

A CHILD SEWING

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Can you hear the chanting
Musical and low
Of the myriad women
Down the long-ago
Stitching bridal linen?
Can you hear bright singing,
Like rivers after snow,
Of the myriad women
Weaving cradle-laces
Foaming in their flow?
Can you hear the keening
Monotone and slow
Of the myriad women
Stitching the last garment
For the limbs laid low?

Young girl in the shadowy corner,
Where endlessly you sew,
Now with a lighted face like Mary's,
Now like an antique mask of woe,
What is it that you know?
Do you hear the wind storm,
See the rain outside,
Good and evil wrestling,
Sun and ravage mingled,
Sow-thistles decked in jewels,
Lilies' broken pride?

No, little girl, you would not know,
So young and passionately you work,
And timelessly the light and murk,
Wind-volley and pause, and ebb and
flow
Of conversation drift above your
head
Until that sudden bell of doom: to
bed!

Then out bursts passionate crying,
Your grief cannot be said,
And but two minutes after
What darkness drowns your rafter,
What silence holds your bed
And all your trouble, dead.

Silence? No, for you are stitching
In rooms of dream that endless
garment,
While around you hosts of women,
Children once of joy and sorrows,
Are chanting round your helplessness,
Musical and low,
Tender-voiced and slow
From the long-ago.