

Some Enchanted Evening

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I know you are not going to believe this story. I wouldn't either, had I not experienced it myself. It happened about a year ago, on a quiet Sunday night, around midnight. I was recovering from an animal rights demonstration against fur apparel at the shopping mall. We yelled at fur wearers, and someone even splashed red paint at a fur-clad passerby. Worn out but still emotionally upset from the day, I sat in my reading chair wearing my cotton pajamas. I began to thumb through women's magazines and draw moustaches on the models in fur ads, when I felt an eerie sense that I was not alone in the house. I glanced out of the corner of my eye to see a bat flying toward the dark end of the room. I went to get a glove to carefully pick up the creature and put it back outside; when I returned the bat was gone. Where it had landed now stood a vampire.

I had never before seen a vampire, but I never expected one to look like this. He looked like a munchkin from the Land of Oz, but with a pending malpractice suit against an orthodontist. His black cape and, "Have you hugged a vampire today" tee-shirt, further clarified his identity.



I was startled, to say the least. I assumed that my life was in danger, but since I have never watched a vampire movie long enough to see the part when the vampire is killed, I didn't know what to do. I thought I remembered something about steaks, but being a vegan, I knew that killing the vampire with flesh foods was out of the question. I did feel a bit more secure in knowing that I usually smelled from garlic. But I couldn't stop images in my mind of this vampire ripping my neck open with his teeth. I instinctively clutched my throat.

Sensing my concern, the vampire held up his hand and said, "Bubby, vy the big fright scene? I'm not going to hoit you. Let me introduce myself. I'm Murray. So, nu, what's your name?"

I couldn't believe my ears. Here, standing in my living room, was a vampire named Murray who spoke like a New Yorker with a Yiddish accent. I felt like I had entered a bad Isaac Beshevis Singer story. Confused, I asked, "How come you have a Yiddish accent?"

He looked around my living room slowly and intently. "Well, to tell you the truth, I'm really Irish. O'Murray is my name, but every time someone sees me they go for a crucifix. I figured that using a Yiddish accent would throw you off. But now that I see the ceramic "Shalom" hanging on your wall, I guess I don't have to worry about you pointing a crucifix at me. So I won't put on such a heavy accent."



FICTION

This was clearly one of your clever vampire types. "What do you want," I said in a loud, frightened voice, clenching my fists. I wondered if it would be possible for me to punch-out a vampire.

"First of all, please lower your voice. As you know, I am part bat, and my hearing is very sensitive. Also, you have no right to be violent. Have I done anything to hurt you?"

"What are you talking about? You're a vampire, and vampires kill people, suck their blood, and turn them into more blood-thirsty vampires."

Murray smiled confidently and slowly turned around. One book was stuffed into each rear pocket of his trousers. A cold chill ran down my spine as I read the titles of the books. One was Animal Liberation, and the other was The Struggle for Animal Rights. This was no run of the mill vampire. I knew I was in for trouble.

Murray spun around to face me and gleefully announced, "That's right, I'm an animal rights vampire. And I say you have no right to harm me." He threw open his cape to reveal a button which read, "Vampire liberation is human liberation."

"I can harm you since you live on human blood. That makes you a predator of humans, and my killing you would be out of self-defense." This vampire wasn't dealing with some animal rights ignoramus. I'd read all the books, too.

"First, let's get one thing straight. Vampires drink human blood, but they do drink other things as well. You know what I'm saying?"

"No, not exactly," I said.

"I'm saying I'm thirsty, you jerk. Didn't your mother bring you up to have any manners?"

"She did leave out the part about being nice to vampires who drop by unexpectedly. What do you want?"

"How about a virgin Bloody Mary?"

"Sorry, I should have known." Great, I thought, now I'm in a Woody Allen movie. As I fixed his drink I figured I might as well put together some snacks. I know it sounds silly, but with his animal rights beliefs, I hoped there was a chance he was a vegetarian vampire. I quickly spread some humus on a few whole wheat wafers, took a fist full of alfalfa and radish sprouts from my sprout jar on the sink, and grabbed some pre-cut carrot and celery sticks.

