

## **The Sick Rose**

by William Blake

*O Rose, thou art sick!  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,*

*Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy;  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.*

As an assignment, I was required to write a short story based upon my interpretation of a poem. The *Sick Rose* by William Blake is a poem which had multiple interpretations, the dominant perspective being that a woman referred to here as 'Rose' has suffered trauma or is sick. This sickness stems from a worm, which could be a reference to sperm; however, this is an interpretation that I reject in the following story. *Flies through the night* suggests that this traumatic event happened in the dark, *the howling storm* could portray a struggle. *Has found thy bed of crimson joy* puts forth the proposal that 'Rose' was a virgin before this 'event' and it would really correspond with the theme of innocence. *His dark secret love*, this could imply that his love wasn't pure as such, alluding to rape/abuse. *Does thy life destroy...* well if you're going to continue with the theme of loss of innocence and with rape...well that speaks for itself almost as while this does not necessarily denote suicide, the victim would lose all grasp of life as she knew it. This interpretation and the poem itself would give me a lot of room to be creative while still getting the main gist across. Now I was meant to be doing a dominant reading of the poem, not entirely sure if this aspect came through in my attempt at a short story. I also have this feeling that I kind of lost what I was trying to do after the first two paragraphs. So here is my transformation! (Note: Thank you Lozza for donating your title and thank you Lexy for coming up with a whole page of possible titles and making the title picking process difficult because there were so many good titles to choose from)

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## **The Unforgiven Deed**

The droplets of rain hitting the window cast shadows across Rose's face as she gazed out pensively. Amazing how one's perspective of the world and their place in it can change so drastically in so little time. Well, not amazing so

much as devastating – Rose allowed her lips to curve in a bitter imitation of a smile at the thought. People talk about lost innocence all the time, but do they really understand? Could they really grasp the concept without enduring such an event themselves? All the news programs shown on television seemed to portray lost innocence, death and sadness to such a level which would make it possible to grasp. Surely, after seeing these images for so long, she would have understood. But she hadn't, not from the safe confines of her living room where the blue glow of the screen had illuminated her face. She thought she had understood. If she, Rose, had struggled so with the concept, what hope could she have that others would succeed where she hadn't?

Now though, now was an entirely different story and as she turned away from the window, she offered a silent prayer for those small faces. Small faces of children with eyes that seemed older than the body which contained them, eyes which had seen more of the world than they should have and such horrors which weren't meant to be endured. Empathy is a strange emotion, she silently reflected. Not one she was sure she had ever experienced in her sheltered life. Not really, truly experienced. Not like this...

In her mind, she heard the screams – the cries and begging for mercy – the violent slapping sound of one body moving against another – and the sight of a crimson stain on the sheets.

Blood. So much blood.

It was everywhere. Why was there so much blood?

Why couldn't she wash it away? How many times would she have to scrub her skin that pink raw colour before the red tears would cease to stain her vision?

It should wash away. It had to wash away eventually. Why hadn't it washed away already?

She closed her eyes and braced her body against the memories as if preparing her body could prepare her for the assault upon her mind. It was no use, she knew and yet her instinctive, perverse need to survive was kicking in with a vengeance. Again and again she would fight. She would not lose this battle against herself, this was the final frontier. This battle of battles which had the potential to end her war...

*You could rest – wouldn't it be nice to rest? Don't you tire of resisting? Do you not tire of fighting this battle which you have already lost anyway?*

The insidious voices in her mind whispered, tempted her – drew her in with false promises...false promises...false promises. It was so tempting. But now she knew how these false promises disguised themselves - this was merely a false promise cloaked in temptation.

No. She would continue to fight. She would not lose. She would not withdraw from the battlefield in this way. She would walk away – victorious.

There was hope....wasn't there?

Maybe it wasn't self-preservation keeping her chained to this world so much as hope.

Was there a point where she could live with herself? Could look in the mirror and not see blood? Surely there was some small part of her that was not tainted...

