

LAURO PALOMBA

## TALK SHOW

Welcome back to the final segment Thank you Carla for that news update Our station's motto all tragedy all the time We are but the messengers Reassuring isn't it to be reminded that the cosmos is starting off no saner on Valentine's Day than on any other? It would be a childish universe indeed if it did Those four snowboarders out west killed by an avalanche At about this darkness too I believe Carla said the area was off-limits and warnings had been ignored We swell the numbers through our folly At the funeral friends will spin it that they were killed doing what they loved Really? They wanted to die doing it? Not the same is it?

Alright let's turn the page So much for other people's woes and lunacies Time for our own

If you were listening last Thursday one of the night owls commented griped moaned take your pick that poetry has lost its place in people's lives I don't recall the suicide rate climbing as a result Nor do I suspect it ever played that great a part except among the hoity-toity And that would be according to them The peasantry's views alas not having been preserved

We're not going to debate whether anybody reads poetry anymore Many say poetry's no longer relevant Sales excluding universities would probably support that view Scoff if you must but be honest When's the last time you read a good poem about mortgage rates? How about any poem good or otherwise? Of your own volition Not under duress No one threatening to pull out your fingernails I thought so

I can't remember exactly how we even got to the gentleman's remark We were on the topic of that couple's lawsuit Rick how'd we get off-track to poetry? Rick's been handling the production of the show this week while another known to you but who shall remain nameless vacations Rick's on the other side of the glass shrugging Couldn't tell me anyway Stuffing his face Where'd those chocolates come from? Your girlfriend? You found one?

However it happened the penny dropped probably counterfeit and I said to my everlasting ruin I'd devote the last half hour of today's show to alleviating that caller's pain My sop to Valentine's Day Driving home I started having second and third thoughts But the harm had been done

Now you understand we're not actually going to read or discuss poetry This is talk radio not mush radio I have a reputation to safeguard Valentine's Day be damned I haven't built up the spine of this program just to have it shred into wet hankies on one misguided idea

The intent here is not to reverse the tide There'll always be poets just as there'll always be how about bird-watchers but it doesn't mean poetry will matter to the populace The plan is not repeat not to indulge in a final orgy lively though orgies may be before poetry disappears utterly from our radar

So let's get the rules straight before you leap from your couches beds bar stools alleyways or wherever else you rest your bones and lunge for the phone Unemployed actors need not rush away from the customers they're serving Not necessary to excuse yourself just because they show no signs even at this late hour of calling it a night You start declaiming it's the finger across the throat and Rick flips you off into the void

What I said last Thursday specifically and without garbling are there nuts in those chocolates? Turn around if you're going to chew them like that What I suggested we'd try is have you quote a line or two from a poem Lord forgive this momentary lapse and then tell us why it's stuck with you What you associate with it A dream an incident It can have absolutely no direct connection The exercise will be much fortified if you avoid the mention of roses or going weak in the knees or soft in the head

So no performances thank you in advance just the facts ma'am And I of course will be my usual sensitive self Be brief The soul of wit and all that A few lines Sonnets are banned Epics are violently banned Get carried away and I'm off to grab Rick's bonbons Dead air will be yours Remember They slotted me into these small ungodly hours precisely because there are fewer people to offend The ratings are rising only because of outrage

The lines are open If the distance is longish the number to jumpin mouse as grandma used to say what's with you folks? It's twenty-seven minutes to two and they're lit up There are NO prizes None I am not offering free tropical cruises to escape winter Both the third and the three-hundredth caller will be horribly dejected and possibly berated Rick

check the wiring Are you all that desperate about poetry? Surely there's something else you'd rather be doing than wanting to confess

Fine bring it on but you've been warned I'm going to be a hard-ass on the ground rules My job is to keep you awake for the ads but stray and you'll wish you'd hit the snooze button instead

Rick's waving frantically You out of yum-yums? Is that face what indigestion looks like? Oh Sponsors have to get a word in edgewise before we start Bet they didn't know they'd be selling poetry Demands for rebates and refunds in the offing Okay quit flapping out there Rick

A minute and the decks will be cleared for your calls

It had to be Hugh I've wandered around finally found somebody who what? Back already? Hugh on line one you're at bat

*How are you today?*

Wary Extremely wary of where this might lead and the damage I've caused What the show will have been reduced to

*It's nice to finally talk to you I'm a first-time caller but I listen whenever I can*

Civility will do you no good What's troubling your mind?

