

Not Quite Dead

Episode 37

'l'Eau de Fonte'

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 Content Warnings

(text in white, highlight to view)

TRANSCRIPT

Episode Thirty-Seven: l'Eau de Fonte

A CLICK
RAIN IS FALLING, CLOSE, FAIRLY HEAVY

NEIGE

It has been three days since we brought Casper home. Three days. You have not said a word, you are just. Lying there.

You won't even speak to your little machines!

All that bullshit about keeping a record goes out the window the moment you feel like shit, eh? Oh, you talk about leaving a meaningful record but all those slow descriptions of Casper moaning and gasping under you, that doesn't sound very scientifically pertinent!

You won't talk to me directly? Fine! Moi et le faux auditeur will keep each other company, non? Though I have had to take a second one, the first one kept buzzing. I could feel it in my jaw. Dégoûtant.

NEIGE MAKES A SMALL SOUND OF FRUSTRATION

If you would just speak to me, mon rôleur. But then I suppose it would make things too easy.

A CLICK
SOFT RECORDING FUZZ

NEIGE
Casper. Is. DEAD.

PAUSE

How is that you-- will you not? Please?

He's dead.

NEIGE MAY BE CRYING

Holding onto him like he--

But Alfie, he's gone. There is nothing inside that shell you are clinging too like a raft at sea. He cannot help you and if you don't do something you are going to drown.

I can't stay. I cannot. I cannot. It's too much.

A CLICK

WIND BLOWS IN NEARBY TREES

NEIGE

It is possible that I could convince you to go to hunt if I promise to sit with Casper.

There are some traditions, you know, where the dead cannot be left alone. Traditions as old as I am. I will sit with him, if it helps you. If that is what you want.

But I don't think that what you are doing is mourning, it does not seem like mourning. It seems like something else.

I hear you whispering to him. It strikes me again and again that I do not know you. I smell your blood, I know you are trying to feed him. What kind of creature have you become? Is it my doing? Casper's? Or is this who you always would have been?

Every day I feel I am begging you to let him be dead but you just--- you cannot. You cannot allow it. It is like the concept itself escapes you and reality reshapes in front of your eyes, so you can be clutching his corpse and still feel your lover. Like he is *anything* anymore. He's not. Casper is nothing now. He only *was*.

What can I tell you about him? I-- I thought that is what these days would be. That we would wreath him in flowers and wrap him in the earth. Make a little garden we can return to if we want to be near the dirt that once was part of him.

I thought we would sit together and you would tell me who he had become in those years since I'd seen him last. I know a little from the tapes but there is so much you did not explain, so many details you left out. His hair, Alfie, he used to wash it with eggs and lemons to make it shine, did you know this? He would rub oil into the strands; almond; olive; cedar; whatever was around and abundant.

Once, Casper and I, we went to Brazil to meet a vampire who claimed he had made a drink which would cure vampires of the damage caused by sunlight. It was just pigs blood mixed with whatever vampire blood and spit he could find. We drank it and it made us horribly sick. It took us six hunts before we felt ourselves again. And as soon as we did, Casper, he insisted we still had to try it, to see if despite the sickness, we could be out in the sunshine longer without being hurt.

We sat up and watched the dawn, how beautiful it looked. Of course, within a few minutes Casper was covered in pale freckles which got darker every moment. He did look lovely, though, in the sunlight. I had to trick him to get him to come back inside.

He told me about the day he fell in love with architecture. A summer's day in Prague, when he was a boy. It had been overcast all morning, the sky a gloomy grey, threatening to rain. As he crossed *Kamenný most* just a step behind his father, though, the cloud broke, and lit the water so it looked like it was made of molten silver, and all the houses on the riverbanks glowed in shades of gold. The bridge tower with its excessive details, its dramatic sloping roofs clawing its way towards the sun. He said he felt then, looking at the tower, that buildings were not simply sheltering from the elements, but about climbing towards to god. He liked old monuments. Pyramids and towers, anything that climbed. Always there was a sense of him *reaching*, you know? Grasping at something just out of reach.

