**Tulips**

The tulips are too excitable, it is winter here.

Look how white everything is, how quiet, how snowed-in.

I am learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly

As the light lies on these white walls, this bed, these hands.

I am nobody; I have nothing to do with explosions.

I have given my name and my day-clothes up to the nurses

And my history to the anaesthetist and my body to surgeons.

They have propped my head between the pillow and the sheet-cuff

Like an eye between two white lids that will not shut.

Stupid pupil, it has to take everything in.

The nurses pass and pass, they are no trouble,

They pass the way gulls pass inland in their white caps,

Doing things with their hands, one just the same as another,

So it is impossible to tell how many there are.

My body is a pebble to them, they tend it as water

Tends to the pebbles it must run over, smoothing them gently.

They bring me numbness in their bright needles, they bring me sleep.

Now I have lost myself I am sick of baggage——

My patent leather overnight case like a black pillbox,

My husband and child smiling out of the family photo;

Their smiles catch onto my skin, little smiling hooks.

I have let things slip, a thirty-year-old cargo boat

stubbornly hanging on to my name and address.

They have swabbed me clear of my loving associations.

Scared and bare on the green plastic-pillowed trolley

I watched my teaset, my bureaus of linen, my books

Sink out of sight, and the water went over my head.

I am a nun now, I have never been so pure.

I didn’t want any flowers, I only wanted

To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.

How free it is, you have no idea how free——

The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,

And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.

It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them

Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet.

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.

Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe

Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.

Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.

They are subtle : they seem to float, though they weigh me down,

Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their color,

A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.

Nobody watched me before, now I am watched.

The tulips turn to me, and the window behind me

Where once a day the light slowly widens and slowly thins,

And I see myself, flat, ridiculous, a cut-paper shadow

Between the eye of the sun and the eyes of the tulips,

And I have no face, I have wanted to efface myself.

The vivid tulips eat my oxygen.

Before they came the air was calm enough,

Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.

Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.

Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river

Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.

They concentrate my attention, that was happy

Playing and resting without committing itself.

The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.

The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;

They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,

And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes

Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me.

The water I taste is warm and salt, like the sea,

And comes from a country far away as health.

 —Sylvia Plath

 **February**

A chimney, breathing a little smoke.

The sun, I can’t see

making a bit of pink

I can’t quite see in the blue.

The pink of five tulips

at five p.m. on the day before March first.

The green of the tulip stems and leaves

like something I can’t remember,

finding a jack-in-the-pulpit

a long time ago and far away.

Why it was December then

and the sun was on the sea

by the temples we’d gone to see.

One green wave moved in the violet sea

like the UN Building on big evenings,

green and wet

while the sky turns violet.

A few almond trees

had a few flowers, like a few snowflakes

out of the blue looking pink in the light.

A gray hush

in which the boxy trucks roll up Second Avenue

into the sky. They’re just

going over the hill.

The green leaves of the tulips on my desk

like grass light on flesh,

and a green-copper steeple

and streaks of cloud beginning to glow.

I can’t get over

how it all works in together

like a woman who just came to her window

and stands there filling it

jogging her baby in her arms.

She’s so far off. Is it the light

that makes the baby pink?

I can see the little fists

and the rocking-horse motion of her breasts.

It’s getting grayer and gold and chilly.

Two dog-size lions face each other

at the corners of a roof.

It’s the yellow dust inside the tulips.

It’s the shape of a tulip.

It’s the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in.

It’s a day like any other.

 —James Schuyler

 **Yellow Tulips**

I was walking along the sidewalk
in all the daily pain
& miserable faces & awful air.
Up above in a flower box
were yellow tulips, too real
to be real, so big
and sexual looking in
that funny way flowers
always are. I guess
they were like heads
poking in from another
world. How do you
like Wednesday, you
beautiful things?

 —Eileen Myles

 **Tulips**

The tulips make me want to paint,

Something about the way they drop

Their petals on the tabletop

And do not wilt so much as faint,

Something about their burnt-out hearts,

Something about their pallid stems

Wearing decay like diadems,

Parading ﬁnishes like starts,

Something about the way they twist

As if to catch the last applause,

And drink the moment through long straws,

And how, tomorrow, they’ll be missed.

The way they’re somehow getting clearer,

The tulips make me want to *see*—

The tulips make the other me

(The backwards one who’s in the mirror,

The one who can’t tell left from right),

Glance now over the wrong shoulder

To watch them get a little older

And give themselves up to the light.

 —A. E. Stallings