The Madonna Smile

Just plunk the groceries down, turn up the radio volume as your hands make busy noise: rustling, thunking, slamming cupboard doors. You like the clock, it's a loud one; like scrubbing and scouring the copper pots; chopping at the vegetables. Singing out your lungs to avoid the silence next door.

She slipped so quietly past my window, white shawl over one shoulder, basket full of weeds. Never heard from him again; never heard her make the noise of pain again. She never spoke—a whiff of sweet burning told me she was widowed . . . and her eyes looking over, looking through the gentle silence.

JOY HEWITT MANN