

Not Quite Dead

Episode 13

‘Lovesick’

Show-wide Content Warnings

This show is a work of horror fiction frequently places characters in situations which jeopardise their psychological and physical health. In addition, listeners should be aware that this show contains the following throughout:

- profanity
- references to sex
- frequent violence
- traumatic injury
- death, including violent death
- references to medical procedures
- hospital settings

Episode Thirteen, Content Warnings

- discussion of violent deaths
- descriptions of human bodies decaying
- scenes of a sexual nature
- heavy descriptions of blood and blood drinking
- threats of violence
- references to murder

TRANSCRIPT

Whatever was happening with the half-mades, whoever had left that vampire in the river to rot, it was unsettling Casper. I could tell he had theories. He was spending more and more time at Ros and Eponine's vampire sanctuary, trying to get a sense of the youngsters who had come and gone from there over the last couple of years. The trouble was, nobody was really keeping track. Turnover was high; disappearing was not unusual. The vampire Cas found in the river, Moira, she was unusual because she was a few decades old when she vanished, but even then, it was worthy of comment but not investigation, not really, except for the number of vampires who had been in York before.

York, it turns out, is a pretty great place to be a vampire. There are lots of narrow streets which are at least partially in shade for most of the day and the layout of the city hasn't changed too much in a few hundred years, so it's a great place to use as a base you can return to every few decades. There is no central organising body of vampires, or anything. No groups of them culminating in nests that grow bloated and wealthy over centuries of well-invested stock. Most vampires live short, unremarkable lives. They're turned and they're likely to die within the year. It's not strange for them to drop in and out of the small fringe communities that pop up in places like York.

Ros and Eponine provided a stopping point for youngsters who would otherwise have probably died on the street but they didn't look out for them. It wasn't like a family, more like a hostel, and the vampires that lived there did so with the idea they would be able to leave, if they were able to live. It provided a place to lie down and sleep, and know you were safe. It provided a place to go where there were no humans you might accidentally kill.

All this is to say that, well. Vampires are pretty hard to keep track of. There was no way of knowing how many of them were missing, which of those who had been lost track of had died the way so many vampires end up dying; alone and afraid, and which of them had been caught and. Well. Whatever was happening to the vampires who were being caught and taken away. One thing everyone could agree on was that vampires *were* being caught and taken.

Moirra, it seemed, was not the first near-dead vampire who'd shown up toothless in rabid blood debt. The last one was also missing fingers. Casper theorised whoever had pulled the teeth had taken the fingers too so the vampire couldn't even use another instrument to draw blood.

'Could a vampire grow their fingers back?'

'It depends how long they were without them,' said Casper.

This was much more of a surprise to me than either 'yes' or 'no' could have possibly been.

'It would take a lot of effort and energy,' Casper continued. 'Maybe three, four human's worth of blood.'

'And the teeth?'

'The teeth would grow in first, before the fingers. They are more essential. Nothing will cause a blood lust faster than a broken tooth,' said Casper. He frowned. 'well, I suppose, pulling the teeth entirely might bring it faster.'

'Why would someone do that?'

'I don't know,' said Cas. 'I think taking the teeth is so they don't have weapons. But I think it might also be about controlling how they feed.'

'Oh.'

Casper ran a hand through my hair. 'Don't worry, I'm safe.'

I leaned into his hand, twisted under it so I could kiss his palm. Casper, my Casper. I wish you were still safe now

INTRO MUSIC. EIRA: This is Not Quite Dead. Episode Thirteen: Lovesick.

There was this song Casper liked. I-- I can't remember for the life of me what it was. It was piano, just piano I think. God. What was it? I can't remember how it goes.

I...

I keep thinking about Moira. Toothless, flailing, absent of any sense. A vampire that close to death, were they meaningfully different from the half-made things that had tried to kill me so many times? Casper told me that it happens in stages, a vampire's death. Little by little they'll lose all of their faculties as they run on less and less blood. Moving, speaking, eventually even thinking is more energy than the blood left in their bodies can provide. And then, it's like the blood can't even hold them together any more.