*You come across like poetry is for snobs or sissies You're very bright but you're sometimes wrong Maybe it's an act*

Better to be right but dumb? Step right up Hugh

*It's from 'To Celia'*

Is it from Celia or to Celia?

*I had to get my wife to look it up and write it down it's been so long*

Celia your wife?

*It's Cecilia actually*

We'll take it under advisement then

*Okay Here goes Drink to me only with thine eyes and I will pledge with mine Or leave a kiss but in the cup and I'll not look for wine*

You wouldn't be a bartender would you Hugh?

*I have a small office-cleaning business*

You working now?

*I'm on a break*

Good thing you're the boss Which floor you on?

*We're just finishing the eighteenth*

You're not going to get sentimental and jump when this is over?

*What for?*

Glad to hear it There's no shortage of reasons but I'd hate to lose  
a regular listener So why to Celia?

*I'd forgotten we studied this poem in high school There was this  
cute girl a couple of rows over that I'd been too afraid to talk to This poem  
kinda gave me an opening Gave me a little bit of courage*

Which grade was this?

*Nine*

And it all worked out True love

*The love of my life forever I married her two years later and April's  
our twenty-first anniversary*

Whoa hold on Hugh You met her in grade nine two years later you  
tied the knot My math isn't famous but unless you flunked kindergarten  
three times you'd have been what? Seventeen?

*We were fifteen actually*

What'd your parents say? Did they kick you out?

*They were all for it Never tried to change our minds Supported  
us They could see we were serious*

You didn't elope?

*We had a wedding with two hundred and seventy people*

And who put you up afterwards?

*We lived on our own I held two jobs Cec finished school Now we  
have three kids this business*

Well I'm floored From the eighteenth all the way down Get back  
to work Hugh you're setting a bad example Before you depress the rest of  
us Jumpin mouse Man Everybody pulling in the same direction Yikes  
Hannah you're next Hannah?

*Am I on?*

Like your life and my career depend on it Go ahead

*I have short ones but from two poems*

Already stretching the limits Hit me Hannah while I'm still in shock  
*The first is Because I could not stop for Death he kindly stopped  
for me The carriage held but just ourselves and immortality*

Cheerful that And the other one?

*The second is Most things never happen This one will and real-  
ization of it rages out in furnace-fear when we are caught without people  
or drink*

The benefit of drink seems to be an early common theme I don't have anything against death though it's arrived a little early on the program Why'd you choose that pair Hannah?

*So many people are afraid of dying but I have a little story*

How old are you Hannah if you don't mind?

*I'm seventy-six I don't always sleep so good I turn on the radio to hear you and that helps*

You're saying this show knocks you out or it's a sleeping pill that cures your insomnia?

*I don't take pills When I was younger I had mood swings I was a real bitch Can I say that?*

Mood swings? Once

*Not once a month every day And my husband put up with it I'm alone now But even then I didn't take pills I took vitamins*

What's the story Hannah?

*It's not a story*

The story where death was hitching but you couldn't stop You said you had a little little one

*I do*

We'd like to hear it

*Am I on? Am I still on?*

No one will pry the mike from your fingers

*Good thanks It was years ago in February Could be January I was out of town when a friend died I had to drive all night to make it for the funeral It was winter After a while I ran into a blizzard I'm a careful driver The roads were icy and I hit an icy patch I lost control I was sliding down the highway sideways and I nicked the car coming towards me The only car I'd seen in twenty minutes But it was enough When I came to I was in a ditch The car was wrecked I had a bruise on my head a few cuts and a gash on my nose My glasses were broken Nobody was hurt in the other car*

No terror?

