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The Sound and the Silence

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The sound & the silence (Series 1)

For my future child

1. As I cradle you
to my swelling breasts
stroking the soft down
swirling around
your still soft skull
breathing deeply
your sweet and sour scent
called by your quiet breathing
into lullabies
keeping time
with the to and fro
of the bentwood's graceful arms

Womanchild
I wonder
at the mysteries
behind your ebony eyes
laughing when open
making me cry
at their innocence
I wonder
how can I tell you
the truth necessary
for your survival

I do not want
to stir your slumber
with my nightmares

- II. Though I know
silence
is a secret
womanshared
for centuries

Among those who know
a certain obliviousness
to pain
is necessary
in this world
if you are to pull his fingers
from your woman's throat
and not cry out
increasing his satisfaction
as he slices your breast

- III. And silence
rests
behind the dull grey eyes
of the girl
in the third row
who doesn't yet know
her times tables
but already knows
the value of the silence
she preserves
through the forced caresses
of her father's hands

In the dark
she is silent
shivering
with the pain
and the blood
staining her flowered sheets
disturbing her slumber

IV. And silence
doesn't save
the thirteen year old
w/ thick braids
and budding breasts
from summer's sudden lust
hot and hurried hands
fumbling
with buttons and hooks
and silky slips
spreading oily rainbows
on garage floors
or from
a mother's tight lipped stares
at a stomach slowly swollen
nor
cold steel stirrups
and sundering pain
in the spring

V. And silence is
shared
for centuries too long
among women mourning
with tears streaming
like light
through stained glass
on the face of a sister
now and ever silent
to wash away
the purplish-brown bruises
adorning her
like jewels
the gifts of a loving man
accepted
without question
as the price of love

VI. And silence
fairly sounds
from the carefully carved face
of the woman
not touched by
the green glowing light
of streetlamps
but by
heavy handed men
liquor breathed
and unconscious
to her need
to silence
her children's hunger cries

With her body
she buys the bread
of silence
and sells her soul
to the sanctuary
of survival
when silence goes too far
and her children
are taken from her
by a grim and silent judge
because no one
could find the sound
of her defense
remarking only
that her failure
is the failure of the system

VII. A system that works
far too well
to keep silent
the scream
of the woman
with white scars
from the silvered snail's trail
of a razor's edge
applied
to assuage her guilt
at not being born
beautiful
and with a dancer's grace
she glides
silently
over the edge
of Miller's bridge

VIII. With you
small one
I would break the silence
giving thanks for the cries
shattering my solemnity
At last you awake
How soon the world?

Teresa Woodward