A dead vampire doesn't rot, Casper says. They crumble. They don't even leave bones behind.

I can see why someone might want to study that. To understand. Vampire blood is a panacea with caveats; maybe the way a vampire falls to pieces holds the secrets to finding out why those caveats are there. Once you understand the mechanism, you can begin to find the cure.

But they're people. Maybe they're not human or not entirely human or arguably not humane, I don't know, but they are undeniably *people*. By any definition of person, Casper is one. An individual moral agent or whatever, a creature who thinks, feels, suffers, who engages with concepts of right and wrong, who makes decisive judgements, not instinctive ones. Obviously it's different in different places, what you think a person is, you know. I know it's contentious, I've-- look, I don't have the brain for philosophical shit but I have read enough in the last few days that I grasp that this is a controversial and difficult concept so there's an extent to which you're just going to have to trust me when I say he's a person, but he is. I know it, I can prove it as much as anyone can prove anyone else's personhood, and I am trying, for hours I've been explaining to you that this man, this vampire, he is a person, and he thinks and feels, and he loves, he does all that the way people do, the way human people do. And if you put him in a box and pull out his teeth and acts like a feral thing it's not because he is one it's because that is what you have made him into, you understand me?

If you're one of the people that took him. If you've come here and found me and I'm dead. If this is all you get from it, please know that if anyone could ever tell you whether Casper is a person, it's me, and I'm telling you he is one. Okay?

Please.

If I can't save myself. At least let me save him.

ALFIE COUGHS DRYLY

The cold is creeping in on me, right now. I know I-- I know that really I've made the decision and I made it days ago. I made it when I sat down and started making these recordings. Every word I speak, it's like I'm talking myself into it, isn't it? But the decision's already made. Like Casper knew I wouldn't run when he told me what it was like for him to hunt and kill, I knew, I think, before I started dying, that there was only one way out of this situation.

I keep thinking back to the forest. The first night we fucked. The night which, to me, felt like the first time we'd touched that way. Our blood on each other's mouths, his teeth in my flesh, the forest floor under my back. That was it, I think. That was the moment I couldn't turn back. That

was when I made this call. That I would drink what's left of Casper's blood. That I would try to be like him, or die in the attempt.

It was always, always, always going to be this, wasn't it? From the night in the forest, it was always coming back to this. From the night Ben died, maybe. From that kiss in his car, even. This was inevitable.

ALFIE SIGHS

After Moira, the other vampires were starting to get restless. They were a greater risk than they'd imagined, and Casper was no closer to finding the source of these problems than ever. Ros, Eponine, the young ones that lived with them; all of them were angry, chomping at the bit. They were tired of lying even lower than they were used to. They wanted their nights back. And they decided they were going to claim them.

I'm not entirely sure what they did that night, Casper wouldn't elaborate beyond that they had organised search parties. I know there was an untick in people who came into A&E the following week with low blood pressure and bruises on their necks, a few more who came in dead. There were no tears in their throats; there were slices and cuts, short, precise, deliberate, over veins and arteries which were just barely nicked. There was always blood on the floor, enough that the police would right it off as suicide or homicide, but actually, really, when you looked at it there was nowhere near enough blood to account for the person's death. They should have been lying in pools of the stuff but they weren't. Just a few well placed smears and splatters, a dribble from the wound, and that's it. The rest, of course, had been drunk.

Naturally, Cas didn't want me anywhere near whatever was going down so we went away for the weekend. He asked me where I wanted to go and I said Whitby, because I thought that would be funniest. It was the height of summer, though, and I hadn't thought about the fact I'd be spending the daytime alone wandering around landmarks associated with Dracula whilst my own creature of the night curled up in bed and slept.

