**iii** *by Estelle Price*

I begin with three.

Circular tub, grey pitcher, Mary

leant over, her alabaster chemise hung

like a bride’s veil from peachy shoulders.

A wide window reveals charcoal sky,

allows the night’s curiosity to rinse the attic

in glitter. At the canvas edge a solitary

curtain flushes. Will this do?

No, begin again. There is too much pink,

too much harmony. Mary, Mary, you should

be nude for the sake of decency.

Your navel’s black stone

exposed, eyes cast down,

fingers busy with plaited hair. Let's cover

the floor with bruised sand, introduce

a vacant space

between your boyish thighs. The pitcher?

Take it away. Boiling water can’t dissolve

the odour of this woman’s desire.

The bath must

alter. Tip it up, let it open, mutate

to a single-minded orifice that gapes at the heart

of the composition. Or is it a ring?

A hoop of wedded-metal.

Enough. I’ll finish with an arched window,

an urn set on a purple sill, artist’s trap for a trio

of wilted tulips, two-red-one-yellow.

I end, I always end, with three.

*(Vanessa Bell, The Tub, 1917, painting of Mary Hutchinson, Clive Bell’s mistress.)*