

Not Quite Dead

Episode 20

'Snow on Snow'

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 Twenty, Content Warnings

- profanity
- threats of violence
- discussion of traumatic injury
- mentions near-death experiences
- mentions of suicidal ideation
- mentions of murder

TRANSCRIPT

Episode Twenty – Snow on Snow

Bonjour mon r leur. I do not know if you actually listen back to these things, or... honestly a part of me hopes that you don't. You are sleeping now, which is good. I know I should wait for you to wake up to speak to you but in honesty, mon r leur, I am a coward. You think after this many years of life I would have learned how to better stay on top of things like this, but no.

I am sorry. That's the main thing I need to say to you. I'm sorry. Not just for what happened earlier but for everything else. I can only hope that I can make it up to you. That you will find it in yourself to forgive me.

It has been some time since I last lived in such proximity with another person and I am finding it more difficult than I imagined I would. That is not your fault, mon r leur.

None of this is your fault. None of it. I made a promise to you that I would not let you drown. I cannot very well keep it if I insist on dragging you to the depths of me. There will be so much time to talk about all of this, I promise you. One of the greatest gifts of immortality is the luxury of time.

Of course, this is also one of its cruelest punishments.

EIRA: This is Not Quite Dead, Episode Twenty, Snow on Snow

I find that memories, unless I go out of my way to recall them, slip through my mind like water through my fingers. Those things I do remember are now stories I tell, so far removed from anything like ordinary memory as to be something else entirely. At I guess I would say I am more capable of holding onto memory than the average human but I do not know that for sure. I only know that time erodes my life as water erodes a rock caught in a riverbed. Sorting it slowly down to sand. I remember now mostly other rememberings.

I think now of things that happened in my youth and they may as well have happened to some other man. And I only remember the youth of this life, the first hundred or so years after I have made the change. My life before I was turned, it is gone from me. If nothing else I have made sure to hold on the memory of that old life slipping away, the gentle horror of realising that I could no longer remember the faces of my family, or whether I had a family at all.

It is, as I have told you before, one of my greatest fears that my first act in this new life was one of great and terrible violence. But of course, I can never be sure if that old nightmare is real or imagined. I still dream it, from time to time. Mostly the dream is of blood. Blood in pools on tiles. Blood dripping from still hands. The taste of it, the smell of it. I see their blue eyes staring at me, all the bluer for red all around them. Blue eyes like mine.

I see now why it is you enjoy talking into your little machine so much, mon raleur. The words come easier to me with no interruptions, no questions. I do not like to talk about the past. I do not like to think about the great, gaping holes that are in my memories of it.

We all bring our contexts along without us, nos sacs de trisstesse durera. Our bags of misery endure. There is happiness too, of course, but. Somehow I find the pain is stickier. That is why I make such deliberate efforts now to notice pleasure. I dedicate myself to it. I am committed to it.

I am going to live forever, mon coeur, I refuse to do it in the bosoms of misery.

NEIGE GROWL-SIGHS FRUSTRATEDLY

This is why it is frustrating to me when you ask it, you see? When you ask what I remember of my life, how can I answer? Hurt, mostly, for a very long time, but that is not its meaning. For so long I was just surviving, mon coeur, you cannot possibly understand what it was like. I did not have chance to think to do more than continue to survive. It was brutal and desperate, what more do you want to know?

That is how I feel when I am asked and that is what I remember of it. Endless stretches of hunger and desperation, feeling like I might have perished every moment I continued not to. Sometimes I longed the end to come. Is that what you want to know?

Does it help you to know of my suffering, mon raleur? Does it help you reckon with what I have become? If it does please do explain it to me because I cannot see the connections for myself.

I wish for you to know as little of this suffering as possible. I do not want you to know what happened to me because then you may feel somehow that you owe me suffering. Or perhaps that you owe it to yourself, I do not know. But the world, the universe, it has no respect for such things. You cannot bargain with reality, it simply remains as it is.

Am I at peace with it? Honestly I would have to conclude that I am not because I cannot talk about it without feeling some small ghost of that old pain again, even when I do not remember what happened. After thousands of years mon raleur I can still feel those old aches within me. In fact I would go as far as saying I do not even crave to be at peace with them. I think it is an awful thing to ask a person who has suffered to embrace it with neutrality and composure. Non! It seems to me the kind of thing that is meant to make it easier for whoever is listening to the story.

I think about the scars on my back, those lash marks, and they make me angry even though I don't remember anymore how I came by them. I will never know, it is impossible to find this out, because there was no written word as you know it now when I was human, and these scars were a part of me before I was born into this life.

