

Mastry* (or Frontal Tuberosity)

francine j. harris

after Kerry James Marshall's "Portrait of Nat Turner with the Head of His White Master"

At the Met, the muted gorehead rumbles
in shadow at the back gallery beyond the town picnic
projects black belly bikinis and sun plumeria at throats
of boy scouts. Signature lightning shivers the forehead boss
of all his black folks. god on the head. a god who

come down with a strike you didn't see coming from axe
in hand. A bloody hatchet. having wholly just
whopped a slaver and snatched his mortal casper

headless, which

revel in its syndicate whiteness is broadcasting
white drain and white limp from white sheets and lace bordered
satin cover pillow. Those slack sleeping eyes. The absolute lack

of torture. It's neat. the decapitation. the bloodless bloodied master.
Such a hacked head, such eyes gouged open and jugular disarrange
as chopped at the door and as unbloody as that wild,
white sham. Whatever he holds, he's holding

back behind his back and is still withheld, in retrospect. All the way
in the back. Hung. in the very last white room.

*on the occasion of the Kerry James Marshall Retrospective: *Mastry*, October 25, 2016–January 29, 2017 at Met Breuer, New York