I served Murray his drink and offered him some food. "Thanks anyway. I only like vegetables with a

human blood dip," he explained, looking at my neck. I didn't want to be that good a host, so I removed the food.

I reasoned that Murray was not an immediate threat to me, or he would have attacked me by now. We decided to sit on the sofa and discuss this vampire rights business rationally. "You see," Murray began, "I'm like other predators, like lions and tigers, for example. So, you can't try to kill me unless I am attacking you. Otherwise, God forbid, someone could argue that one could go out and kill all other predators of humans because of the potential danger."

I smiled. "But those animals have no choice. They are not capable of analyzing their actions, so they are not acting immorally. You, on the other hand, seem to be rational and intelligent, although you dress funny. You have no claim of innocence in killing as the lions and tigers have." I knew he wouldn't be able to get out of that one.

But somehow he did. "My human friend," Murray said shaking his head. "You don't understand. Sure, I'm rational. I'm thought of as a very smart and wise vampire by my friends, may they rest in peace. But despite my rationality, I have no choice in having to drink human blood if I am to continue to exist. After all, many animal rights ethicists believe that it's okay for humans to eat animal or even human flesh if it is the only alternative for survival. Sometimes, of course, there are other alternatives, but people don't see them. Since it is allowed to kill animals and humans in emergencies, and since what is thought to be an emergency might simply be just a figment of someone's inadequate imagination, it follows that you humans accept that you will sometimes kill for no other reason than your own stupidity and shortsightedness. Since I am a vampire, I am certain, which you humans can never be, that I have no alternatives. I must have blood.

"Then you're nothing more than a mosquito," I retorted. "And even animal rights activists have a tough time not killing mosquitos."

"But mosquitos are different enough from humans for you to have little empathy for them. As it happens, I like mosquitos, both as individuals with admirable careers and as a snack. They taste wonderful after they have fed on humans." Murray smiled broadly and licked his lips. I turned away in disgust. My eyes fell on a magazine on my coffee table opened to an ad for Kentucky Fried Chicken, captioned with the words, "Finger Lickin' Good," in big letters.

"You can't think of me as a mosquito, human, because I am very much like you. I have pleasures and pains, a future and past, and I can cease to exist, just like you. I am no different than some humans who prey on the flesh and blood of animals, except that I have no choice. Humans are simply my prey. So don't try to kill me, Mr. Hypocrite, unless you also kill all those predatory humans in your society."

I was baffled by this point. What Murray said made some sense. After all, he should have intrinsic value as any other sentient creature, and I should respect his right to life as much as I respected that of any predator.

"I don't condone human killing of animals for food," I said, trying to regain my composure. "Humans have choices because they are capable of reason, and they can choose cruelty-free food sources. You seem capable of reason also, so you have no justification for killing, either." I wasn't sure of my argument, but I hoped it would be a good bluff.

It wasn't. Murray leaped off of the couch in a fury.

"Please tell me, am I any different from a human who is allergic to all sorts of vegetable products and must eat animal flesh to survive? Of course not. But you think I am different. And that's because I need to consume human blood. It's alright with you if a human eats an animal to survive, but when I need to eat a human to survive, well, that's a different story. But you can't have it both ways, human. If I have a right to life, and I must kill humans to survive, then I must be left free to live out my life in the only way I can."

Murray paused for a moment, calmed down a bit, and hopped back onto the couch. He continued, "You see, it's easier to be an animal rights advocate once you've wiped out so many of your predators. And the few predators who remain, like mosquitos or fleas, you kill and then justify your actions by appeals to some rationalizations or philosophical tricks that allow you to continue to call yourselves animal rights advocates. But, my friend, I am no mosquito or flea. If you humans have rights, then so do I." He sat back on the sofa and folded his arms in triumph.

I folded my legs into a meditation position and tried to get back in touch with my beliefs. Murray patiently nursed his virgin Bloody Mary. I was occasionally distracted by the sound of his fangs hitting the glass. I was glad I didn't give him a styrofoam cup or my couch would have been soaked.

Finally, I found the words to say. "I hear you saying you have a right to your own life. But I don't have to allow you to kill me, since I have a right to my life as well. Also, I could use a utilitarian argument and say that killing you, while admittedly a harm to you, will save the lives of many people, which is a much greater good that outweighs your harm.

