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## Poem with Bathtub, Foils

Liz Robbins

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## POEM WITH BATHTUB, FOILS

Liz Robbins

—after Berryman

1.

At what point did shifts occur? Did the mirrored face make cliffs of fractal rock? She, about to leave thirty-six, yet November's fall back—that extra hour—more than she can do. Her house's rooms—blankets, clocks, books, fur, carpets—are some of what she loves, despises, they are so much her. The little white dog comes and goes, lies down, sighing. Out the window, wind moves the raintree, sheds the skin-colored blooms. She starts a bath, waits on the bed, the water going like a promise, she cannot stand to smell her hands, her hair, her mind, twisting from the night, the still-blueing dreams.

2.

What so bad, at thirty-six? Only the relative few dead, not yet the Do Not Go Gently, nor the As I Lay Dying. The sun has not yet run, her husband whistles, digs shallow, plants marigolds in ground.

3.

She tried so long to mum. To speak would be risk, she sensed accurately. But felt the poke of pride and change, a painter's smock she'd admired in a shop so bought, though the sleeves too wide, pockets worn. Such a bright green like the sprawled lawn of the Castillo de San Marcos fort, where students sun themselves in shadows

of penetrable coquina. A bad fit, her thought  
and mouth speaking. Now all the world see jade  
scales, tail, teeth, fire. And saw clearly. Helplessly,  
the no-defense.

4.

Emails arrive, should she open? Encoded with  
(imagined?) slights and black screened. In  
the evenings, the modem slaps down, but is still-  
darkened connection. She has friends somehow,  
but all the unsent missives go  
like valentines to June, who hates her most. As  
she suspects June's right.

5.

Does she offend all with her useless heart  
of the personal? She tried no pride, she tried  
disdainful, haughty. Now she hide.  
She try all ways, and hide's what works. White  
bear in a snowbound cave, thick has grown her  
hide. Teeth, kept in, hidden, pornographic art.  
So long, the dead arousal of sleep.

6.

At the kitchen counter, she stands before  
a bowl of pretzels. One bite, and the dog  
comes running: O, tiny bliss! Onto the pink  
tongue to place a twist, one's heartbeat  
the corresponding crunch echo! To share  
becomes un-difficult within love's salty  
laps! (What we shan't say: she holds all  
the snacks.)

7.

When June demand her sharing, she gnarled  
yellow teeth and no-love-there. And hide. *No*

*person ever looks miserable who feels that he has the right to make a demand on you. Then she feel black soot inside. Make June yellow cheese sandwich equivalent. Feel weak. The bee sting, make honey, die.*

8.

"I wait for Joe to come home, so I can toast bread, melt cheese, pop soda. He's out tossing a plastic disc far across a field. He say, *You don't need make food, woman! I, a grown man!* But my feet root to floor. Duty burn. I, with cellophane wrap, bound. Foiled. I put out. The plate, Joe. You don't have to, he means. He and I know I don't do."

9.

She got no baby, babyfies her dog. Kisses it dead on the mouth. Who's mommy's sweet bunny, she cries, confused. Good thing it don't speak human. Like a god, the dog gets all needs met. And without a spoken word. Not the burlap sacks and straps to the back, but the monks got right howls of silence. Too late to make herself right?

10.

Three impossible tasks, say Freud. To teach, govern, cure. She mutters this in hot baths. Epsom salts for nerves. There's reasons, see, can't teach nobody. No dog, no June, no god, no he. Why drive shudders to a stop. No good. No bath for what she got.