We play dress up in the basement
Five-year-old girls
Suddenly glamorous movie stars
With boas and blonde wigs
Silky green dresses
High heels bigger than our feet
Necklaces hanging to our waists
Bracelets piled high around our skinny arms

I am good at pretending
Playing someone else
I've done it for so long
The real me is just a memory
She visits sometimes
At other people's houses

Away from home
Another mother
Not my own
Pours me cherry Kool-aid
Tells funny stories until
My shoulders relax
My stomach unknots
"Nothing's wrong" I lie

Other families
Are different somehow
Dinner at 5, bedtime at 8
Every day the same
No chaos, no rage,
No screaming, no crying
I don't know what I've done
To make them so mad
I feel, but cannot speak
I see, but cannot tell

A charm bracelet
Misplaced in the trunk of dress-up clothes
Glitters in the afternoon light
Clinking and tinkling as I hold it
A tiny silver house, heart, moon, and star
Attached by thin silver to a chain
The charms say everything
Would you wear a silver house if you didn't have a happy home?
Would you wear a silver heart if you weren't loved?
I want the bracelet's spell on me
Replacing the story of my own life

Too young to make sense of my family
But my body will not lie
My head pounds, my shoulders tense, my hands shake
My feelings are true
My feelings are true

The bracelet loses its power
Locked away in a basement trunk
I sigh, knowing I will take it
Not from greed, but from love
And so it goes in my pocket

I lay on my bed
For hours that day
Bewitched by this silver bracelet
Its beauty
And promise

I'm tired of pretending
That what is real is not
I want a tiny silver house
Where it's not scary to live
Where people are the same day after day
And you're loved forever, just because

Later
I go back to my friend's house
This time with my mother
Holding the back of my neck
High heels angry on the cement
She is furious, but I feel no shame
Maybe they'll see her as I do
And insist that I stay

I give back the bracelet
But its magic stays
Captivating me
With the promise
Of a charmed life