

Short story: Where the Boys Are (award winner)

Rebecca liked the poor ones. The struggling, artistic, hungry boys with the frayed collars and worn suede jackets, the ones whose quiet demeanor failed to hide the wildness within. They failed to hide it from her, of course, because she knew the type.

She'd meet them at the most fashionable gatherings celebrating the next big thing. The boys—pick one, any one—would be standing slightly apart from the crowd. Invariably, they would congregate farther over, fraternizing amongst themselves, or perhaps sidling up to some familiar face, a face of a potential sponsor.

As for the invited guests? Their costumes would change, but their faces remained the same. Last time there was the art dealer in his soccer pants and next-big-name shirt; the experimental musician sporting her blue leather workout outfit with heels alongside her teenaged daughter, wearing an impossibly tailored suit that created curves for her emaciated figure. They had come to pay homage, the musician would laugh, to the starving artists of the world.

So superficial, Rebecca'd think, without a trace of irony. Absently, drink in hand—Stoli tonic, anyone?—she'd drift over, not quite outside the society orbit, and into that of the new boy. She would appear friendly, down-to-earth, *genuine*. Not another rich bitch wanting a piece of him. By then, he'd be hooked.

She liked them—no, she *loved* them—because there were no expectations. She knew they'd be too poor to give her the jewelry or any of the toys she could

buy for herself. They would simply bask in her radiance and she would pick up the light as though reflectively off her own mirror. They would love her for her inspiration, her beauty, her attention. Her age would suggest a wisdom beyond their years, an oedipal flirtation promising a trip back into their lost mothers the sweetest way imaginable.

Occasionally one would ask her for money outright; this was both expected and welcomed. To Rebecca, it was a way of unifying with them. They needed her. And she was glad to give. It was why she attended all the openings, wasn't it? For support. And for that, she would be remembered for her patronage. A patron. Patron saint, she fancied, forever immortalized in a scrambled painting of questionable media, peculiar chartreuse-and-pink halo around a beatified face.

It was all self-deception. By the time Rebecca'd gone through her third divorce, she would have been expected to have wisdom. By then, if nothing else! But Rebecca was clever. She'd married rich, not one, but three times. And, despite all that money, she craved an intimacy that would stand the passage of the ages.

The last time she lured one of the boys home, she woke up on a lumpy futon in someone else's flat. *Oh yes, she remembered, this is what I came here for.* She lay naked, her expensively moisturized skin pressed against a rough wool-and-paper fiber blanket, and savored the moment as she played the muse for her latest discovery. He sketched furiously on an impossibly oversized canvas.

He didn't hear her, but his eyes saw everything.

She never saw him again. She returned home, a smear of lipstick on her mouth, Prada handbag over her wrist, not a bill or charge plate touched. Her

money was intact, heart still empty as her lover peddled his wares at the next show. It would be a place where rich divorced women would fawn over him, yearning to go home with him, to live—if just for one night, perhaps a lifetime, if you wish upon a star—that carefree life of artistic poverty.

So glamorous.

Rebecca stood in the doorway of the gallery, cracked crystal glass in hand, as her eyes met those of the next boy. He was waiting for her to discover him. She was ready to strike.

He knew.