"Sure," he confidently said, "but then you would be sanctioning the killing of all predators to save their prey, which I am sure you do not condone. Besides, are you God that you know how to interfere with the balance of nature. Human animal rights ethicists say that you need to maximize pleasures and minimize pains. Besides the obvious arrogance in assuming you humans know how my pleasures and pains feel to me, or how much value my life has for me, tell me, what right do you have to be nature's accountants? Who put you humans in charge of calculating life's pleasures and pains?"

"Well," I responded, "there are probably two answers to that one. If you believe in God, then you can say it is His will that we act as stewards of the animals. If you don't believe in God, then you can say it is our moral responsibility out of respect for life."

"How arrogant you humans are. You are nothing but two-legged schmucks, who don't even know how to live your own lives. Before you try to be stewards of animals or some type of moral wizards, get your own act together. You've been around for hundreds of thousands of years as a species, and still you haven't figured out how to live properly or where you belong in the world. You're outsiders looking in at life on planet Earth, which is probably why you're so interested in going to other planets. You don't feel like you belong here, so you keep looking for the right place. In the meantime you've been destroying this planet and yourselves to the degree that it's getting hard for vampires to find healthy, clean blood anymore. Maybe, big shot, you should work on your own problems before you take on the responsibility of playing the leader."

Murray looked spent, and as the sun was starting to rise I saw him get ready to leave. "Wait, Murray, I can't let you go. You can't continue to kill innocent people."

"Why not? Haven't you understood what I've been telling you?"

"If I let you go," I explained, "then you will kill some human. It would be like my letting go a psychopathic criminal who was going to murder someone. I would be an accessory to a crime. You are human death

waiting to happen. I can't in good conscience just let you go."

Murray's eyes flashed. "Ha, you hypocrite. You deny me my life just because you value humans more than you value me. You're a speciesist."

"Murray, look. I know I don't have to explain myself to you, but I want to. You see, I'm not sure how it is for vampires, but humans are extremely frail creatures. You're right, we are arrogant and shortsighted. We are much less rational than we would like to think; we have ethicists who come up with ideas on how to live our lives, but you gather twenty of them in one room and you will get twenty contradictory ideas. So rationality doesn't get us what we need. We merely have enough rational ability to be dangerous to ourselves and others, since we don't have the wisdom or patience to use those abilities well. In short, we are flawed creatures, and for all I know, we may even be an evolutionary dead end."

"God forbid," Murray chided. "If you humans become extinct, what will we vampires have to live on?"

Most people dislike a smart-ass vampire, and I was no different. "Will you give me a break, Murray. I'm trying to explain something serious to you," I pleaded.

Murray stretched himself out on the couch, folded his arms, and propped his head up with a pillow. "Go on, Mac." He was trying to do a Bogart impression. "But don't ask me to be too patient with your explanation of why you are going to kill me. After all, it's my blood you're after, not the other way around." Murray grinned and slanted his eyes. I felt this talk of blood was making him hungry, and I didn't want him to have a "Big 'Mac' Attack."

"As I was trying to say, despite our faults, we humans have some goodness in us."

"I'll say," Murray interrupted, smacking his lips. I decided to ignore him.

"We do the best we can given our limited abilities. We know the world needs changing, and that most, if not all, of that changing pertains to our behavior. Some of us see the road to change as a recognition of our interconnectness with all life on the planet. The animal rights movement is one expression of that desire for peace and love between all creatures. Of course, we first know this desire in our hearts and souls, but we feel a need to also express it in rational terms. Unfortunately, our minds are not as developed as our hearts and spiritual insights, so we have conflicting theories and

inadequate rational arguments to explain the truth which we already know."

"If it's any help, my experience has always been that philosophers have much thinner and vinagery blood than, say, social workers," he said, smiling. I continued to ignore him.

"Another human flaw is that we are creatures of habit."

"You're also persistent," he interrupted.