*Who had time for terror? Maybe a tiny one*

So where does death come into it?

*From nicking the car to the ditch was maybe three seconds That's what they told me I don't have any recollection But that's death Three seconds of like sleep*

Oblivion

*Yes Three seconds of oblivion Multiply by eternity That's all  
it is people shouldn't be afraid of it It's what I wanted to tell everybody  
Did I read both poems?*

Charmingly Hannah thank you

Sweets gone to your brain Rick? Putting through folks who've taken  
Valentine's Day to heart Aren't you screening the calls? Love is grand  
death is grand There's a canyon I know that's grand The nightmare  
scenario come to pass Optimists skipping out of their blizzards and sky-  
scrapers Are there no hopeless situations? Like a worm in a swimming  
pool A dose of sanity A counterweight Something sobering

Janos might you be the one?

*Hello?*

You're on the air Janos

*I have story but not poem Poem is from university son From  
his book*

Truth automatically offsets disqualification

*Please?*

Read the poem from the book of your son

*She died and left to me this heath heath is open flat waste tract  
of land especially if covered with shrubs this calm and quiet scene the  
memory of what has been and never more will be*

Very nice Thanks for clearing up heath

*No heath meadow I will read with help from cousin When I  
was a child we used to play football soccer on a wide meadow behind  
our village At the end of the meadow was a forlorn house It was a  
spooky house and everyone was concerned of it That house was empty  
long time nobody wanted to live there He came to live in house where  
we usually used to play*

Who is he?

*Man A widower lived in that house He was forlorn desolate  
mysterious and strange for a group of small children They wanted to  
find some information about him I was member of that group Dur-  
ing several days we were exploring his house and we were watching him  
trying to find what his daily routine look like He lived alone and there  
wasn't furniture in the rooms of his house But were all clean and tidy  
During the last day of our exploration we found a room which wasn't like  
the others That room was lined with deep broad shelves on which there  
were rows of standing dolls Suddenly we had interrupted by the man*

*and we waited to see what was happen The man stayed in the left corner his room and we stayed opposite him His reaction was unexpected for us The man was surprisingly kind and he told to us He told a story of losing his wife during the birth of his daughter who could not walk and talk He made her dolls and when she died he went on making them After story he asked us to leave and we never returned The end*

Thank you Janos

*You welcome Goodbye*

I'd say that's sobering No mix required

At nineteen minutes to two Gillian on a cell on Highway thirty-seven  
Why aren't you tucked in?

*My mother had a knee replaced and I've been giving her a hand Sorry but I have something sobering too*

If you must

*And a teensy liberty with the length*

Exceedingly teensy I trust Do you often haul around a wide-load poem and story in your car?

*The story came before the poem I read it much later but now they're together although the poem's about a thrush and the story has robins*

Nobody'll know the difference Warble on

*So little cause for carolings of such ecstatic sound was written on just a sec I'm trying to do this from memory written on terrestrial things afar or nigh around sorry that I could think I thought no I could think there trembled through his happy good-night air some blessed Hope ah whereof he knew and I was unaware I think that's it*

Was this linked to some period when you were depressed?

*Not at all I was eleven or twelve We always had birds in the backyard Bird feeders It gave us something to look at in the winter Occasionally we'd even get a cardinal On a bough red against the snow*

But this story is about robins isn't it?

*I'm getting there One summer a pair of them made a nest in the branches just outside my bedroom window I watched that nest being built like in slow motion One day the female was on the garage roof with a ball of building material in her beak It fell out and began rolling down the slope and she raced after it on her legs right into the eavestrough It was pretty funny*

Meanwhile back at the nest

*Two eggs and then two chicks squawking all day for food The male would fly in and out more or less directly and then sit on a higher branch to keep an eye out for predators The female was much smarter You're going to get me into grief*