I think maybe that's what I saw in him. Maybe I mistook that longing inside him for some kind of aspiration. I hoped, perhaps, he was trying to raise himself up out of the gutter but actually, I think he just liked to look up.

What he could not understand was how he poured a romance into it, his longing and his misery. As much as he claimed to always be mourning for this lost past self, really that person he

imagined he had been was invented. Oh, my poor stolen wife, he'd say. My children growing up without a father. That same poor wife he left alone every night to stalk the streets looking for someone, anyone, who'd eat him. Even before he knew vampires existed he longed for one to bite him. And I would think, when you were human, Casper, it took only three cups of wine to tempt you into my arms. When I asked to bite you, my love, you were hungry and eager, and you would have stripped naked and bent over for me in a heartbeat if I had let you, but I didn't.

He wanted to be in the gutter. He liked the view.

Ah, but maybe this is just me, maybe it is that I blame myself, somehow, for what he became. It was not I that made him but Antoinette, of course, but she choose him for the scent of me left behind when I had sunk my teeth into him. Antoinette was one of Claudio's; Claudio was my fault. Maybe I feel guilt then that Casper was turned against his will? Maybe.

I liked him best when we were quiet together. Late at night, when he would stretch. He asked about my life, about places I had been. Made me speak in languages he didn't understand, words which had not been spoken aloud for decades.

Still. Even in those dark moments where we were alone. Sometimes when he was undressing me, his hands on my body, I felt his eyes like they were seeing beyond my flesh. I let him taste my blood, he said he knew the memory of it from when he drained Antoinette. She was so wrong, he said, to do what she did, to claim it was in the aid of building some superior being. How could we be superior if we relied on murder to live?

'So does a jaguar,' I told him.

He ignored me. Went on about how it was sacrilege. To claim a vampire was superior to man was to go against god.

'Which god,' I asked. But I knew. Good little Catholic boy. Laid low by the beauty of every cathedral he ever saw. It was a matter of the soul, to him, I think. If we could cured of what we are, it might mean we still have one. If we had become another creature, we were godless beasts. Demons.

I asked why he wanted a god who hated him. He asked if it was wrong for children who'd father's who struck them to still crave their love. I lived through the birth squeeze of his god, messy and tumultuous, a deity born out of the corpse of an empire. If there is a god it is changeable, malleable, responsive. Why not assume that god would love you, whatever you are? Why, if your deity is shaped by what you ask of it, would you ask for it to hate you and cast you out?

It was wrong of me to say that, I know.

Over the years I think his thoughts on god and existence changed and shifted. I do not know what he believed when he loved you, mon râleur. If when he tried to keep you from turning it was out of concern for your soul. What I will say is that if there is a god we have not spoken.

You would think as the oldest thing alive it may have spared a word for me, but no. If it is there it is something so complex as to be beyond our comprehension, like attempting to explain a telegram to a moth.

A CLICK
RAIN

NEIGE

You asked me to go so I have gone.

It is just as well, I cannot stand to look at you.

At him.

I have gone, and what now? What will you do? Take him back to your bed and hold until blood lust consumes you and you wither into dust? Is that what you want? There are quicker ways to die, if you ask it of me, I will give it to you.

Won't I?

Ugh. It doesn't matter. It does not matter. You have not asked, you will not ask.

I will go to France. Not that you care. Not that you even asked or stopped to wonder what I would do if you were to send me away! But then. Of course. Why would you? Who am I to you, really. Nothing. I saved you, I cared for you, yes. But I don't know you, you don't know me, not really. We have had such short a time together. You knew Casper and he told you nothing about me.

Why should you care?

I could go anywhere, do anything. I've lived for millennia before either of you were born, I will live millennia after you are gone, I will be here when everything you've ever known has turned to ash and dust and--

And.

I will remember you. Even if your name is gone, if I cannot recall that peachy-sweetness of your blood, even then I will remember something that was you.

Something.

Putain de merde.

I cannot let you go, can I?

Is it guilt, mon râleur?

When I came to York it was not to save you. You ask what happened between Casper and I. You want me to explain but I cannot, not without. Without losing you.

Alfie. I did not come here to *save him*.

I wish I could make you understand without---

I am not speaking to you in the flesh and yet I still cannot bring myself to say it to you.

