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Sunday (Opening):

A man well hung

By Mike Rowe

On October first, 1788, 40.000 people traveled from all over Scotland to see a burglar hang in the public square.

It was the largest turnout for a public hanging in the history of the world, which begs the question of what exactly does a burglar have to steal to inspire forty thousand people to cheer his death.

By day William Brody was a happily married locksmith, a respected family man with a reputation as a maker of fine furniture. Officially he was the deacon of rights, a title that afforded him a seat on the town council. By night, however, the deacon was a hard-drinking lover of cards and dice. He kept a mistress unbeknownst to his wife, a second mistress unbeknownst to his first mistress, five bastard children, and a massive gambling debt, he serviced by robbing his own customers, usually by letting himself into their homes with keys he copied after installing their new locks. For twenty years William Brody lived a double life. And when a strong him up no one in the crowd we sure, exactly who it was up there, dangling from the end of that rope. Maybe that's why somebody came to watch.

Eighty-five years later to the day a twenty-three-year-old writer found himself hunched over his father's antique desk not writing. Instead, Bob was staring at a stack of blank pages, like a slab of untouched marble waiting for the sculptures chisel. The empty sheets taunted him with their endless possibility. How exactly should the young author begin his career as a man of letters: with a poem, an essay, a play, a novel, maybe a pirate adventure? Now that's stupid! Nobody's going to read a pirate adventure, what was he thinking.

Before long Bob concluded that he was incapable of filling those blank pages with anything worth reading. So we left them neatly stacked on his father's antique desk and fled to the sanctuary of his favorite brothel where he continued his search for inspiration with the help of two hookers and a bottle of Scotch.

With blithe society, have been scandalized by Bob's presence in such a lowly place, with his parents and their friends have been mortified by his behavior. You better believe it! Like his father an engineer who designed and built lighthouses all over Scotland and his grandfather an engineer who designed and built lighthouses all over Scotland, most of Edinburgh expected Bob to become an engineer who designed and built lighthouses all over Scotland.

But Bob made other plans and shared them with no one but the fine folks in Edinburgh's gambling halls and bordellos. There he revealed a personality completely at odds with the boy whose parents thought they raised, that of a true bohemian committed to changing the world with pen and paper.

Anyway, on this particular evening in this particular bordello, Bob's presence just happened to coincide with the eighty-fifth anniversary of deacon Brody's execution. A fact brought to Bob's attention by one of the aforementioned hookers with a simple toast: "Here's to the good deacon! Hang on this very day eighty-five years ago but alive and well in our livers in loins!"

The name hit him like a serendipitous slap in the face. Deacon Brody, of course, the cure to his writer's block had been staring him in the face all day. In a flash, Bob knew precisely how he would fill those empty pages. He would offer the world a profound rumination on the duality of man. He would do so in the form of a play. A glorious play and he would write that play on the desk made for his grandfather a hundred years ago. A desk that bore the name of the craftsman who made it.

William Brody.

Call it Kismet or coincidence or divine intervention. Whatever it was Bob was reinvigorated he bit the whores a pleasant good evening and ran home to write the play that would make him a respectable author. He called it deacon Brody the double life.

It took awhile. Bob was not a writer to be hurried and along the way, his parents were devastated by their son's choice of vocation. Likewise, polite society was shocked that a fine lad like Bob would refuse to follow in his father's footsteps. But Bob was determined and soon he was a published play right and soon after that his first play finally premiered on the London stage and there "Deacon Brody - the double life" was seen by virtually - no one.

It closed a week after opening. Bob was crushed obviously but refrained from drowning his sorrows with the strumpets in their do well at the closest gin joint, because Bob was now a married man and resolve to live a more congruent life than the subject of his first and only play.

So he tried again this time with that pirate adventure. The one he had wanted to write in the first place. The one that went on to become an international bestseller and eventually a major motion picture.

Yes, it was "Treasure Island" that put Bob on the map and after that "kidnapped", would secure his place as a writer of great fiction. Many others would follow, but as it turns out it was his failed play, that ultimately led to his most enduring work. Not because his play enjoyed a revival, but because it eventually led to a rewrite.

Six years after the "double life" bombed in London, Bob once again put pen to paper and ruminated upon the duality of man. But this time he did it not through the story of the burglar who built the furniture in his father's home, but through his own efforts to live a double life.

The result.

A breathtaking masterpiece, written over the course of just three days that leaves the reader to wonder who among us is really as they appear.

Maybe that's why forty thousand people showed up to see deacon Brody swing. To stare not just at the burglar on the gallows, but at each other to look around and wonder who else might be hiding their true self behind the smiling exterior.

That's the question that vanquished Bob's writer's block, one hundred and forty-five years ago. A question that prompted a would-be lighthouse builder to provide an answer. An answer that still gives us pause today.

Such is the legacy of Robert Louis Stevenson and the "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde".

Anyway, that's the way I heard it.

Monday (Night Game):

The Ugly Duckling

By Hans Christian Andersen

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It was a beautiful day in the country. The sun was shining and the birds were singing. Close by the canal a duck sat on her eggs. She had been sitting on them a long time. One by one the eggs cracked open. "CRACK" ... "CRACK" ... "CRACK" "How big the world is," said the ducklings as they waddled around.

