rest is now a cobblestone road covered with a fresh layer of snow.

A CHILD runs across the shadow. We look up to see it's being cast by the design of a large metal gate.

Unkempt and anxious CHILDREN line up in front of the gate. Beyond looms the massive **Motherhouse of the Grey Nuns**. Those same NUNS, in their grey frocks, approach the gate to open it.

Waiting amongst the children is BERTHE COURTEMANCHE (female, 27) dressed in simple winter clothes. She's as anxious as the children. Snow floats down upon the group.

SISTER LAGRAVE  
Miss Courtemanche?

Berthe turns to see SISTER LAGRAVE (female, 30s) behind her. She's taller than Berthe and wearing the traditional winter garb of the Grey Nuns.

BERTHE  
Uh, yes. And you are?

The two shake gloved hands. Sister Lagrave's grip is firm.

SISTER LAGRAVE  
You may call me Sister Lagrave. I'm here to escort you to our Reverend Mother.

Berthe gives a nervous nod and follows Sister Lagrave.

They walk through the gate and are greeted by lines of perfectly placed hedges and trees, all desperately hanging on to the last few leaves they have.

SISTER LAGRAVE (CONT'D)  
In the spring you will get a better idea of how beautiful the gardens are.

BERTHE  
They're beautiful now, in their own way.

SISTER LAGRAVE  
I suppose. If you like that sort of thing.

They push through the front doors...

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- FOYER- CONTINUOUS**

And are met with the immediate hustle and bustle of the Motherhouse. NUNS and ORDERLIES going about with their chores and welcoming in the CHILDREN.

BERTHE

Are these children new or returning?

SISTER LAGRAVE

A mix. Most are orphans who we then house or they come from families who struggle to provide.

BERTHE

How do you manage so-

SISTER LAGRAVE

Come along. I am afraid we are on a rather strict schedule.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- CONTINUOUS**

Sister Lagrave guides Berthe deeper into the Motherhouse and up the stairs to an office with a tall heavy wooden door.

The sign above reads: Office of The Mother General

SISTER LAGRAVE

This is where I leave you. I will be here when you finish so I can show you to your room.

She gestures for Berthe to enter the office.

BERTHE

Should I knock?

SISTER LAGRAVE

No need. She is expecting you.

Berthe walks through.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- GENERAL'S OFFICE- CONTINUOUS**

Standing behind a desk is Superior General of the Grey nuns M A. PICHE (female, 60s). A stout old woman wearing her perfectly pressed habit.

MOTHER PICHE

Sit.

Berthe practically trips over herself to comply.

MOTHER PICHE (CONT'D)

Welcome to the Motherhouse.

BERTHE

Thank you, Madame Piché.

MOTHER PICHE

You will refer to me as Reverend Mother. Nothing else.

BERTHE

I'm sorry, Reverend Mother.

Piché takes in Berthe from head to toe. It's an oppressive gaze. Innately demeaning.

MOTHER PICHE

Welcome to your new home, Miss Courtemanche. I am familiar with your professional history but may I ask, what is your history with the church?

BERTHE

This church? Or-

MOTHER PICHE

Your relationship with God.

BERTHE

Oh. Well, I used to go to church every Sunday with my mother but I must admit it's been a while.

MOTHER PICHE

You let your mother go alone?

BERTHE

She passed.

MOTHER PICHE

Apologies. May her soul be at peace in His heavenly kingdom.

BERTHE

I felt... things always seemed better then. I thought coming here and really taking the time to learn might make it all easier.

MOTHER PICHE

"Blessed be God! Divine Providence provides for everything; all my trust is in it."

BERTHE

I don't recognize that verse.

MOTHER PICHE

Those are the words of our great founder, Marie-Marguerite d'Youville. You will come to know them well in your time here.

Berthe goes to speak again but is cut off by Mother Piché, who sits down and sifts through papers on her desk.

MOTHER PICHE (CONT'D)

Now, we must get to the matter of your responsibilities here.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- ORPHANAGE- AFTERNOON**

Sister Lagrave guides Berthe through the orphanage of the church. CHILDREN are running and playing. Most under the age of 12.

MOTHER PICHE (V.O.)

Given your schoolhouse background, you will be aiding us with the children.

Berthe spots ODETTE (female, 7) drawing by herself.

MOTHER PICHE (V.O.)

Presently, we do not have a teaching position available but we are always in need of caretakers.

Berthe goes and sits by her. The young girl hands her a pencil to join in.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- BERTHE'S ROOM- EVENING**

Simple and barebones. A shoebox of a room with a TWIN BED and a SINGLE WINDOW. There's a SMALL DRESSER and a MIRROR but nothing more.