I had almost switched my routine to match his and become nocturnal, but it wasn't really practical to do that when we were staying at a bed and breakfast and I couldn't cook my own food. Shops, restaurants and the like tend to be open during ordinary business hours, especially somewhere like Whitby that isn't very big. It was either get up in the day, or starve.

It was a particularly sultry evening, and I was eating an ice which was melting a little, the vanilla running all the way down to my elbow. I had stopped outside a little museum and an adjoining shop. The museum, the Vampire's Trove, housed the largest collection of Dracula memorabilia in the world. The shop was called Bela's and Whistles, and sold a variety of vampire snacks and knick-knacks. Once I'd finished my ice-cream and made my best of licking my arm clean, I wandered inside.

The museum was pretty neat, if tiny. They had some of the original film cells of Bela Lugosi's Dracula, one of Gary Oldman's stupid wigs from that movie he'd been in in the nineties. I knew we'd come here because I was in danger, but it all felt very far away in that dark museum. They

were playing Nosferatu on the back wall, from a projector which sat atop a life-sized Dracula wax figure in a glass case. I looked up at the light, twisted my fingers in it so the coffins in the film rested on my knuckles, and then they were gone, when the scene cut.

Looking at all of those posters, and plushes, and figurines, and film cells, and books, and hand-painted artworks, the ridiculousness of my life and the situation hit me like a freight train and I couldn't stop laughing. The guy who must've owned the place was looking at me funny. He was smiling in an encouraging way, hoping that I would somehow find a way to let him in on the joke, but there was no way to explain. He was wearing a t-shirt that said 'I heart vampires'. I asked him where he bought it and he told me they sold them in the shop next door, so I wandered through.

There was a case on the wall of very expensive fake vampire teeth nestled in coffin shaped, velvet lined boxes. The shirts were hanging next to them. I bought one and pulled it on over my tank top as I left the shop.

The sun was setting as I walked up the street in the direction of our B&B. I never made it the whole way there.

Casper stepped out of a darkened side street, his cool arm slipping through mine. 'Nice t-shirt,' he said, with a smirk.

'Thanks,' I said.

'You smell of sugar,' he told me.

'You smell like booze and honey, but you always smell like booze and honey, so.'

Casper hummed thoughtfully. He was in a wide rimmed hat and sunglasses, but his arms were bare, catching the dregs of the sunlight.

'Are you okay like that?'

He trailed a finger over my throat. 'Will you let me?' he asked.

'Yeah,' I said, and I couldn't stop myself from grinning.

'Then I'll be fine. It's late enough in the day that it won't burn me, anyway.'

'Freckles?' I asked, hopefully.

He held out his arm, turning it this way and that. I could just barely make out a few ghostly dots between the fine hairs. 'What would you like to do?' Casper asked.

'We could go to the beach?' I suggested.

Casper sighed. 'Alright.'

We wandered down the long steps to the sand. The sun was low in the sky, a rich coppery light falling on the parts of the beach that weren't in shadow. Most other people had left, and what stragglers remained were headed away from the water, not towards it. I turned, and the ruins of Whitby Abbey were filled with the red-gold sunlight, and it looked like it was bleeding from every open archway.

Casper took off his hat and the sun caught in the thin strands of his hair which had escaped the bun at the nape of his neck. When he took off his sunglasses, his eyes were the same shade as the light behind him and seemed to glow. I touched his cheek, he leaned into it. Behind us the waves broke on the sand, a steady thrum, like the pulse Casper was missing. I held my breath as the sun slipped over the horizon, the sky stained in streaks of pale pink struck through with lilac clouds, a sky so beautiful it looked like a painting.

Casper looked like a painting too. He reached up and fumbled with his hair until he'd freed it and it caught on the still-warm breeze. 'The moon is full,' he said. I looked over my shoulder and there in the still light sky the white moon stared down at us. It reflected in Cas's eyes. Something in me flared bright, then. It was white hot and violent. I wanted to bite him, to taste his blood. I wanted him to crumble under my hands. I felt like I was the creature and he was the vulnerable little human who could break so easily if I put even a toe out of line. I loved him, I loved him, I loved him, I wanted to eat him alive.