She would pull the shattered pieces of her mind back together somehow. She would not give into the rising panic, or be swallowed in the dark depths of despair. She was Rose. It became her mantra.

**I am Rose.**

**I am Rose. You have no power over me.**

But the insidious voices continued to whisper.

*You are weak. A fool. You deserved your fate. You shouldn't have worn those clothes; they tempted somehow and drove him wild. Allow the darkness to consume you. Rest. You have already lost.*

She cried out in agony.

"NO!" she screamed it out loud.

*No!* Her mind whimpered weakly.

It wasn't much, but it was enough. Enough for her carefully constructed walls to come smashing down and for the memories to sweep away her resistance – a vivid flashback with no end.

*Flashback*

*"Rose... oh my fair, pretty Rose who is so sweet. How are you this evening?"*

*Rose smiled and ducked her head shyly as she allowed his deep tones to wash over her. He always had that effect upon her. He made her feel safe. Cherished. He made her feel like she was beautiful and deserved to have good things in her life. Briefly, she wondered why she had never felt this way before? Did she like being made to feel like less for men? Was that why she never had any luck before now? Realising she was getting caught up in her thinking, she pushed it all away with a smile and a very simple thought.*

*At least I have him.*

*Blake smiled back and nudged her slightly.*

*"A dollar for your thoughts?"*

*"Oh nothing, nothing. Just thinking about how lucky I am." She smiled, her grey eyes dancing with amusement. His smile widened.*

*"Ah, but you have it all wrong, my dear. It's me; I am the one who is lucky." She smiled shyly again. She never did wonder about the look that had entered his eyes as he looked down at her. And little did she know that she would never smile at him again.*

*End Flashback*

The door creaking open startled her out of her memories. Rose backed away to the corner of the room and raised her arms in front of her like a shield. Her brother, John, gazed at her sadly.

"Rose? Honey? What's wrong? I heard whimpering..."

"Just...stay away from me, John, please. Please....Just LEAVE me ALONE."

*Alone...*

*Alone...*

It hung in the air and echoed in their heads and hearts. John bit his lip, his hand twitching as he tried not to reach out. Rose sank to the floor, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears.

*Alone...*

*Alone...*

She had never been more alone than she was at that moment with her brother standing in front of her. She would always be alone. Always.

John sent her one pleading look with his soft brown eyes before doing as she requested. Rose stayed in her corner until she heard his footsteps retreating to somewhere downstairs. With a sigh, she slowly rose to her feet and turned back to the window. Looking out, she whispered her secrets to the rain.

"I loved you. I loved you with a child's naivety. Now though, I know the truth. All those pretty words you whispered dripped with the poison of false promises. I know now and it can't be taken away. I may be tainted but you can't take that away..."

Soon she couldn't even form the words to even begin to describe her agony. It became a wordless, mindless scream, matched only by the howling wind and the driving rain against the window pane. The scream lasted until her throat felt raw and the need to breathe reasserted itself.

With another cry she drove her fist in the wall beside the window. Knuckles bleeding and hand cradled to her chest, she turned her back to the window and slide to the floor. Her shoulders shook with sobs.

*Why?*

The rain offered no words of comfort, only reflected her misery to the rest of the world.

Downstairs, John looked up at the ceiling as he heard her scream of pent up agony. As he passed the mirror in the hall, he saw Rose's reflection behind him, her eyes a swirling maelstrom of agony which couldn't find a voice. He watched, startled, as a tear escaped and crept down his face.

He couldn't bear her torment, but he was to bear witness to her pain. He would allow nothing else. He should have protected her and because he had failed in that, it was now his duty to pick up the pieces and help Rose get the life she truly deserved. He looked away from her too old eyes.

"I'm sorry." He whispered brokenly, knowing that the words would never be enough. Knowing but having no other words to express how he felt, watching Rose cling to her sanity with the barest of threads. "I am so sorry."