You are driving me to madness. I needed to leave, you were right, it was time to go. I have gone. I will go to France, get some things. I will come back. Fuck you.

A CLICK

QUIET, NEARBY BIRDSONG

NEIGE

I had forgotten how much I love this place. La Maison Perier.

You would like it here too, I think. Yes. You would. There is electricity, hot water, the bath is huge. I think you would enjoy it.

Most of the rooms have been shut for a while. I've not spent much time here, not since Henri. It is out of the way, undisturbed in the Normandy countryside. It's quiet out here.

When I first came to Normandy it looked nothing like this. There was no grand maison, non. A feudal lord with a few serfs worked the land nearby and where my house now stands was a small house made of wood. It is returned to the dirt now, dirt that is in the foundations of this

house. I like that, that the pieces of that place are here, in this new one. Pieces of the place I lived so many years.

It is funny, you know, it was an accidental meeting on the beach nearby that made me stay here. When was it? Oh. Some time after the Norman conquest of England, I think? How much time. A century? Maybe two? It doesn't matter. What matters is I saw him on the beach. He had hair which turned the colour of rust in the sunlight. 'Are you lost, my lord,' he asked me. Of course he did not use those words, the language Menet spoke is dead now. But he asked if I was lost, and he called me his lord. I told him I was nobody's lord, but I would be his if he wanted.

I had felt so. Hollow. Before Menet. I have loved and been loved a thousand times, but he was like the first day of spring after a long, hard winter. He lit a fire in me which I thought I'd lost the power to burn. When he touched me, it felt like the sun on my skin. Burning little kisses down my spine. Oh, how he smelled when he lay in the fields on summer evenings, the sweet, fine scent of his blood, I would twist my fingers just so inside of him and make him scream, choke it off with my teeth into the thick muscle of his shoulder, lapping up the ooze of blood that trickled free.

He was not like you, mon r leur, he could stand to be bitten but only now and then, only in those moments of ecstasy. Every taste of him was hard won but I loved to try to win it, let him play me for a fool, ring as much worth out of me as possible, let him use me up until my teeth ached and my chest was ragged with the need to just bite him Always, right before I thought I might tip into insanity, he would whisper it, 'receit', to receive, like a gift.

And it was.

Non, after this I found it most unwise to take humans for a lover in this way. Most unwise. But I had empathy, you see, for young Casper when I saw how he had killed that girl I had seen him professing his love to the day before. It was not that I believed that he had loved her as I had loved Menet. Patently I do not; I think dear Casper took those lovers to hurt himself beyond all else but I mean I saw in him something I had seen in myself.

A fascination with *fragility*.

I loved to watch him swim. Watch him strip bare and leap into the water. He needed air to breathe! For a moment as he became immersed I would fill with dread, but then he would burst free, droplets falling like jewels from his dark hair, and he would gasp a breath.

He asked me what I saw at the bottom when I swam down to it. Glass bottles, strange crabs, little fish. I do not like to go too deep; it hurts my ears. He found this so funny. My ears were like little shells, he said. He did not call me snow, or any name at all, not once in all those long years we lived together. He called me only his majesty, only his lord, only his love, only *his*. I was his, that is all, and I felt it.

Oh now when I look back on it do I see a selfishness in my actions? Of course I do. I had come from Constantinople, wandered across the whole continent to the coast. I had heard about

Claudio and his mad ideas. Thoughts already began to spread at the edges of cities; thoughts of Snow Blood; thoughts of me. Why had I made Claudio? Why had I not killed him when I had the chance?

Despair, despair. It ate at me.

And then Menet. Menet who knew nothing of vampires until he was being fucked by one.

You know he asked one day that I might turn him? 'Do you not love me, mine,' he said. 'Of course I love you,' I told him. 'Of course I do, I am helpless to do anything else.' 'Would you not want to keep me for the rest of time?' he asked.

And I thought on it. On Claudio. On Justinian and Theodora whose deaths still hung heavy on my soul. And I said when the sun set on his life it would set on mine too, for he was my sunshine, my everything, and I was only his. I told him change is everything. I could not turn him, I said, for I would not be deprived of a chance to see him grow old and beautiful the way that humans do.

