

BEFORE THE YEARS SHE SPENT INSANE

George had had Alsina for
But few years when their fifth was born.
Their love was sealed with years of days
And nights beneath the quilt she'd made,
The white and yellow pillowslips,
The laced crocheted embroidery
Were threads that tied the time to her
And witnessed all the angel-love
That could not be contained within
The fragile vessel that she was
And so, flowed into cruel blooms—
(Little lilacs on the sheets.)

Their fifth had brought brain fever.

He held her pulsing hands in his
And rubbed her fingers in his palms.

Her cheeks were Winter's early flowers:
Poinsettias bright on snowy banks;
The lines around her mouth and eyes
Impious tracks through virgin snow
Unjustly dark, unjustly deep.

Her eyes, half-open, stared at him.
Her little mouth stuck to her teeth.
He moved his hands to touch her hair
And let his fingers press her head.
He thought about the Priesthood pose,
The way and words to bless, to heal . . .
He kissed her dark and gleaming strands.

"I have the power to call on God,"
He whispered to her needlepoint.
"I'll use my strength to make you well.
Lord knows I'll wilt without you here."

Her breaths were loud, laborious.
"I'll never be the same," she said.
"Oh George, my love, please let me go."
He held her close and breathed, "I can't."

Alsina turned her head away.
And when George laid her down again,
She cried and stained the pillowslips:
The threads that tied her down.

—Margaret Blair Fox