

## TWO SIDES OF THE SAME POEM

### i.

She was surrounded by jonquils,  
forsythia, a hedge of unclipped roses  
-- purple red -- the color associated with greed.  
A black dog hung at her side and on command  
would offer his paw, devoted beyond  
all human understanding.  
Together they sat by the fish pond  
and observed daily sky.

Her flowers, her dog, her tanned face  
and flat belly could -- she knew --  
be taken as signs of contentment.  
This is why she painted over her mailbox,  
clipped the telephone wires and was,  
for five years, conveniently lost to everyone.  
Other than that, she did nothing

for on her underside, tied  
to the network was a man.  
Not any man, but a man who suffered  
from hay fever, who disliked the sun,  
its heat, and her daily ritual of  
snapping ticks from the dog's neck.

One by one she gathered them  
between thumb and forefinger  
until the collection spilled over  
and their bloated bodies  
rocked on useless legs.

At the moment she brought down her heel  
and they split like overripened grapes,  
emptying purple red, he screamed,  
always he screamed,

and afterward, when she followed him inside,  
telling him the dog was grateful,  
the tick blood smeared onto the cool linoleum  
leaving a trail.

For five summers this was  
an undeniable fact of their everyday;  
yet they continued.

### ii.

In Mebane, you may remember,  
there was a green yard with yellow flowers  
and a black dog who loved me.



Every May third, Mr. Walker  
mowed a path from the pear trees  
to the fish pond, clearing the view.

After May third then,  
for every one of those five seasons,  
I had in addition to flower and animal,  
the luxury of landscaping.

It was enough without a man  
but he was there also  
on the inside  
in a shade-drawn bedroom, reading.

He did not speak when he read  
but I heard the words,  
so many words.

Every sundown, I stretched  
the water hose from the pump house  
to the flower garden.

I wore, like my grandmother Meads,  
a billowing straw hat with red band.  
At ninety, she is trying to leave a man  
who died before she could.

When I tell this again,  
I am determined to keep the connection  
between my grandmother and myself

more ambiguous,  
to establish our love  
of gardening first.

Then the end will fall to jonquils,  
a loving dog and scenery,  
the more positive approach.

-- Kathy Meads

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#### A KNIGHT

A knight wakes one day with a giant smile on his face.  
Which is odd since he's a serious fellow, even grave.  
He tries and tries, but can't stop smiling.