Sister Lagrave leaves Berthe in her room.

MOTHER PICHE (V.O.)

I understand you will be boarding with us. Your room is yours to do with as you please but do keep in mind the age of this place.

Berthe sets down her bag.

MOTHER PICHE (V.O.)

There is a lot of history here and everyone is expected to be respectful of it.

Berthe looks out her window. A MAN by the front gate. His features are hard to make out at this distance.

MOTHER PICHE (V.O.)

If you have any questions I am sure Sister Lagrave or any of the other Sisters will be able to help you.

His head flicks up toward Berthe. STARTLED, she looks away.

When she looks again he's gone.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- ORPHANAGE- MORNING**

Berthe arrives. She looks around the room for the young girl from yesterday Odette, when ESTELLE VALADE (female, late 20s) pops up.

ESTELLE

You must be Berthe. Or, Orderly Courtemanche if we want to be proper about it.

BERTHE

What gave me away?

ESTELLE

I've been here since I was a girl. I know everyone there is to know. Plus you're looking around like a lost puppy.

BERTHE

This place is a lot bigger than I imagined.

ESTELLE

It's definitely easy to get lost. I'm Estelle Valade.



She holds out her hand. Berthe nervously takes it and braces herself for the joke she's attempting.

BERTHE

Or, Orderly Valade. If we want to be proper about it.

Estelle laughs. Berthe relaxes.

ESTELLE

Let me give you an actual walk-through. Sister Lagrave is great at pointing but pretty unhelpful when it comes to explaining.

BERTHE

I was hoping it wasn't just me.

ESTELLE

I promise it's not you.

As Estelle guides her farther into the orphanage, Berthe spots Odette. The two share shy waves.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

So, you've met Odette?

BERTHE

We were drawing together yesterday.

ESTELLE

So, you were a caretaker before this?

BERTHE

A teacher.

ESTELLE

Right, that's what it was. I just heard you were qualified and we need all the help we can get these days.

BERTHE

It feels like more children file in every day.

ESTELLE

Because they do. And we can't turn away a single one.

BERTHE

You almost sound like you want to.

ESTELLE

I don't. At least, I don't really.  
It's just... we're constantly  
outnumbered. I know a lot of them  
aren't better off at home but we  
can't fully provide for them here  
either.

As if on cue, two distraught 7-YEAR-OLDS (one boy, one girl,  
6-8) run up to Estelle.

GIRL

Miss Valade! Miss Valade!

BOY

Don't listen to her!

GIRL

He took my toy/ and broke it  
and now I can't play!

BOY (CONT'D)

/She's lying! I didn't take  
anything.

ESTELLE

Okay, okay. Breathe please, then  
one at a time.

Estelle's chatting with the children becomes muffled as  
Berthe spots a LITTLE GIRL (7) in a far corner of the room.

The clothing she wears is different from the other children  
and she's dirty. Or beaten.

Berthe walks towards her but Estelle's hand on her shoulder  
turns her around.

ESTELLE (CONT'D)

Sorry about that. We trend at that  
level of chaos.

BERTHE

I'm used to it.

ESTELLE

Right. Good, let's continue then.  
Hopefully no more interruptions.

BERTHE

Yeah, one moment, I just wanted-

She looks and the girl is gone.

ESTELLE

You alright?

BERTHE

Yes, sorry. I thought- never-mind.

ESTELLE

Okay. Well, the morning rotations tend to be the easiest cause the kids are still a little tired. For the first few weeks, you'll be shadowing me which means mornings and afternoons you're here.

BERTHE

Got it.

ESTELLE

Most of what we do is really just spending time with them. We only have a handful of teachers so the children cycle in groups between here and the classroom.

BERTHE

That hardly seems like enough schooling.

ESTELLE

Like I said, we just do what we can. Follow me.

**INT. THE MOTHERHOUSE- ORPHANAGE DORMS- CONTINUOUS**

TWIN BEDS line the walls. Little TRUNKS sit by each perfectly made bed.

ESTELLE

If you're ever working a night rotation, you'll be in here.

BERTHE

This is way too small for them.

ESTELLE

More kids every year, less space. The sisters are talking about another expansion but I'm not sure the church has the funds.

BERTHE

And you really never turn anyone away?

ESTELLE

Not since the last expansion as far  
I know. Personally, I think the  
Reverend Mother is just paranoid  
God Himself will come down here and  
rage if she does.

BERTHE

You don't fear God?

ESTELLE

What's there to fear?