Even though I cannot know about it, I am still angry about it. Because who would fucking dare to do that to someone, eh? What a monstrous act of brutality and violence. And the idea is that I am supposed to consider this neutrally? Non! Merde! Non.

I will not do it.

But you ask what what snatches of my early life come back to me when I think on them, you have asked it more than once, and as you are not sitting here waiting for me to reply. Because you cannot watch and judge what answer I give and the feelings I place within it. I shall try to answer.

Your little machine, it is a good machine, I suppose, for this.

NEIGE GROWL-SIGHS

I remember when I woke up new I was naked and covered in blood. I know there was nobody else there, nobody alive. I know all of this because I spent the next hundred years trying to find whoever had done this to me. Whoever had turned me and left.

Mostly I wandered the empty landscapes. I would walk for weeks, my feet bloody, growing rabid with hunger. I would cross a settlement of people, sometimes small encampments of those who were more nomadic, and I would kill all I could catch. It was not intentional; I was fuelled only by the drive to sate my hunger, the drive to subsist. It was all I could do.

In the brief moments of sanity when I had drunk enough blood to clear my head, I would be filled with awful regret and horror at myself. It was a lonely time. There were simply fewer people back then; it was so long between each group I came across that I would be starving every time.

In desperation, I hunted animals, but their blood made me sick and only made the hunger worse.

I do not know how long I lived like this. I know that it felt like an age, like it would never be over.

In moments of clarity, I would question what the point of my existence was. I was thoroughly miserable and utterly alone. I flung myself from cliffs. I tried to drown myself in the sea. I cut my own throat. All any of this succeeded in doing was making me hungrier than before.

If I think about it seriously now, I know that had I truly wanted to die, I would be dead. I know how to kill a vampire and I cannot remember a time where I did not know this so it must be knowledge I have had for a while, and I can't imagine its something I could not have figured out for myself efficiently had I put my mind to it. So I can only assume that these attempts on my own life were an act of penance I performed to soothe the guilt that racked me all my waking life.

Eventually, after some time wandering like this, I met another vampire. I can't remember who they were or what the encounter was like, only that it happened. After that my life continued as before except now with the knowledge that I was not alone. I met others along the way, pieced together some knowledge of what I had become. At some point I learned that whoever made me had been like this themselves and had still left me.

It was uncommon, even then, for a vampire to leave one they had made behind like this. Why would someone go to all of that effort of making a new vampire only to abandon them this way? The odds of a successful creation at so low that you would think it bizarre. I could only assume whoever did this had found me unsatisfactory somehow.

This I remember very keenly, this sense I had done wrong, somehow, in some deep and fundamental manner. Something about me and who I was had come out bad and wrong. Although I was a vampire and I knew that other vampires existed, still I was so desperate for my suffering to be about some central fatal flaw.

I tell you this, mon rôleur, because I know this is something that is hurting you now. Because I know what it is like to feel you are somehow insufficient. That you have been damaged irreparably and fundamentally. I know what it is like because I lived in those feelings for many years. I called them my home. And for me, it was because it was comforting.

I'm not sure if that makes sense, but in some way the notion I was simply somehow deeply broken was a comfort because it meant that I did not have to try. For me it felt as though either I would be flawless and perfect or I was malformed, ruinous, irredeemable, somehow. Of course this is absurd, everyone has strengths and flaws, nobody is really perfection and everyone needs some accommodation or another to get by.

But we hold ourselves to a difference standard than the ones we hold others to, don't we? And my need for comfort in my own misery was so strong it distorted the lens through which I saw the whole world. I was so convinced of my own deficiency, mon raleur, that in an important way, I was living in a different reality, one which placed everything in a hierarchy, and I was at the bottom of it.

You will notice this too is a form of self-centred-ness. Perhaps I am not the best, but I am the worst. I am the most important, but here it is derogatory.

Ach, now you will be thinking this is what I think you are doing. It is not. Well, a *little* I think you are doing this, mon raleur. You *are* very convinced you are terrible even though you are basically just fine. Just being sort of okay is actually okay, you know, it doesn't mean you are the worst simply because you are not the best.

Zut alors, il ne casse pas trois pattes à un canard, you're fine, mon coeur.

I imagine it is harder, remembering that you were human.

I do not remember being human at all, anymore. I have tried so hard to recover the memories but it has proved impossible. I have memories which span thousands of years of myself attempting this task, and it never went anywhere. I think perhaps I have some quiet memory where I am committing myself to either hold onto that life or let it go forever, but it's murky and strange, and possibly imagined. Memory is like this, I have learned. Far more embellished and unreliable than we'd like it to be.

From the scars on my back I do wonder if it is not a good thing I do not remember my human life.