*Much much smarter When she had something for them in her beak she'd zigzag from lawn to fence to bush and then maybe to the nest Trying to throw off any danger to the babies Then one morning I didn't see anything No robins no chicks I went out to the backyard One chick I don't know what had happened to it The other was on a patio tile Real spindly legs The wings were fairly formed it had feathers But its neck must've been injured because it couldn't lift its head Just opening its beak from time to time The mother was sitting on it trying to keep it warm Of course as soon as it saw me it flew up into the tree It hopped around to the surrounding trees even driving off some smaller birds*

*No great feat Rick does it*

*But not so sadly I don't think My parents were down the street at a neighbour's yard sale and I felt sort of helpless I took the chick off the tile it was still alive I put it under the tree to protect it from sun wind animals whatever but the mother never flew down again I went inside and when I came out about an hour later the chick was dead I felt really awful like it was my fault I was so ashamed I didn't tell my parents After supper I decided to bury it I went out this would've been five six hours the body had disappeared A crow a cat could've been anything And then years after I saw the poem It was that sense of guilt Of not having done enough The next summer nobody used the nest Like I was being blamed Punished*

*Wasn't it just nature being nature?*

*When people find a starving dog or a cat that's lost an eye in a fight they don't say that If we let nature be nature we'd all be murdered or maimed*

*Ah a dark vision With an orange breast And thank you for it But then who'd be left to go goofy on Valentine's day? Don't be nicking any cars on the highway Gillian Hannah to the contrary*

*Let's see if we can fit in another Aidan*

*Thanks for taking my call Mine's a sexy one*

*If it violates the broadcasting code It's the only sexy we allow*

*I'll do my best*

*Apologize later Sashay it out*

*I like kissing this and that of you I like slowly stroking the shocking  
fuzz of your electric fur How's that?*

I'm pacing the studio to cool down You've melted Rick's chocolates  
I wish you'd saved it though for another show Maybe when we tackle the  
subject of how we lost our virginity Virginities? Nah you can only lose  
it singular even in twos

*I didn't Not with this girl the one it reminds me of We were in-  
nocent*

There's innocence Aidan and then there's spin the bottle Where did  
you practise your innocence?

*We had rented cottages beside each other Our parents had but it  
wasn't the sex*

It certainly wouldn't have been an electric fan blowing fur around  
the cottage

*I think you know what I'm getting at*

Let's pretend I don't

*Do you know that song*

No no no song and you've used up your poem You're on your own kid

*I can't explain it like you*

Fine Then explain it like you

*It wasn't the sex no way We get dopey Fed-up New things now  
don't have you know that same same*

Delight perhaps

*Yeah Delight It sounds smart-alecky but I miss my ignorance  
Thanks*

It would appear you've explained yourself pretty well It was the  
sex after all

Eleven to the hour Rick wants in Now that the chocolates are noth-  
ing but wrappers you want in? What about when I wanted in? He has a  
torn piece of paper up on the glass with his two cents worth on it Probably  
more than its value Our dried voices when we whimper whisper? Save  
us from these technowizards who've never held a pen Our dried voices when  
we whisper together are quiet and meaningless Touching Deeply moving  
Rick The next dry voice we hear won't be yours I am the host you are the  
producer you have no voice Thusly is it written Any chocolates left to  
trade with? All of them? Well then the rules abide It's out of my hands

Abe's been waiting patiently Your turn Abe

*Yet each man kills the thing he loves*

Now that would fill another show Is that it?

*I killed my girl*                      *That's my story*

When was this?

*She never did nothing but love me*    *I was everything to her*

You're not being serious? Abe? Abe you there? Have we lost him?

