

Caging the Tulips

Every spring
their pale tips
poke through quickening soil
in my neighbor's fussy plot, his perfect
square, five by five,
a tiny platoon of beauty.

I imagine the autumn muster: plump
bulbs with brown papery skins,
bottoms fringed with roots,
roll sleepily from perforated
sacks to be nestled
in close rank and file
precisely eight inches beneath the loam.

In May, showers roust them out,
green recruits of incipient joy;
sun gives the drill command
and we brace for the cadence
of color—when
the cage
goes up around them.
Four feet of chicken wire
open at the top but tall enough
to deter winter thin deer.

They come, then, smoldering
orange petals with blazing yellow
throats, pitch black at the center,
erect three lobed stigma
ringed by six slender stamen,
their anthers dusty with pollen and curved daintily outward
splayed cups of exultation
penned in for their own protection.

I lope past
after my morning run,
suddenly remembering how you reached for me
last night, unexpectedly,
how we panted in the dark air suffused by subtle scents
from my rowdy spring beds
laced with manure.

Oh glorious disorder, I croon to the captives,
as if my song could free them.
let us throw reason to the winds

let us plant tulips for the spring
and let ravenous deer
eat the sweet tips,
or not.