Breaking Down in Ritzville

by Benjamin Cartwright

The way their eyes appraised
my purple hair and earrings—
the British Queen on my Sex Pistols T-shirt,
I knew that Ritzville, Washington
was gaping like Calcutta, and that they were going to be
the most expensive spark-plugs in the world.

I could have told them I was born
in the Carolinas, that I
had swung hammers—shoveled bark—
painted asphalt, anything to get my car
and my wallet out alive, but I froze
and they ambled up, ready for war.

“Good ol’ Toy-yota,” Caliban jeered,
grinning in his grave-yard lot,
the worn-out husks of Fords
and Chevies surrounding him, grass
creeping between their vertebrae,
their souls oozing grease
into pools on the red, caked, clay.