But one egg remained in the nest. It was very large. "Why is it taking so long?" said the mother duck. "It's a turkey egg," said one of her friends. "Leave it. Take the other ducklings away with you." "Oh I couldn't. Just a little while longer." And she sat on the egg. At last, the egg broke, and out tumbled...A very odd looking creature. It was big and grey and ugly. "What a funny looking duckling," said the mother duck.

The next day, the mother duck took her children to the canal. To her surprise, the ugly duckling jumped in with all the others, and swam around happily. But back in the fowl yard, the other ducks were not pleased. "What is that?" they asked. "It's my newest duckling. He is very good. He swims as well as the others – maybe better." "But my dear, he is so ugly!" They all laughed.

Worse than that, some of them pecked at him and called him names. After a few days, even his brothers and sisters turned on him. "Go away," they hissed, "you ugly duckling." So the little duckling ran away. He found himself at a lake. On it were a number of wild ducks. "Oh gosh," they said, "you are ugly. But you can stay with us, if you wish."

All was well for a few days. Then one day BANG ... BANG ... BANG Hunters have arrived. They were shooting at the ducks. A big dog jumped at the ugly duckling. WOOF! The little duckling ran away as fast as he could. At last he found a lake. All on his own, he swam around.

Time went by. It grew colder. One evening, as the sun was setting, a flock of white birds flew overhead. They were very beautiful, with long slender necks. "Oh how I wish I was one of them," said the ugly duckling. Winter came on. It was bitterly cold. The duckling was starving. He was so cold he could not feel his flippers. Ice covered the pond. The ugly duckling hid under a bush, trying to keep warm.

One day, a farmer found him. "I'll take you home for my children," he said. Inside the farmer's house, the duckling felt better. But the children were rough. And when he knocked over a pail of milk, the farmer's wife yelled out at him, and tried to hit him with a broom. Once more, the duckling ran away, back into the wild.

The snows came. But the duckling was stronger now. And somehow he kept on. As time went on, he grew stronger, and bigger. The sun started shining again. The leaves came out on the trees. Spring had come at last. Birds came back after the winter. And one day, three beautiful white birds landed on the lake where he lived. "They're beautiful," he said. "I will go to them. But then he remembered that he was ugly. "They will probably kill me," he said. "After all, the hens picked on me. And the children. And the farmer's wife."

He swam towards the white birds. They turned. They came towards him. "Please do not kill me," he said. "I know I am ugly. But please be kind to me." But as he stopped, he looked down. He saw his reflection in the water. He could not believe his eyes. He was like them. He was a swan.

"You are one of us," they said. "Welcome." They swam around him and stroked him with their bills. On the shore, the children cried out, "Look! There is a young swan. And he is the most beautiful of all!" He hid his head under his wing with pleasure. Then he raised his head up and said, "Never have I been so happy."

Tuesday (International Evening):

Nostalgia

Transcript from the Podcast "Welcome to Nightvale". Slightly abbreviated.

Thinking back, ladies, looking back, gentlemen, thinking and looking back on my European tour, I feel...a heavy sadness descend upon me.

Of course, it is partly nostalgia – looking back at that younger me, bustling around Europe, having adventures and overcoming obstacles that, at the time, seemed so overwhelming – but now seem like just the building blocks of a harmless story.

But here is the truth of nostalgia. We don't feel it for who we were, but who we weren't. We feel it for all the possibilities that were open to us, but that we didn't take.

Time is like wax, dripping from a candle flame. In the moment, it is molten and falling, with the capability to transform into any shape. Then the moment passes, and the wax hits the table top and solidifies into the shape it will always be. It becomes the past – a solid single record of what happened, still holding in its wild curves and contours the potential of every shape it could have held.

It is impossible – no matter how blessed you are by luck, or the government, or some remote, invisible deity gently steering your life with hands made of moonlight and wind – it is impossible not to feel a little sad, looking at that bit of wax, that bit of the past. It is impossible not to think of all the wild forms that wax now will never take.

The village, glimpsed from a train window – beautiful and impossible and impossibly beautiful on a mountaintop, then you wondered what it would be if you stepped off the moving train and walked up the trail to its quiet streets and lived there for the rest of your life. The beautiful face of that young man --- last seen already half-turned away as you boarded the bus, already turning towards a future without you in it, where this thing between you [two] that seemed so possible now already, and forever, never was.

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It can be overwhelming, this splattered, inert wax recording every turn not taken.

"What's the point?" you ask.

"Why bother?" you say.

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But then you remember – I remember – that we are, even now, in another bit of molten wax. We are in a moment that is still falling, still volatile – and we will never be anywhere else. We will always be in that most dangerous, most exciting, most possible time of all: the now. Where we never can know what shape the next moment will take.

Goodnight, IMWe. [Nightvale] Goodnight.

Wednesday (Be Prepared):

A Pale Blue Dot

By Carl Sagan with pretext by Jens Buß

Close your eyes!

It is 1977. You are in Florida.