'Catch me,' he said, and he ran. I chased him even though he was so much faster, inhumanly fast. He kicked off his shoes and ran barefoot through the shallows and I followed, too slow, out of breath. I stopped, doubled over, clutching my side, and in an instant he was behind me, cool lips against the back of my neck.

It wasn't yet completely dark. The sky was inky purple, and the moon was huge and white-gold, glowing. It caught the edges of the waves. The water was cool, but not cold. Casper took off his shirt and dropped it on the sand. He didn't turn to look at me. He unbuttoned his jeans and let them fall, stepping out one foot at a time, and slowly walked into the water. He stopped when it was just past his waist, looking up at the moon. His skin seemed to shine under it, eyes closed, face tilted upwards like he was basking in the sunlight.

We stayed on the beach all night, until the sun started to come up again, an orange halo creeping over the ocean, making it glitter. We slept that day together, bundled under blankets, safe behind tightly closed curtains. I didn't sleep well, but his cool body was the perfect counter to the sweaty heat of the day, and when I woke Casper would stir, too, and trace his fingers up and down my spine, along my ribs, like he was mapping my bones.

We drove back to York after the sun went down.

ALFIE SIGHS

That was... it was the last good day, really, that. It was a few days after we got back where it happened, where. *This* happened. But I had work, Casper was busy with clearing up the vampires attempts to reassert their freedom, and we only saw each other for handfuls of

moments at a time. The last time he bit me, I barely remember it, hurried as it was, me on the couch, him on the rug on his knees, like we'd done so many times before.

You don't think about stuff like that. That there was a time when you were a kid where your parents picked you up and put you down and it was the last time. The last time you played with sticks in the mud. The last time. The last.

ALFIE'S BREATH CATCHES

You know--- you know Atlantic salmon? When it's time to breed they return to their spawning grounds inland. They swim miles and miles upstream against violent currents, jumping up short waterfalls, climbing rocks. Their bodies change colour and even shape. And when they reach their destination, warped by the hardships they've endured, often having not eaten for months and existed only on the fat stored in their bodies, they just--

they just die.

All that and they just die.

Um.

So.

ALFIE TAKES A DEEP BREATH

So I was working a shift, and it finished pretty early in the morning. This was three, four days after we got back from Whitby and I. I'd been waiting for this package, and when I was getting my stuff together to go home, I saw I'd got a text saying they'd tried to deliver it the night before, when I was working, and it was at the post office.

It's all so boring and normal.

It was half five, and the post office opened at six, so I figured I'd walk into town, stop by pick up my package, and then head home to Casper, who'd probably have got in at four, just after sunrise. He'd probably want blood; he'd not been able to feed at the hospital since our first day back at York, the vampire stuff was keeping him away.

With that in mind, I took some iron tablets and drank some apple juice, and I walked into town in the early sunlight.

There was a pleasant kind of quiet everywhere. A few places, like the bakeries, were already showing signs of life, smells of baking pastries and bread wafting out into the streets. But otherwise there was nothing happening, not really even any cars on the roads, nothing.

I'd walked faster than I thought, so, I thought, oh. It'd be nice to sit on a bench in the museum gardens for a bit on the way, you know? So I. Went into the museum gardens.

Like the city, it was quiet there. Just me and the flowers and the trees. It was already pretty warm even though the sun had only been up for less than two hours, but it had hardly cooled off in the night at all. I was starting to regret my decision to come out at all and was starting to become hyper aware of how sticky with sweat I was, how my clothes felt damp on my back. I couldn't tell if I smelled bad or not.

