

BURKE AND HARE EPISODE 1

Written by

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OVER BLACK: EDINBURGH. MARCH 1828

EXT. LEITH DOCKYARD - DAY

Burke and Hare are with a large group of men surrounding the FOREMAN [45]. To his side stands his ASSISTANT [30].

FOREMAN

Alright boys! A bit of silence if you don't mind.

The men fall silent. The foreman studies a piece.

FOREMAN

You. You and you. Yard 51.

HARE

(whispers)
If that bastard passes us again, I'm gonna speak my mind.

BURKE

(whispers)
I don't think he likes our kind.

Eventually the foreman folds up his piece of paper.

FOREMAN

Right. That's it for today.

The remaining men grumble and disperse

HARE

You have a problem with us?

FOREMAN

In what way...paddy?

HARE

Weeks we've been coming here. Nothing.

FOREMAN ASSISTANT

We've -

HARE

You think we're not up to it?

FOREMAN

No Irish. No dogs..

HARE

Is that right?

Hare punches the foreman who falls to the ground.

Burke bursts into laughter.

The foreman's assistant reels back in fear.

Burke and Hare abruptly turn and leave as the foreman groans.

HARE
(to Burke)
He had it coming.

Hare feels a hand on his shoulder.

He pivots to receive a fist to the face.

The foreman turns to Burke.

FOREMAN
You want the same paddy?

Burke two successive punches.

In the distance a group of men run towards them, shouting.

BURKE
We need to go.

Hare raises two fingers into the air and laughs.

HARE
Feck you, ya bastards!

The two men run off.

INT. MAIN ROOM IN HARES' LODGINGS - SAME TIME

MARGARET HARE [33] and HELEN MCDUGAL [24] are drinking and smoking.

MARGARET HARE
I hope they find work.

HELEN MCDUGAL
It's not easy Maggie.

MARGARET HARE
One lodger doesn't stretch far. And with that cough, I doubt he'll last the week.

HELEN MCDUGAL
 He ed rough this morning. Wasn't
 pretty.

INT. SURGEONS HALL/KNOX'S STUDY - DAY

DR. ROBERT KNOX [37] stares out the window in thought.

ARCHIBALD JOHNSON [28] sits watching, clasping his pencil
 and notes.

MR. JOHNSON
 But your science doesn't comply
 with this age of enlightenment.

Knox pivots.

KNOX
 You refute my objectives?

MR. JOHNSON
 Only the means.

KNOX
 Our government does little to help
 the cause of the Anatomist with
 this infernal Murder Act.

Knox turns round to face Johnson. He holds his pipe in one
 hand and a business card in the other. He studies the card.

The card reads:

Mr. Archibald Johnson, Journalist, Edinburgh Courant

KNOX
 But perseverance, is a skill I have
 had many years to hone.

Knox places the card on the desk.

There is a knock at the door.

KNOX
 Enter!

DAVID PATERSON [35], Dr Knox's assistant, enters.

MR PATERSON
 Sir, your students await for class
 to begin.

KNOX

Would you care to accompany me to where my work is appreciated?

MR. JOHNSON

I would be delighted, sir.

KNOX

Follow me.

Johnson rises but remains behind Knox as they advance to the doorway.

EXT. WEST PORT STREET - SAME TIME

BURKE [28] and HARE [29], with a noticeable bruise under his eye, clomp along the cobbled street.

Burke spits a glob of flem on to the roadside to the disgust of passers-by.

Hare helps himself to an apple from a crate outside a fruit shop and crunches into it.

INT. SURGEON'S HALL/CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

The three men pass smoothly through the corridor.

KNOX

I am no believer of the faith but like Moses climbing Mount Nebo, I have spent many years striving to reach my own Promised Land.

Johnson watches him.

MR. JOHNSON

Does that mean you have achieved all that is possible?

KNOX

Far from it but the name Dr Knox will be synonymous with anatomy a hundred years from now.

EXT. WEST PORT STREET - CONTINUOUS

Burke and Hare stride towards Rymer's store.

MR. JOHNSON (V.O.)

What about the appropriation of the bodies?

Hare approaches the window and draws Burke's to something on display.

KNOX (V.O.)
What about it?

Hare throws away the remainder of the apple into the street.

MR. JOHNSON (V.O.)
Your lectures are full, yet
hallowed ground is repeatedly
ravaged.

Hare turns his head, his face in full view. He possesses the stare of a man with evil in his veins.

KNOX (V.O.)
You refer to those body snatchers?

Hare holds his gaze then enters the shop.

INT. SURGEON'S HALL/CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnson and Knox stand face to face.

MR. JOHNSON
It is an epidemic.

KNOX
There are many unprincipled among
us.

MR. JOHNSON
And you do not fall into that
category?

KNOX
I do not dig bodies in the middle
of the night!

MR. JOHNSON
But do you facilitate it?

EXT. WEST PORT STREET - CONTINUOUS

Burke and Hare exit the shop holding jugs of whisky.

Hare smokes a cigarette.

KNOX (V.O.)
I am an anatomist. It is not for me
to investigate every subject that
comes my way.

Burke and Hare enter "Tanner's Close" next to the shop.

