

## Alma

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### Alma

Cross-stitch cramped fingers  
fidget on an afghaned lap.  
A sweetly puckered mouth  
describes the wedding gifts that you,  
the single single sister,  
crafted for the other girls.  
A lovely linen tablecloth  
"the likes of which you can't get now,"  
and eight (emphatically), "eight napkins,"  
exquisitely embroidered  
to make a matching set.

A medical student mentioned a rumor  
that you were once engaged  
but never married,  
as your long ago fiancé  
had died before the wedding date.  
Is it true that true love lost  
can never be replaced?  
Perhaps. I do not know.  
Is it sad that you spent  
seventy-odd years without a mate?  
Seems so to me,  
yet I must respect your dignity.  
I cannot speak for you.

A white-coated stripling,  
I knew only your physical heart.  
It murmured to me,  
whispering of its constriction,  
of flow forced through  
a shrinking space.  
Odd that a heart which held so tightly  
to blood, to love,  
would one day starve itself.

You knew of the narrow  
and narrowing  
outlet,  
knew one day stream  
would dwindle to  
trickle.  
It was knowledge borne  
with fear and grace,  
extreme options (and their risks)  
considered and discarded.

With less forethought  
I asked about your stitching,  
indulging in your past  
without acknowledging your future.  
Now each personal detail  
reminds me of a person lost.

Deaths and leave-takings  
will go on either way,  
but I must choose,  
with fear  
(and maybe someday grace)  
if I would prefer to have  
something I could lose.