I got up to the ruins of the old abbey and stopped, leaning against the old stone. I'd been up to the abbey in Whitby in the afternoon when Casper was sleeping, touched the old walls, warm under my fingers from hours in the sun, but anywhere the sun hadn't touched pulled the heat away from me skin fast, like it was drinking it. Casper's skin was like that. So cold it sapped the heat away.

Colder than death.

The sun was still low so all the shadows were long, and the stone of the abbey was cold under my hand. I leaned against it and took a deep breath. I sipped my apple juice.

A breeze rustled the flowers and the lush leaves of the trees. Above me the sky was endless blue, marred only by the dissipating trail of an aeroplane I couldn't see.

I closed my eyes.

I smelled it before I heard it, I think.

That unmistakeable smell of rotting flesh, sweet and rancid and wrong. Then, it's shambling step, clumsy foot turning in the gravel of one of the nearby paths. My heart sped up; wherever Casper was, he'd be coming to help soon; he'd be able to feel the fear creeping in at the edges of my mind, so visceral I felt it like frost on my limbs. I turned away from the thing and started to run, but as soon as I did, I heard it sniff, I heard the rhythm of it's rotting feet change to match my pace. I turned sharply, heading down the path towards the river.

I couldn't hear its feet anymore, but I didn't stop running. I was almost at the gap in the fence that would let me out onto the flagstones at the water's edge. I'd be able to see more clearly in both directions, there would be no trees for it to hide behind if I got to the river, that was my thinking, but I was on the other side of town than I usually went down to the river from, and I had forgotten the pathways were narrower this side, more stairs, more trees breaking up the sight lines.

I ran down the water's edge, pausing by a restaurant whose kitchens I could hear starting to grind into action. I looked over my shoulder; there was no sign of the half-made that had been following me. It was only a short walk to the bridge, then I could get to the post-office, call Cas and wait for him to come and get me inside where they couldn't reach me.

The water of the river lapped. Something was bobbing in the water next to the hull of one of the barges moored nearby. I stared at it. It rose out of the water, running rivulets from its hair and its

sopping wetting clothes. Its lips hung askew from its mouth, teeth crooked and barely still in its jaw. It looked at me, maybe, but I'm not sure it could see. It's eyes were yellow and cloudy.

I ran for the bridge, towards the narrower path, barely twice my own width. It was following me, the half-made that had emerged from the river, and I knew it. I ran desperately for the ornate victorian stairs that would take me up onto the bridge, bring me to the side of a main road, and--

PHONE BUZZES

ALFIE: An unknown number. *Who* is calling me at four in the morning?

ALFIE ANSWERS THE PHONE; A HEAVY BREATH COMES DOWN THE LINE, AND THEN--

CASPER: Alfie?!

CASPER BREATHES HEAVILY AS ALFIE SPEAKS

ALFIE: Oh my god, Casper! Where are you, are you alright?

CASPER: No time. Not safe. Please listen; you have to leave. Get out of the city.

ALFIE: I-- Cas. I can't you know I can't, the blood.

CASPER: They're coming.

ALFIE: Who's coming? Please, Cas, tell me where you are!

CASPER: *Alfie*.

ALFIE: Tell me where you are, Casper, I want to help you, please!

CASPER: ALFIE!

ALFIE: What?

CASPER: *Run*.

ALFIE: I can't run, Casper!

THE LINE GOES DEAD, BEEPING THE DISCONNECTION TONE

ALFIE: Casper. CASPER.

I can't run.

Because I'm dying, Cas. I'M DYING.

Oh god, I can't run, they're going to--

Oh fuck, what am I going to do?

Oh god, oh god. It's.

ALFIE TAKES A DEEP BREATH

It's okay, it's okay. The decision is made. It's done already. I--

I'm doing it. Okay? Okay.

[END]

EIRA: Not Quite Dead is written, performed, and edited by Eira Major, under a Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution License. Guest performance of Aaron Wolfe as Casper. Live, laugh, bite.