Imagine you are standing in front of a huge rocket, 60 meters high.

Imagine you are in this rocket.

You hear the end of the countdown: 3, 2, 1, 0, we have a lift off!

Everything is shaking.

The acceleration presses you into your seat.

Just a view more seconds and its over.

You are at maximum speed. 15 km per second. The rocket calms down and starts its flight through space.

It is 1979. You are far out in the solar system when you reach the brown and grey sphere you already saw ahead for a while. The view is magnificent.

Jupiter the largest among the planets.

It is 1980. The autumn leaves are falling when you slide alongside the rings of Saturn. No one has ever seen what you see now.

It is 1990. More than 13 years have passed since you left Earth. 6 billion kilometers lie between you at home. Mankind has never been further away than you in this very moment. You turn around to see your home for the last time before you continue your way into the depth of the universe.

You stare into the direction of your decent and you see

Darkness, only darkness.

And a tiny little dot!

--- from here on: Carl Sagan, Pale Blue Dot, 1994 ---

Look again at that dot.

That's here.

That's home.

That's us.

On it everyone you love,

everyone you know,

everyone you ever heard of,

every human being who ever was, lived out their lives.

The aggregate of our joy and suffering,

thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines,

every hunter and forager,

every hero and coward,

every creator and destroyer of civilization,

every king and peasant,

every young couple in love,

every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer,

every teacher of morals,

every corrupt politician,

every "superstar,"

every "supreme leader,"

every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there -- on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena.

Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot.

Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this dot on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner,

how frequent their misunderstandings,

how eager they are to kill one another,

how fervent their hatreds.

Our posturings,

our imagined self-importance,

the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light.

Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark.

In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint

that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life.

There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate.

Visit, yes.

Settle, not yet.

Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience.

There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world.

It underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another,

and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot,

the only home we've ever known.

Thursday (Creative Evening):

Hor(r)o(r)scopes

Transcript from the Podcast "Welcome to Nightvale". Compiled from several episodes, with small changes/abbreviations

Leo: Today is your lucky day! Which is good news, because tonight is your unlucky night. But enjoy this lucky day until the sun goes down. Until the very second the sun goes down. And then...and then...

Virgo: Don't shoot the messenger, Virgo! It's noisy, and will alert others of your crime. Lure the messenger inside. Make sure no one saw him come in. Choose something quieter than a gun. Perhaps suffocation, or an accidental fall. Really plan these things out. Stop being so trigger happy, Virgo!

Libra: Do you believe in ghosts? You don't? Well, won't you be surprised when you wake up in the middle of the night tonight! Scream loud enough so the neighbors can hear you.

Scorpio: No sunshine for you, Scorpio! Nope! The sun's light has been blocked, but only for you. Oh yes, everyone else will walk in sunny rays, sunshades and shorts, wide smiles and hat brims, SPF 50 and a Frisbee at the beach. You will likely lose feeling in your skin due to the cold of a sunless world. Good luck!

Sagittarius: You worry too much about earthquakes and plane crashes. You're going to die of heart disease or cancer, just like everybody else!

Capricorn: Stop throwing your money away on expensive cars and nice clothes. The owners of those cars and outfits do not appreciate the crumpled dollar bills you keep throwing on them! And anyway, if you want to throw something away, that's what garbage cans are for.

Aquarius: Today's lucky number is imaginary! But, coincidentally, so are you, and your entire experience of the world.

Pisces: If you don't have anything nice to say, try saying something mean. I mean there are lots of options for things to say.

Aries: I think they saw you, Aries. Hold still. They cannot see you if you do not move. Shhhhhh! Don't move! Don't move! Don't— Nope, they saw you. So long, Aries!

Taurus: Taurus, today is the day that you change everything. Oh, I'm sorry. I misspoke, I'm sorry. Uh, let me try that again, OK? *Ahem* Today is the day that everything changes you. You will be completely unrecognizable. Yeah, that's it. There ya go.

Gemini: You will meet a tall, handsome stranger. He will introduce himself, you will come to know him well, and he will know you well. He will grow older. His skin will sag and thin. He will no longer be handsome. He will no longer be a stranger. He will no longer be most of the things he once was. He will be a close friend, an old friend, one you've known for years, and with whom you are settling down into that final stretch of life. But he will always be tall. So tall. Very, very tall.

Cancer: I'm not saying this is bad news, but the stars just say "Aaaaaaaaagggggghhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!!" I mean, maybe that's a good sign, right? Right? It's a very inexact science.

Saturday (Concert):

I Opened a Book

By Julia Donaldson

“I opened a book and in I strode.

Now nobody can find me.

I’ve left my chair, my house, my road,

My town and my world behind me.

I’m wearing the cloak, I’ve slipped on the ring,

I’ve swallowed the magic potion.

I’ve fought with a dragon, dined with a king

And dived in a bottomless ocean.

I opened a book and made some friends.

I shared their tears and laughter

And followed their road with its bumps and bends

To the happily ever after.

I finished my book and out I came.

The cloak can no longer hide me.

My chair and my house are just the same,

But I have a book inside me.”