MR. JOHNSON (V.O.)
But from somewhere, they come.

Burke and Hare enter the close.

INT. SURGEON'S HALL/CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Paterson, Knox and Johnson stand at a set of double doors.
They hear the murmur of voices on the other side.

KNOX
If you care to follow Mr Paterson.

Paterson grins. He opens the door for Johnson to enter.

KNOX
Good day, Mr. Johnson. I look
forward to reading what you have to
say.

INT. SURGEONS HALL/LECTURE THEATRE - MOMENTS LATER

The auditorium is full of students.

Knox, gripping a scalpel, dramatically pulls the sheet to
reveal a body on the plynth.

KNOX
Shall we begin?

There is a rapturous response from the students.

EXT. GRASSMARKET - DAY

The audience cheers at a puppet show in the busy street.

An old man can bent over, slowly shuffles down Tanner's
Close.

EXT. TANNERS CLOSE - CONTINUOUS

The sound of voices singing can be heard from inside the
house as OLD DONALD [72] as he enters the lodgings.

He coughs repeatedly.

INT. MAIN ROOM IN HARES' LODGINGS - CONTINUOUS

In the sparse room, Burke sits stuffing a hole in his shoe.

Hare dances on the spot in the middle of the room holding a jug of whisky.

MARGARET HARE [33] sits on the chair, breast feeding an infant.

HELEN MCDUGAL [24] sits on the floor facing the fireplace drinking whisky from a jar.

HELEN MCDUGAL

Ah Donald, you've decided to join us after all?

DONALD

Aye, but I'm feelin' richt poorly and will no be havin any o' that whisky this day.

The old man shuffles over to the vacant bed. Hare watches.

HARE

Just remember you still owe us rent old man.

Donald, continues to cough persistently.

DONALD

My pension will mend your troubles come two days from now.

Hare advances towards Donald with a sense of intent.

MARGARET HARE

Leave him be. The old man is poorly.

HARE

Not enough to spend his days drinking.

Margaret removes the child from her breast and pulls over her shawl.

MARGARET HARE

Just remember who's lodging this is.

HARE

Tell them how you came by it.

INT. FLASHBACK TO: MAIN ROOM IN HARES' LODGINGS - DAY

Superimpose: One Year Earlier

The lodgings appear cleaner as a fire glows in the hearth.
Hare and Margaret lie on their backs in the bed semi-naked.

MARGARET HARE
When will you be back?

HARE
You gonna miss me?

She leans over and kisses him on the lips.

MARGARET HARE
You know damn fine.

HARE
Then we can seek what's rightly
ours.

Margaret lights her clay pipe.

HARE
If you stay true to our covenant we
can be away from here in time.

Hare gets out of the bed and dresses.

HARE
But no conditions.

INT. MAIN ROOM IN HARES' LODGINGS - LATER

Margaret is kneeling by the fireplace, preparing food. The door opens and her husband PETER SULLIVAN [45] enters.

MARGARET HARE
You're late.

Sullivan removes his jacket and drops it on the floor.

PETER SULLIVAN
Spillage in the yard.

He sits down and hands three coins to Margaret.

PETER SULLIVAN
This was all I could get.

Margaret is unimpressed.

MARGARET HARE
You remember what you promised when
we were married?

He leans back, tired.

PETER SULLIVAN
Not now Maggie.

MARGARET HARE
I was twenty-two and here we are.
Ten years later.

PETER SULLIVAN
You never were one who was easily
pleased. Were you?

Margaret hands a bowl of food to her husband.

MARGARET HARE
This was not how it was supposed to
be.

Peter takes the bowl and jug.

PETER SULLIVAN
I've given you my all.

Peter begins eating from the bowl.

She advances towards the main door.

MARGARET HARE
Not everything.

She leaves the lodgings.

Peter starts choking. He collapses and dies.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAWN

Margaret watches the coffin lowered into the grave.

INT. BACK TO PRESENT: MAIN ROOM IN HARES' LODGINGS

MARGARET HARE
Maybe another day.

HELEN MCDOUGAL
Did you find any work?

BURKE
Soon as they hear our tongue, they
pass us over.

HELEN MCDOUGAL
What we have won't last much
longer.

BURKE

Aye, it's getting desperate.

Hare reaches for the jug.

HARE

Come Maggie. I'll sing a song of
the Emerald Isle and you can join
me in a wee jig.

INT. GENTLEMAN'S' STUDY - NIGHT

Dr Knox is gathered with his assistants, FERGUSON [25],
JONES [23] and MILLER [23] (wearing a red, white and blue
neckerchief) in the company of Dr ALEXANDER MONRO [55] and
PROF JOHN WILSON [43].

WILSON

I didn't think you would be joining
us today.

KNOX

The Board meeting was thankfully
brief. They can be damned dull
affairs.

WILSON

So he has brought you young men
into this inner sanctum?

FERGUSON

It is a fine place indeed.

WILSON

And where your learning truly
begins.

Munro laughs.

MONRO

I hear your class was as full to
the brim as the glass you hold?

KNOX

The board are aware I require a
larger theatre to accommodate the
demand.

WILSON

It is a costly affair.