

Cruelty

by Deborah Oster Pannell

The men knew who she lived with, they knew who her lover was, they had their gnarled fantasies about her, and him together. It made them sweat and stagger with rage, to see her blond hair against the chocolate brown of his skin. So when they decided to teach her a lesson, it was with particular vigor and vitriol that they pinned her to the ground and had at her, one after another, after another, after another.

They lost interest after a while, because it seemed as if she wasn't frightened anymore, and so their emboldened weapons of personal revenge went soft, and they felt puny and ashamed. And she began to seem powerful, and then they became the frightened ones. So they slapped her about her painted eyes and bruised lips a few more times for good measure and went on to play pool and drink brown ale and lick their girlfriends' faces.

