

*She said she would buy the flowers herself*

The skivvy snuffles, serves her grievance cold  
and hears the mistress slither  
from polished graciousness to vowels that whine  
imagined maid-speak.

Later:

*“Adjust your cap. Stop snivelling.  
What have you got to moan about?”*

On her half-day, she’s set to polishing.  
*“It’s easy. I’ve the flowers to choose and buy  
and after all, you have no friends –  
no calls upon your time. Polish. Don’t sniff.”*

She hears leaves rustle and the creak of wheels.  
The sun paints bars across the table.  
She polishes, imagines warmth,  
thinks of the errand boy – *“so rough,  
that dirty neck”* – who dosses under bridges.  
He told her once he dreamt of carpentry  
(he still caresses wood) but now  
his sister’s in the workhouse, he must save.

Party tonight.

The skivvy’s crimped and starched, told  
*“Be invisible.”*

Below, the cook sweats wrath.

Above, she hears the conversation:

*“My dear, you work so hard –  
this house – it gleams.  
I see your servants love you – what a gift.”*

Cramp holds the skivvy’s face.  
She’s still. So still.