



Debate
WITH A
Vampire

A SHORT STORY

Liese
Sherwood-Fabre

Debate With A Vampire

by

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Debate With A Vampire

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Dedication

To my 3Rs and an F.

**What people are saying about
Liese Sherwood-Fabre...**

"[Liese Sherwood-Fabre's story "Stranger in the Village"] reminds us how our lives may be in the hands of people who come and go..." ~ Phil Hey, fiction editor, Briar Cliff Review.

Liese Sherwood-Fabre's shrewd heroine in "Debate with a Vampire" provides a refreshing new slant: the Vampire gets vamped. ~ Nancy Jones Castilla, editor, *Voices from Within*

"If we could invest in writers the way we do stocks, I would buy Liese Sherwood-Fabre and hold her, because she's going to be one of the hottest talents on the market soon, and 'Debate with a Vampire' is proof of that." ~ Richard Abshire, author of *Gants* and the Jack Kyle mystery series.

Allison wanted to skip her annual pilgrimage to Dracula's castle. For the past two years, she had been a part of a group that traveled from New Orleans to Romania to party in Vlad the Impaler's castle on Halloween night. Without Patrick, however, it wouldn't be the same. Her friend Francine's insistence forced her to go.

"You can't spend all the time moping," Francine said. "You need to get out there and have some fun."

Fun. The last thing on Allison's mind. She *needed* to mope. Breaking up with someone requires a period of mourning. Instead, she was being bounced about the back roads of Romania with Francine and wishing she had the courage to throw herself under the bus's tires. She tugged on her robe's tight collar. They had all stopped at the hotel before the bus ride and changed into their costumes. What's a visit to Dracula's castle without dressing like a Boris Karloff wannabe? She had straightened her long, dark hair, parted it down the middle, and added some white streaks to give it a Morticia-Addams look. With pale makeup on her cheekbones and dark-red lips, she was a truly sexy ghoul.

The bus sighed to a stop outside the castle and belched forth the motley assortment of vampires, vampirettes, and other creatures of the dark. The group trooped up the trail to the castle, making enough noise to scare away any descendant of the Count, living or dead. In the castle's main room, drinks awaited the group, although their boisterous merry-making indicated most had begun partying as soon as they had boarded the plane in Louisiana.

Francine patted Allison on her arm. "I'm going to get us some drinks. I'll be right back." She worked her way into the crowd, leaving Allison on the fringe.

It didn't take long for Allison to lose sight of her. All black capes look alike, especially at night.

“You alone?” a male voice asked from behind her.

Allison jumped and turned towards the sound.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

She noticed his teeth first. They downright glowed in the semi-darkness, probably a set of plastic fangs. Widening her vision, she was aware of his height. He seemed much taller than Patrick. She craned her neck to look at him. He seemed quite interested in that part of her body when she did so.

“It’s all right,” she said, unable to take her gaze from his teeth. “I just thought everybody was in the middle of the room.”

“You do not want to join in?”

She shook her head. “Not really. I’m not even sure why I came this year. Francine made me.”

“Francine?” His voice had almost a hypnotic tone. She wanted to tell him everything.

“My friend. She went to get some drinks.”

“She is French?”

“No. She’s American as apple-pie. Just like me. We’re from Louisiana.”

“I like apples. They’re so ...red.” He stepped closer to her, and a chill passed through her body. She could see his eyes now. They had a flat look to them, no reflection of the torchlight in them. “What has made you so sad?”

She started to make some snide remark about it being none of his business, but before she could speak, he placed an icy finger to her lips. “Shh. Let me see it.”

She stared into his eyes and fell through space. The party melted away. Only his eyes existed. She could sense him inside her mind, reading it as one would a computer screen. She felt him click open the file marked “Patrick” and images flashed through her mind like a digital montage. The first time they met at work. Their first all-nighter working on a project together. Hurriedly and hungrily making love on her desk after completing the assignment and before the cleaning crew arrived. Mechanically and perfunctorily performing the same act in their shared apartment just before he left for California and his sister’s wedding. The fax informing her he was not returning and to ship his things to an address in that state. The images faded, returning to their storage file.

