

Once

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Rooms rented cheap.
After all, it was just about
a slum neighbourhood.
I lived there, let's see,
for a little over two years.
Once, a long time ago.
Forty years ago.
In those days, I would have
two or three Irish Coffees
in the morning to take
the edge off living.
One day something happened.
It was nothing really.
And yet it was a 'nothing'
I have never forgotten.
I remember it to
this day
with different feelings;
shame, sadness...horror, guilt.
But what could I
have done?
How could have I
gotten involved?
What did I
really want?

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As I was passing a small house
on the corner
near the bar where
I spent my mornings
there was a girl, a woman really.

Probably around 35,
perhaps a bit more.
But with her short red hair
and her transparent skin
and her slim figure
she seemed so young,
so young,
timelessly young
as if unable to grow older.
Her pale eyes
told of her life
full of panic, instability,
fear, distrust of herself.
Frightened of what
she might do to herself.
Her hands shook
when she talked.
She wore a red sweater

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She gave off
a sense of fear
and hysteria.
I found her
desirable.
I wanted to have
sex with her.
This filled me
with shame.
But there it was.
I knew she was sick.

She smelled
of mental institutions.
But it didn't matter.
I knew I
won't touch her
not from conscience
but because it would be
more trouble than
it was worth.
She would scream
in front of my door
at three in the morning,
pounding, crying,
demanding that
I open it.
I was living
with a woman
named Ruth.
She was more
a drinking partner
and she
was possessive
and mean.
But Ruth and I
had some sort of bond
This woman who
was burning up
In front of me-
Well, I couldn't trade
my life with Ruth
for a few hours
in bed
with this crazy.

Yet I wanted to.
She looked to me
for aid.
Her flaming red skin
trusted me.
Perhaps that was
just my ego
creating an illusion.
Or perhaps
that was the way
she turned to certain men.
I wanted sex with her.
And more;
I still don't know what.
She was all the pain
and fear
In the world.
Her hands flew at me,
Is it safe?
which really was
am I safe?
Without waiting
for an answer
I am worried
about the lock.
Oh, poor, poor child
where have you been;
an asylum,
a halfway house.
Why did they
let you out.
You are not ready.

I hope there is
someone to protect you.
There is so much danger
in this world.
Why, what about the lock.
It doesn't seem to work right.
She didn't add
I am afraid
But it was there.
I wished it was another life
and I could love her,
protect her, .
But I couldn't;
nobody could, nothing could.
I looked at her red hair,
her pink skin, her thin
fragile body,
her piercing innocent eyes.
Oh, She was meant
to have children
And grow old
with somebody
But it would
never happen.
I said what
she wanted to hear,
let's take a look at it.
She smiled,
a frightened
but sly smile.
She might get
a protector.
She was willing

to trade for it.

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The small house
had even smaller apartments.
Hers was a studio in the front.
The walls had been recently painted.
There was a big picture window.
The walls had been painted white.
It was sunny and cheerful.
There is nothing
wrong with the lock.
She knew that.
I could tell.
She was expecting sex.
It would give her
the opportunity
To be hysterical.
I remembered
a bar in Florence;
with outside tables
and people
who lived nearby
who knew each other.
They met there
every day
before or after work.
They seemed happy.

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I wanted her.
She knew it.
She waited.
I have to go.

Be alright.
But I knew
she wouldn't be.
She would wind up
wherever it was
she had been
locked up.
Or worse...

Or worse.

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I never saw her again.
The next day
When I passed
she was gone.
I sensed the emptiness. She and
something else was gone.
But I never understood
what it was,
what it is.
I only wish that
she didn't come to harm
before they imprisoned her again.
or after.
I am sure that this
is her life.
Not a life at all.
Tears and fear
until she dies.
Forty years...
I still remember her.