What a crime to steal the chance at lines etching smiles into his face, a shock of spun silver like a crown upon his head. But you will be young forever, my dearest, he said and I told him I was not young, and youth is something I do not have the gift of remembering, though I might wear a mask of it. And that is a crime too!

And for some years this was the way. I would see new crinkles around his eyes, see the way scars formed and changed.

But he was not old, when I lost him.

They came in the night. There were six of them. I could smell them before they came. In their blood; Claudio. I found Menet, tried to make him flee, but he told me no, I must take his niece first, just two years old. Ah, mistake, mistake.

I hid the girl in the hills, ran back to him as fast as I could. He had fought the vampires; many had been attacked, but only a handful killed. Menet was chewed, bitten, hacked with knives and teeth, but they'd barely touched a drop of his blood.

I would notice over the next weeks trails of the vampires' scents through the fields, all strategically in areas I would not have smelled them unless I had been seeking them out, all in places they may have watched us, Menet and I, and waited to make a move.

I took him back to our little cottage on the hill. He could not speak. He was frightened; I could smell it and see it in his eyes. When his hands grabbed at me, his grip was weak. I cut my palm and fed him from me, the first time I had ever done this. He drank and drank, he drank so much my ears began to ring and I began to worry.

When I pulled my hand away, Menet convulsed, he writhed, smearing blood on the straw floor. He retched, my blood and his mixed together on the floor, soaking into both our clothes.

Menet, I'm sorry.

He opened his mouth like he was screaming but all that escaped was more. It was all I could do to hold him. I held him as his muscles twitched and he shook. His eyes rolled, every breath was like a gasp and a bark. Finally, finally, after too many hours, he was still.

Still, I held him. The heat seeped out of him. The sun rose and set and rose and set and rose and set again.

Blood pooled in his limbs, turned the backs of his arms and legs the colour of bruises. His eyes, open, shot with blood, staring at me, turned cloudy.

When I could not see the warmth of their brown anymore, I set him down.

I went out to the small yard and drew a bucket from the well. I cleaned myself, and Menet, and set him on our straw bed.

I set the cottage alight.

Menet, Menet.

Ah. Some day you will understand. Someday I will talk about Menet and you will talk about Casper, non? And we will love them, in the past tense.

Oui.

A CLICK

A CAR

NEIGE

For the first time in its existence, coming back to England feels like a relief. I have been worried about you, I-- I know you need help but you are not in danger.

I want to ask you to come here, but all you want is-- to lie with that dead thing we both used to love. Fuck. I am scared to ask you to bury him. Scared you will say no. But I need it. I need it to end. I cannot-- I cannot live with seeing you wilfully killing yourself to stay beside him. How

much more can I intervene, Alfie? Where are the lines and how many do I cross before I lose you entirely? Am I violating some treaty between us by coming to you before your life is at risk?

There is so much you do not know. So much you do not understand, about me, about Casper, about why I came when he called.

Perhaps you are already lost. Perhaps I never had you.

Yes. Yes. That is it. You know nothing about what you are, what I am. You love me only because I was there, like a duckling imprinting on whatever is present as it hatches. If it were not me it would be someone else.

Except that if I had not found you, you would be dead.

Ugh! Je me dégoûte. What a foul implication. You owe me nothing. NOTHING.

I will not use my choice to save you against you, how vile of me to even--

I feel desperate. Tellement immonde.

You see what you are making me? Fucking impossible!

A CLICK
THE SOUND OF A NEARBY RIVER

NEIGE

Pathetic as it is, I have schemed for us to meet.

Ugh, such lows I have sunk to!

But you have been coming to the city now for some days and I do not think you've yet noticed my presence.

I have been neglecting my lessons for you, I think. I should have taught you to be less *oblivious*. So much unrest, yet you seem so blind to it. The vampires are restless and reckless. There are fewer half-mades, yes, but more death. How have you not noticed?

You don't know the normal rhythms of the city, I suppose. You would not know how different these streets smell now, how many more of us there are, acting out, causing chaos. This I can understand. But me? You know me. Why do you not notice my presence? Why do you not seek me out when you ought to? I wondered at first if this was some consequence of whatever it was that made Casper so enthusiastic. I have my theories, but they are theories alone.