The party noises returned.

The man clicked his tongue. "Such a cowardly bastard. You must hate him."

It took a moment to recover herself. "I do ...and don't. There are times I wish to kill him; but then, I think about killing myself instead."

"I know exactly how you feel. Shall I tell you about it?"

Without hesitating, she said, "Yes."

He placed an arm around her shoulder, and his cape encircled her. The party noise muted and then disappeared. When he dropped his arm, they were standing alone in the woods. She turned about, recognizing nothing. The castle and surrounding landmarks were gone. Damp, wild smells told her they were far from any human habitations.

She turned back to her companion. "I know who and what you are. I've read enough," she said. "I just want to know, are you Vlad himself? The original vampire?"

The man gave her a half-smile. "No. Only one of his ...followers. You may call me Dmitri."

She stepped to a fallen log and sat down, crossing one leg. "So tell me, what are your plans for me, Dmitri?"

"Well, that actually depends on you. I could sense your sadness, and, as I said, I know exactly how you feel. I have come to offer you the same choice I was once offered. How great is your sadness? Truly enough to want to end your life? How great is your desire for revenge against Patrick? Enough to want the power to end his?"

"You're offering me a choice between death or the undead."

He smiled again. "You Americans, so direct. That's one reason I picked you. So sure of yourself. Again, you make the choice. I suck the life from you and you die; or you take a bit of my life and you live...forever."

"Well, it's obvious which path you chose. Who gave you the choice?"

"Vlad himself made me what I am today. I came to him, begged him for help, and this was the offer he made in return. I had lost my love to another, just as you. Our love was pure and true, but other factors determined betrothals and marriages then. It is so much easier now.

Unions do not even have to be sanctified, like yours.”

She felt her cheeks burn at his reference to her own cohabitation with Patrick. Not that she would have objected to marriage, he had just never offered it. She thought he just wasn't the marrying kind, until the fax.

“So your true love married another?” she asked.

Dmitri stared past her into the dark woods beyond. She could see his pain remained even after five hundred years. “Her name was Catherine.” He sighed as if the marriage had occurred yesterday. “Her beauty was legend throughout the world. That was the problem. I might have been able to request and receive her hand had she been more plain, but her beauty was an asset her father could exploit for his own gain, and he did. She went to the highest bidder, an old degenerate who had already driven three other brides to their graves. I could not let her be the fourth.”

The vampire began to pace in front of the log where she sat. He turned suddenly and glared at her. “I petitioned Vlad to annul the marriage. I pleaded with him, offered him half my wealth. I threw myself at his feet and begged him to kill me if he would not return my Catherine to me.”

He knelt in front of her as if she were Vlad, and lifted his face to gaze into her eyes. She could see the castle's throne room, the same one she had left with Dmitri. Vlad, dressed in rich velvet, a goblet of a dark, red liquid in his bejeweled hand, wore a haughty smirk as he asked, “I have the power to end your life, but I give you another choice: life eternal and the power to pass such life on to others or to end life just as quickly. Which do you choose?”

Dmitri rose from his knees, and the scene faded from Allison's mind. “Do you fathom the possibilities of the choice he offered me? That I now offer you? To live forever? To have to power to make others live forever? Should you accept my offer, would you present it to Patrick in return?”

Allison thought for a moment. She imagined appearing at Patrick and his new love's home. She could do it, kill the bitch who stole her man and take Patrick away with her. “That's what you did, isn't it?” she asked quietly. She gazed into Dmitri's eyes. “You killed her

husband, and you made her a vampire. Did you give her that choice, or did you make it for her?"

"I was new to this life," he replied angrily. He began to pace again. "I had no idea of all the implications. I was certain I knew her true desire, to be with me."