Either way, I have no point of comparison for how human or not this need for touch is, how human or not I am as a being overall, what I have lost, what I still have to lose, what all of it might mean. All I know is that I am this. Neige. And I am a vampire. And I do not want to die.

I do not believe any creature is inherently bad, I think all that lives desires to live, and I think to even consider who may or may not deserve that privilege is folly. All that leaves us with, then, is how we consider ourselves and everyone else around us as creatures that do live. Oui? The ways different creatures exist, they require different things, some of those things are violent, and that is not necessarily comfortable for us, the observer. We do not want the penguin to be swallowed by the whale, but it will be, for the whale wants to live, as does the penguin. The penguin, after all, ate the fish, and the fish the krill. Who are we to deny that krill's desire for life as more or less meaningful than the desire of the whale?

I know that I am not human. I cannot tell you how different my thoughts and feelings are from human thoughts and feelings but I can tell you it seems we are alike in more ways than most humans or vampires would be comfortable. I also know that as a vampire my needs are different to human needs. There is no shame in this. Shame, perhaps, in wanton violence, but in the need to live? No. The desire for life is the most fundamental thing of all, is it not?

To me it seems like to remember my human life would be to constantly see myself through the eyes of something I am not. Like a cat who is only able to see himself from the perspective of a mouse. Of course I would think I was a monster, then. But I am not a mouse, and neither are you. We are different creatures to them, *mon rôleur*, and that is why our behaviour is frightening when viewed through their eyes. They want to live. We want to live too. How can wanting to live be wrong, *mon rôleur*? It is the most natural thing of all.

And it is wanting to *live*, too, not to simply exist. All those early days of my life, amidst the spotty memories I recall a great, deep loneliness within myself, like a bleeding wound. I remember I carried it with me everywhere and I found no comfort for it amongst humans or vampires for an awfully long time, even after those dead days began to recede and I was able to spend more time amongst other people without feeling that feral need to kill.

By then, the shape of what humans were doing had begun to change. There was more farming happening at a far greater scale, and the first great cities were being built. I moved into those places of bustling life with the foxes and the rats, found my home in the new shadows between closely placed houses. It was a fascinating and exhilarating time; more people so close to one another meant more ideas, more minds to bounce them off one another, more innovation.

It also meant more vampires. So many humans so close together meant that cities drew attention of those of us nearby. There was more food, more hiding places. It was easier for us to hunt and blend in. And it was the first time, for many of us, that we could regularly feed enough to think and function at a level higher than beasts for more than a few days at a time.

I do not think that before this time there had been much planning and strategising between vampires. As I mentioned I do not have much memory of my early life but I do know that those vampires I had met seemed to live in small groups, a creator and those they had made, most of the time. There was a problem, though, with these groups. Vampire blood will not infinitely replenish; drinking from a vampire yields less nutritious blood than one might obtain from a similarly sized human. However it is these

processes work, there cannot be a state of infinite energy where vampires share blood between one another and soon in such a situation more human blood is needed.

However, this does not stop vampires from attacking one another if they become too deeply focused on the drive to kill. The hungrier a vampire gets the more dangerous it becomes, to humans and to other vampires alike. Naturally you can see how this would be a problem. These little families were highly prone to becoming one regretful vampire with a belly full of those they had previously hunted alongside, and a heart filled with regret.

I will never know this for sure but I am certain that the cause of death for most vampires was other vampires. It would be a close tie between this and starvation.

After the cities began to grow, things began to change. Loose communities began to form, systems of behaviour and expectation were established. But vampires, despite our potential to live for dizzying lengths of time, do not come with a long life expectancy. Still, many vampires were killed by one another or else died of starvation.

Because most vampires lived such short lives any culture we formed was also brief. I do not know why I lived and the others did not. I do not think I am especially smart or gifted. A confluence of coincidences occurred which allowed me to live, and I am grateful for it, but that is all that it was.

A coincidence.

I did not even particularly value my own life at the time, I do not think. I did not, for a long time.

I am perhaps talking more and longer about this than I should. What I want you to know is that-- it's okay. The way you are feeling right now, whatever way that is, it is okay. And there is no shame in it, even if shame may be a part of the process for you. Please know it is unnecessary to blame yourself. I--

I'm sorry. For what happened earlier and for my inability to speak with you directly about it. Please do not think it means I don't care for you, mon coeur, I do. Very much. These things have never come easily to me. I am used to-- well. I can grow used to great deal of situations mon râleur but the truth is I have come to anticipate isolation and I struggle to adapt when that expectation is defied. I do not say this as an excuse, only an explanation.

I would like to talk about these things with you, some time, if you are willing. I do not know how to begin, but I am sure that the words will come to me, eventually. Please give me patience, mon râleur. One thing we certainly have is time.

[END]