What do we do with that? Has Abe really killed her? Your guess is as good as mine But Abe felt he had to share it with us

It's a confessional age too often vulgar You know the programs I'm alluding to People willing to admit everywhere except in a court of law admit to millions of strangers that they've hacked somebody Dismembered them That they secretly have the hots for a family member A member of another species Their own member Not bothered by what the fuss is about just because they've been dating a serial killer He has a heart of gold and never forgets his mother's birthday

It isn't just TV They do it anonymously one-on-one at a bar in the line at a checkout counter beside you on the bus Waiting for the bus An eighteen year old waitress did it to me recently at an early morning restaurant after I'd finished this show She didn't know who I was Just me and she and immortality And the notepad in her hand for the order She had a tricky heart that might need an operation And a father-in-law usually drunk Not yet an in-law because our lovebirds had only made the decision the night before She'd walked over to tell pappy but he'd been too wiped for her to waste her breath And her dreamboat? Would she be receiving flowers for Valentine's? No he was broke until next Friday so she'd be taking him to an expensive steakhouse No item under thirty dollars There went her earnings for the week It was threatening sunrise before she got around to the eggs over easy and the peameal bacon Maybe she'd invented the whole thing A stall because the cook had been late arriving

But guess what? This confessional business? I've just done it to you

Because it is a confessional age Minus the priests Minus the absolution Minus the privacy Which means it's an exhibitionistic age Which means it's an egotistical age We used to confess our sins privately to be forgiven Now we confess them publicly to be noticed even it makes us look like fools It's why I'm gainfully employed Why talk shows thrive

We're keen to have our voices heard and for that we'll blab everything Think of the billions who've passed through our planet If I gave you a week could you name a thousand? We want to be named dammit But it's overwhelmed by endless churning So make it the age of verbosity

too Of excess Maybe all I'm saying is that it's the wrong people who are talking too much I could be mistaken According to Hugh I thought I was mistaken once but I was in error

Saint Valentine got named Who was he? A saint obviously but he moonlighted as Don't know Some say he was a priest who married the early Christians illegally and was beheaded But the Pope who put forward his name said his acts were known only to God Lots of room there for fraud Thus spake the Internet Oh yes I looked it up Did you think this stuff comes off the top of my head? But at least Valentinus has his name

Most of us? Worms in the swimming pool No idea how we got there no chance of getting out by ourselves We'd prefer crave grovel what have you to be and let's stick with the theme of birds emperor penguins Penguins live in those huge colonies, rookeries, hundreds of thousands of them But they feed at sea Their hunting grounds can be a thousand kilometers from the rookery As you've probably noted they dawdle Hardly ever confused with say a cheetah The nearsighted excepted So when they go for lunch they're gone for months They return to their rookery this colony of massive hubbub and congestion cheek by jowl beak to beak but each penguin's voice is so distinct his sound so special its mate and chick recognize it immediately Not talk radio granted but a start And a leg or flipper up on a worm

I do believe that was my closing riff prematurely delivered Okay last time out

Asha line four you've beaten the clock  
*Can I begin?*  
 When you're ready Soon would be faster  
*I have a little background music to go with it*  
 Splendid I'm sure  
*I am furious with dying*  
*though misery abounds*  
*find a glen*  
*of solace*  
*and the headiness of living*  
*becomes*  
*addictive*

Short and sweet A woman who doesn't beat around the verse And spoken like a thespian Is there a mental keepsake that comes along with it? Asha? Is she gone too? She hung up? She declaimed and hung up It was only pretend Rick it wouldn't be that she used the show used us to audition? Well felicitations Now you have a sound byte for your resume Asha You've been on stage Wherever you've scooted I hope you get the part Mind you we all get a part It just may not be the one we auditioned for

Do we have time for one more? Rick is signaling madly he'll unleash mayhem if I try He can do it But the lines are still jammed Have it your way Don't want to get on his prickly side Rick'll leave you with a dead mike talking to yourself Or worse Replace you with a commercial

In that case I'm done for Valentine's Day And it's only two hours old Last year as I was walking into the building a woman was getting off the elevator With a small black and white dog gnawing on its own leash and refusing to heel Very perky the dog I was wished a Happy Valentine's Day the woman So if you're yearning for it the same greeting to you all Haven't seen her since Not your type Rick Too worldly Far beyond your digital experience

On balance that failed the harrowing test We might risk it again sometime Though it seems to me that if confessing our sins in the piazza is really the rage then the truly rebellious gesture the true act of defiance would be to keep silent

On that low note good morning Hear you again tomorrow at midnight

Or not