Did Casper tell you about the vampire he killed in Siberia, not so long after he killed Antoinette? This was after the first time I had sought him out, but it was not until after the incident in Siberia that that my interest was truly sparked. When we had met before, I'd thought him unremarkable, despite his good looks. Irritably melancholy, I thought. But then he went to Siberia, and there was begged for help by a young vampire who had been made just weeks before.

The young vampire was half-frozen, missing his arm, at risk of losing his feet. He would have succumbed to blood lust, except that, it is strange, in such low temperatures, it takes longer for this to set in. Casper thought this was curious. He thinks that's why she did it, the vampire who made this stray thing Casper rescued from the snow.

She was old. Not as old as me, but perhaps as old as Claudio. We don't know because Casper didn't ask. Her blood, it was entirely different to anything else Casper had tasted, and yes, when I drank him first after he'd returned from her, I could tell from what traces of her remained in him that she was not from any lineage that I knew. I'd have needed a cleaner sample to trace her better, but Casper, of course, drained her dry the moment he saw what she had been doing.

She had built a system of tunnels into the ice. Inside, small pens, where she kept humans and half-mades. No full vampires, though. There was only a stack of their frozen bodies, dissected, pulled apart. From the set of their faces, Casper guessed some of them to be alive when she had pulled their insides to their outsides.

But most intriguing to Casper was how she selected humans with different scents, scents that Casper recognised. Distinct ones, groups. Things you would now call blood types.

Casper had an excellent nose. He would go to society parties, smell out humans who seemed perfectly healthy at a glance, but contained within them some quirk of construction which caught his interest. We never spoke on it plainly, but he hinted to me many times that he believed that maybe the cure for vampirism was not something obtained from *vampire* blood, but human blood. He did so firmly believe humans to be superior to us, I believe his friend, who we know now as Bonham, I believe one of the things he enticed our Casper in with was his interest in a panacea that could come out of the blood. Like they once took life-saving insulin from the pancreases of cows, Bonham seemed to think, from what little Casper mentioned, that there was some secretion, some special component of a vampire's blood which might be separated out and used to treat human illnesses with none of the drawbacks of attempting to treat a human with the blood itself.

I think, for Casper, Bonham's belief in this possibility suggested some method for distilling the sickness out of our bodies, that there could be a way, somehow, to extract the sickness he saw in us in isolation.

There were some half-mades in strange states. One she had grafted a full vampire's arm to. Others, in various states of dissection. But outside of the compound there were more of them. What Casper had thought were posts marking some boundary were their frozen remains, held upright and rigid under a layer of frost.

When he saw what she had done Casper killed her without a second thought.

What I heard about this, I had been in Venice, with friends.

I followed him for some weeks. Talented though Casper's nose is, I have grown adept at remaining hidden when I wish to be. At the right moment I crossed his path in such a way as to catch his attention, and he followed the smell of me to a bar in a quiet part of town.

Pathetic of me, again, but...

There, we kissed. He said that he remembered me from our last meeting, he'd learned who and what I was. I asked what he meant by that. He said I was the source. He said I was the first vampire. He said everyone he'd spoken to knew that, and were shocked that he had met me once and lived.

Why should this shock them, I asked? Plenty meet me and live. Did not he know his maker, who he'd slaughtered so senselessly, had chosen all her vampires based on humans who I'd bitten and left left behind?

Casper asked then if being bitten by a vampire might make you more likely to survive the turn. I asked him how many Antoinette had tried to turn and failed. He did not answer but I knew the number to be significant.

I fucked him in a backstreet, made him scream so loud that people came rushing to see what violent act had been committed and we had to hide, pants-less, still catching our breath, until they were gone.

He did not ask me why I was there, or suggest he ever realised our meeting again was not coincidence.

And here I am waiting in my car to hear yours pull up in the next street. In fishnets and a cropped shirt, I'll stand outside the club across the river as though I've been hunting inside. I will catch your eye across the water, Alfie, and you will come to me.

