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Barron

Don Russ

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DON RUSS

Barron

*as if that quality of her father which had thwarted
her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too
furious to die*

—William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"

What are you doing in that, that's Papa's,
I say, not playing. And then I see that look
he gets, getting ready to play. I am Papa,
he says, and sets a bottle down. Look.

I have been lying here, hearing him
thump around downstairs, and here he is, big
and booming above me, his big hand bunching up
the hem: his one hand--the other

handing me a bitten pear. In this cave
of green heat, this tree gloom, his legs
and belly look pale, his papa thing fat, battening
in a cloud of its own black steam.

What's Papa got to have a nightshirt for,
it's not night, he says, his knee deep in the bed.
I see his arm sinking in black wedding cake,
and scream. Papa's headboard. I laugh.

When the sheet leaves my chin, I am little.
My hair I have cut to spite Papa lies shiny
around my little girl face. Show Papa, show Papa,
he keeps saying, his fingers smelling of pears

and spittle. My spittle. I smell myself
on him. Eyes closed, I smell Papa, Papa's
whiskers, Papa's whiskey, whispering
in my mouth and ears.

Somewhere in the--. Somehow--.
Down, down, in the bowels of burnt earth,
the yellow wheels now--. Somehow
the yellow--.