

## **We are free...? (Part 2)**

“*We are all free* to do whatever we want to do,” he said that night. “Isn’t that simple and clean and clear? Isn’t that a great way to run a universe?”

“Almost. You forgot a pretty important part,” I said.

“Oh?”

“We are all free to do what we want to do, as long as we don’t hurt somebody else,” I chided. “I know you meant that, but you ought to say what you mean.”

There was a sudden shambling sound in the dark, and I looked at him quickly.

“Did you hear that?”

“Yeah. Sounds like there’s somebody...” He got up, walked into the dark. He laughed suddenly, said a name I couldn’t catch. “It’s OK,” I heard him say “No, we’d be glad to have you.... no need you standing around ... come on, you’re welcome, really...”

The voice was heavily accented, not quite Russian, nor Czech, more Transylvanian.

“Thank you. I do not wish to impose myself upon your evening ...”

The man he brought with him to the firelight was, well, he was unusual to find in a midwest night. A small lean wolflike fellow, frightening to the eye, dressed in evening clothes, a black cape lined in red satin, he was uncomfortable in the light.

“I was passing by,” he said. “The field is a shortcut to my house ...”

“Is it?” Shimoda did not believe the man, knew he was lying, and at the same time did all he could to keep from laughing out loud. I hoped to understand before long.

“Make yourself comfortable,” I said. “Can we help you at all?”

I really didn’t feel that helpful, but he was so shrinking, I did want him to be at ease, if he could.

He looked on me with a desperate smile that turned me to ice.

“Yes, you can help me. I need this very much or I would not ask. May I drink your blood? Just some? It is my food, I need human blood ...”

Maybe it was the accent, he didn’t know English that well or I didn’t understand his words, but I was on my feet quicker than I had been in many a month, hay flying into the fire from my quickness.

The man stepped back. I am generally harmless, but I am not a small person and I could have looked threatening. He turned his head away.

“Sir, I am sorry! I am sorry! Please forget that I said anything about blood! But you see ...”

“What are you saying?” I was the more fierce because I was scared. “What in the *hell* are you saying, mister? I don’t know what you are, are you some kind of VAM ?”

Shimoda cut me off before I could say the word. “Richard, our guest was talking, and you interrupted. Please go ahead, sir; my friend is a little hasty.”

“Donald,” I said, “this guy...”

“Be quite!”

That surprised me so much that I was quiet, and looked a sort of terrified question at the man, caught from his native darkness into our firelight.

“Please to understand. I did not choose to be born vampire. It is unfortunate. I do not have many friends. But I must have a certain small amount of fresh blood every night or I writhe in terrible pain, longer than that without it and I cannot live! Please, I will be deeply hurt - I will die - if you do not allow me to suck your blood ... just a small amount, more than a pint I do not need.”

He advanced a step toward me, licking his lips, thinking that Shimoda somehow controlled me and would make me submit.

“One more step and there will be blood, all right. Mister, you touch me and you die ...”

I wouldn't have killed him, but I did want to tie him up, at least, before we talked much more. He must have believed me, for he stopped and sighed. He turned to Shimoda.

“You have made your point?”

“I think so. Thank you.”

The vampire looked up at me and smiled, completely at ease, enjoying himself hugely an actor on stage when the show is over.

“I won't drink your blood, Richard,” he said in perfect friendly English, no accent at all. As I watched he faded as though he was turning out his own light ... in five seconds he had disappeared.

Shimoda sat down again by the fire .

“Am I ever glad you don't mean what you say!”

I was still trembling with adrenalin, ready for my fight with a monster.

“Don, I'm not sure I'm built for this. Maybe you'd better tell me what's going on. Like, for instance, what. ... was that?”

“Dot was a wompire from ‘Tronsylvania,” he said in words thicker than the creature's own. “Or to be more precise, Dot was a *thought form* of a wompire from Tronsylvania. If you ever want to make a point, you think somebody isn't listening, whip'em up a little thought-form to demonstrate what you mean. Do you think I overdid him, with the cape and the fangs and the accent like that? Was he too scary for you?”

“The cape was first class, Don. But that was the most stereotyped, outlandish ... I wasn't scared at all.”

He sighed.

“Oh well. But you got the point, at least, and that's what matters.”

“What point?”

“Richard, in being so fierce toward my vampire, you were doing what you wanted to do, even though you thought it was going to hurt somebody else. He even *told* you he'd be hurt if...”

“He was going to suck my blood!”

“Which is what we do to anyone when we say we'll be hurt if they don't live our way”

I was quiet for a long time, thinking about that. I had always believed that we are free to do as we please only if we don't hurt another, and this didn't fit. There was something missing.

"The thing that puzzles you," he said, "is an accepted saying that happens to be impossible. The phrase is *hurt somebody else*. We choose, ourselves, to be hurt or not to be hurt, no matter what. Us who decide. Nobody else. My vampire told you he'd be hurt if you didn't let him? That's his decision to be hurt, that's his choice. What you do about it is your decision, your choice: give him blood; ignore him; tie him up; drive a stake of holly through his heart. If he doesn't want the holly stake, he's free to resist, in whatever way he wants. It goes on and on, choices, choices."

"When you look at it that way..."

*"Listen," he said, "it's important. We are all. Free. To do. Whatever. We want. To do."*

(Richard Bach, *Illusions*)