I tried to let his interruptions go unnoticed, but I realized that I was starting to strangle a carrot stick. I continued, my voice changing just slightly in pitch. "When habit is combined with limited understanding, it can lead to repeated human mistakes. This is another aspect of our frailty. What this all boils down to, Murray, is that humans are not now, and will never be, perfect. We each have been born into a world of problems we did not create, and the best we can do is to try to change that world in some small way. But we can't change the world with philosophy alone."

Murray got impatient. "Nu, so what does this have to do with your trying to kill me? Unless, of course, you're trying to kill me with boredom."

I began to yell. "It means, you little creep, that philosophy is not enough of a guide for humans to lead their lives, that we sometimes have to listen to something other than reason and philosophical principles." I stopped to calm myself. I never thought I would let some puny vampire get the best of me.

I unfolded my now numbed legs, and found my composure. "Murray, you have argued that I have no right to take your life. But for me to let you go I must assume two things: first, that I completely understand all of the ethical arguments one can make in support of letting you go; second, that these arguments are valid and sufficient, and should supercede my spiritual and emotional senses which tell me that it is wrong to let you leave and continue to kill innocent people. You see, I cannot accept either of these assumptions, since I cannot put so heavy a reliance on my potentially mistaken human mind. I must follow my higher senses, which tell me that I must try to stop you."

Murray was shocked. "You know what you are promoting, don't you? You are arguing against philosophy in favor of 'higher senses.' You can't have a code of morality that way."

"I'm not arguing against philosophy, Murray. I am simply recognizing that a spiritual view of the world is

the foundation of moral philosophy. While I value intellectual attempts to elaborate on and justify spiritual reflections, it is those reflections that are of deeper meaning and lasting truth."

"So you insist on trying to kill me, despite your spiritual reflections of love and peace?" Murray rose from the couch and began pacing the living room. After a few minutes he stopped pacing and walked over to within six inches of my nose. I was still sitting on the couch, or he would have been standing in front of my navel. His voice became low and sad. "You realize, of course, that I am already dead, at least as you consider life and death. I suppose you know what the concept of an afterlife can do to secular ethical theories? It would make them as useless as an animal care and use committee at a research institution."

I know it sounds silly, but I started to like the little vampire. Suddenly an idea flashed in my mind. "You know, Murray, you were right about people assuming that emergencies exist when they really don't. We are assuming that your existence must be maintained at the expense of a human life. But maybe there is some way around this. In fact, problem-solving and the desire to search for positive solutions to life's challenges are the only ways we frail humans can compensate for our limited abilities. Why don't we see if there is something we can do for you?"

"That's all I wanted to hear you say," Murray said with a smile and a clap of his hands. "You're a real munch, Mister."

"I'm a munch?" I asked with some concern.

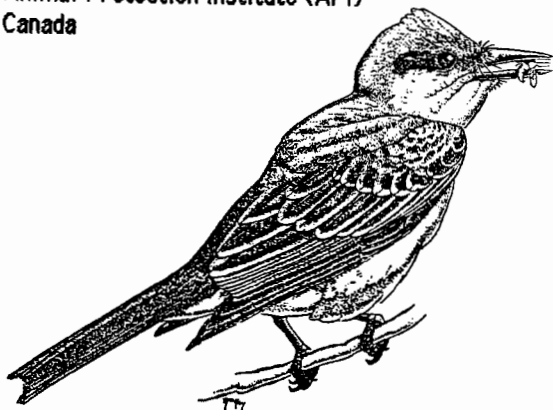
"You know. A really humane person."

"Oh, you mean 'mench.' I sighed in relief and smiled.

"Mench, munch. What do you expect from an Irish vampire. Anyway, I like you." And with that Murray immediately changed back into a bat and flew out of the open window. I then realized that I couldn't have stopped him even if I had wanted to.

I haven't heard from Murray until today, when I received a telegram from him. He says he is living in New York and works at a hospital as a phlebotomist. When he is off duty, his vampire senses tell him when people are about to die, and he manages to get into the rooms of dying patients during their last few minutes of life. He only approaches lonely, forgotten people who are frightened to death, and he hugs and comforts them while he drinks their blood. He wanted me to know that he has found a way.

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Information needed for research on the literature of philosophic vegetarianism in 19th-century England. Contact Karen Davis, Dept. of English, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.