"But she didn't?"

He paused in his pacing to study her. "You must be very careful about who receives this gift. It was very different for women at that time, especially a beautiful noble such as Catherine. They were pawns, to be played and traded, totally without power. My gift gave her power. She was free of that wretched husband, her conniving father, and ...me." He slumped next to her on the log. "I gave her a life of freedom, and she left me."

Allison realized she actually was beginning to feel sorry for him. She patted his hand. She might as well have comforted an ice cube. "What happened to her?"

He waved his hand. "She's gone. It took a long time to find her. Centuries, actually. But I did. I can still remember her screams as the sunlight hit her." He gave another long, deep sigh.

"And so, you walk the earth, making the offer to others. Why me?"

"I only offer my gift to those who have suffered such as I. I find souls in pain from broken hearts and give them the same choice as I do you this night."

"And how many have accepted the life you offer?"

He turned to face her. "That is the odd thing. In all my years, they have always accepted death."

"And why do you suppose that is?"

He sneered. "They are cowards. Just like that fool who had not the courage to tell you to your face he was leaving you."

Her blood surged at this remark, and her cheeks grew hot again. Her hands contracted into fists, just as they had when she crumbled the fax paper into a tiny ball. "And you think I'll be different?"

"I can feel the power in you. The need for revenge. Look at your hands."

She forced them to relax. "You think I'll take your offer and exact the same kind of revenge you did?"

He shrugged. "It is up to you. I simply give you the

tools to accomplish it, if you desire.”

“So you’re not looking for a replacement for your beloved Catherine?”

“Never. There will be only one Catherine.” He stood and glanced at the sky. “Enough. It is getting late. You now understand my offer. What is your decision?”

Allison’s heart jumped, but she willed herself to remain calm. Swinging her foot, she said, “Neither. I choose to leave as alive as when you found me.”

His eyes narrowed. “That is not possible.”

“Of course it is. You simply return me to the castle.”

“You have two choices. Remaining as you are is not one.”

“But you will return me unchanged.” His face darkened, and he floated slightly off the ground. His gaze sought hers, but she looked over his shoulder. “Is the sky lightening? Surely it’s not getting that late, or should I say early?”

He glanced quickly behind him. When he returned his gaze to her, his eyes glowed red, and he floated higher. He spread his arms. “No more tricks. Choose, or I will choose for you,” he said.

“I’ve given you my choice. You’ll just have to accept it.”

“Impossible. I can end this discussion right now and simply kill you.”

“But you won’t. Because then I wouldn’t have made the choice. That’s what you want. You want me to confirm that *you* made the right choice all those years ago. You say the others have always chosen death. You call them cowards. I say *you* are the cowardly one.”

“I am *no* coward.” His voice boomed.

Allison swallowed hard, but willed her face to remain impassive. “But you are. Your choice shows it. You were afraid of death. You were afraid of life without Catherine. And when Catherine chose life without you, you murdered her.” She stood, and brushed the dirt and leaves off her cape. “Now, please return me to the castle.”

He floated towards her. She could feel his icy breath on her face. He placed a cold hand around her throat. She stared into his eyes. “Go ahead. Kill me. You’ll have proved my point.”

He opened his mouth. The points of his fangs glinted briefly. His breath carried the scent of rotted flesh. He emitted a frigid hiss that turned into an ear-splitting howl.

She must have fainted because the next thing she knew, she lay alone on the ground back at Dracula's castle. Trash and other party remains were scattered among the weeds and fallen stones. Regaining her bearings, she hiked to the main road and hitched a ride back to into town.

A little before daybreak, Francine let herself into their hotel room. She seemed surprised to see Allison sit up in bed to greet her. "I saw you talking to that totally sexy guy, and when I came back with the drinks, you were gone. Way to go, girl. Did he help you get over Patrick?"

"Let's just say he helped me to put things into perspective."