We'll meet on the bridge. The bridge you were attacked on, where Casper saved your life. We will smoke, here, and you will ask me for my help.

I will agree, of course.

A CLICK
FAINT STATIC

You are not very good at hunting lab technicians. I am not much help. They're ready for us every time and do not let their guard drop very far. I think they're pissing in bottles in their car to avoid getting out so we can take them. They watch us as much as we watch them and when we catch one, it will be because they have allowed it to be so. This whole institution is fucked.

A CLICK

RAIN

You seemed alive when you drained Tim Sherman today. I am proud to see the change in you, but I worry about what plans you have for that blood. Somehow I think not much of it will pass your pretty lips, little love. I wish you would think things through.

A CLICK
WIND AND HEAVY RAIN

I cannot stand this way that you are being. How is it that in my absence you have become so much more unhinged by this? What are you doing to our Casper? What fucking-- what are you becoming?

Perhaps I did not know what you were to begin with.

Perhaps it is unfair of me. I am trying all I can, but it is raising things in me. Things about Menet. About Claudio. Of course, about Casper himself. Whatever he made himself out to be, Alfie... think back to the moment you met him, what he was doing. My love, I had not come to York to offer Casper my help.

But whatever his hobbies, he would not have wanted this for himself.

I don't know how to help you move on. I cannot stand to watch another man I care about slide into madness, desperate for a cure for something which has none. But what else can I do? I will not leave you unless you ask it of me.

Why did I come back to you.

Why.

A CLICK
WIND IN NEARBY TREES

You have sent me away again, and like a bad dog, I have gone. Is this wise? I do not know. You were right to say what you said. I have not been right for many years. Not since Claudio, really. There has been such a rage in me. It makes me listless.

I am looking always for purpose, and feeling always a looming threat. What if it happens again, some vampire who is my fucking responsibility decides to start a war in my name? What then?

It weighs so heavy on my heart, mon rôleur. That fear.

I am sorry I did not have an answer for your question. You were right to ask it. Why do I come back to you? What do I want from you?

Foolish of me to not have seen the answer right away, but the guilt of it. The *guilt*. I pray to anything that might listen that you will never understand it. I have done a terrible thing. You need a friend, a guide, a mentor. I tried to be all of this, but there was something there, wasn't there.

Something in you I recognise. The way you are, so infuriating, so ridiculous, it speaks to parts of me I thought were dead. You don't remind me of Casper or Menet, or Theodora or anyone else, in little ways, perhaps, but you are so entirely yourself. So stubborn, so determined.

It is my fault that I acted on this. You are so new, still. It is not fair. A friend, a guide, a mentor. That is what I wished to be. I tried to keep my boundaries firm. Should have kept them firmer. Irresponsible of me to indulge you in the heat of the moment. It was not a privilege I had right to abuse, then. You didn't know me as I am, you were so scared and vulnerable. But I acted selfishly. I did. I should have stopped you and I didn't and it is my fault.

Every time we speak, now, you are so much stronger. So much more yourself. Every time I see you standing on your own, it hits me again. You are so full of fire, little love, mon bijou flamboyant. You are right to send me away. I am wrong to want to stay. Wrong not to look beyond this. Wrong to try to tell you how to live.

Still there is so much which you are so blind to. Why do you not look? How is it that you do not see?

I hear you talk sometimes about the other vampires. The squalor you have seen them living in. You speak of them solely as victims, and perhaps you are right, but they are all around you, living beings hunting, killing on streets which you call home.

Your focus is so narrow, so fixed on Casper, on Bonham, that even when you talk about things like how vampires need change and institution, it is always through the lens of saving us from that one threat. You don't understand the nuance, the implications, the ways in which that violence acted on us ripples outward. How at risk we truly are when we are on the verge of exposure.

I used to dream of that, long, long ago. My first glimpse at a hope of this for centuries was in Casper, and that hope was misplaced. Don't make a fool of me the way he did, mon rôleur. I beg you.

NEIGE SIGHS

It all feels so much clearer now that I have gone, the answer to your question. What do I want from you? Anything that you are willing to give me. And when you call, I will come back to you because you have begun to feel like home.

