

"Subverted Flower" - Robert Frost

She drew back; he was calm:  
"It is this that had the power."  
And he lashed his open palm  
With the tender-headed flower.  
He smiled for her to smile,           5  
But she was either blind  
Or willfully unkind.  
He eyed her for a while  
For a woman and a puzzle.  
He flicked and flung the flower,   10  
And another sort of smile  
Caught up like fingertips  
The corners of his lips  
And cracked his ragged muzzle.  
She was standing to the waist   15  
In golden rod and brake,  
Her shining hair displaced.  
He stretched her either arm  
As if she made it ache  
To clasp her - not to harm;       20  
As if he could not spare  
To touch her neck and hair.  
"If this has come to us  
And not to me alone -"  
So she thought she heard him say; 25  
Though with every word he spoke  
His lips were sucked and blown  
And the effort made him choke  
Like a tiger at a bone.  
She had to lean away.           30  
She dared not stir a foot,  
Lest movement should provoke  
The demon of pursuit  
That slumbers in a brute.  
It was then her mother's call   35  
From inside the garden wall  
Made her steal a look of fear  
To see if he could hear  
And would pounce to end it all  
Before her mother came.       40  
She looked and saw the shame:  
A hand hung like a paw,  
An arm worked like a saw  
As if to be persuasive,  
An ingratiating laugh       45  
That cut the snout in half,  
And eye become evasive.  
A girl could only see  
That a flower had marred a man,

But what she could not see           50  
Was that the flower might be  
Other than base and fetid:  
That the flower had done but part,  
And what the flower began  
Her own too meager heart           55  
Had terribly completed.  
She looked and saw the worst.  
And the dog or what it was,  
Obeying bestial laws,  
A coward save at night,           60  
Turned from the place and ran.  
She heard him stumble first  
And use his hands in flight.  
She heard him bark outright.  
And oh, for one so young           65  
The bitter words she spit  
Like some tenacious bit  
That will not leave the tongue.  
She plucked her lips for it,  
And still the horror clung.           70  
Her mother wiped the foam  
From her chin, picked up her comb,  
And drew her backward home.

-Robert Frost (1874-1963)