

The Launderer's Lament

(In appreciation of the painting; *Women Ironing* 1884 by Edgar Degas)

We two women toil side by side,
Labouring from dawn until dark.
My exhaustion I cannot hide,
I was awake before the lark.
How I wish our work was complete
So I could rest my aching feet.

Would that this bottle still held wine,
Then she and I might take a pause.
Some bread and cheese would suit us fine
But we must press on with our chores.
Stifling our hunger and our thirst,
To lives of drudgery we're cursed.

My companion is quite robust,
Heaving that iron to and fro.
Although her strength I do not mistrust,
I'll tell you something, this I know,
To flatten that remaining crease,
She will need much more elbow grease.

Though smoothing sheets is backbreaking,
This work is shared, you realize.
Hard slog but there's no mistaking,
It's those toffs' shirts I despise.
If I have to starch one more cuff,
I'll tell you now I've had enough.

By Amy Clennell