I have allotted them their tasks

I have allotted them their tasks, the maids.
While I sit waiting here, they busy themselves.
One, maddened by the smell of beeswax,
circles the living-room with a yellow duster.
Another steps into the garden to pick herbs,
holding leaves of rosemary to her nose,
pressing marjoram between her fingers.
She pauses on her way back to the house
to talk to another who's pegging out the sheets,
hoisting them into the wind with the laundry prop.
Can you hear them laughing ? Yet another -
have you noticed how like you they are :
hair, nose, mouth, the way they walk,
anyone would think that you were sisters -
climbs the hill behind the house, kicks up
leaves, and stoops to fill her apron with chestnuts.
The last - she's the wild one - is missing.
"A doctor's appointment," she said ; but there she is,
running across the sand, shedding her dress
and knickers - the hussy - and wading into the sea.

Eleanor Cooke

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