

Tulips for the Holiday Table

by Phyllis Chesler



I always order flowers on Friday morning. Roses, often—but they do not seem to last as well as tulips do. This gathering of lovelies arrived small, sweet, and bud-like and the green

spears were decorously and artfully arranged. My dentist, retired, has become a passionate gardener. A friend has been gardening for all his life. Poets garden. But not I. My flowers are but words, carefully chosen, or running riot on the page.

I've been told that tulips are indigenous to Persia and Turkey and only got to Vienna, Antwerp, and Amsterdam at the end of the sixteenth century.

The sheer beauty of red tulips "hurt" Sylvia Plath. In a poem with that title (*Tulips*), she wrote:

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

Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe.

.....

The vivid tulips eat my oxygen."

Tulips do not "hurt" me nor do I think they are stealing my oxygen, although, come to think of it, they do steal my breath away by their bright beauty. Tulips are a joy—but they only last for four days, maybe five.

In *Still Life with Tulips*, Erica Jong also describes a charged relationship with these flowers. She writes:

"Because you did, I too arrange flowers

.....

Mother, you are far away and claim

In mournful letters that I do not need you;
Yet here in this sunny room, your tulips

Devour me, sucking hungrily
My watery nourishment, filling my house
Like a presence, like an enemy.”

Ah, and I, no poet, do hereby promise to enjoy these lovelies
for as long as they so shall live.