

Genetic

Old and strange-smelling in that crowded room
Close curtained, dusty with a dirty kettle
The bit of glass was blue, blue-veined the hand
A gemstone to my magpie eye aged five
It's yours she said and gave it me
Later she said and took it back

I left remembering
Her dead hand didn't wear a ring but she
Willed me a memory aged ninety-seven.

Women will weave the stories tell the tales
This was my mother's soon it will be yours
Her wedding band?
That must be Ann's she was the grandchild nearest
These silver swords piercing a gilded heart?
That was your grandma's pin you see the date?
She wore it as a youthful fiancée

Afterwards
Her heart was sorely tried
Take it, wear it in good health.

Diamonds in gold set flat it was the style
Those were the great-aunt's
Her I never knew
She wanted Nell, my mother, her poor niece's child
No one I ever knew—though now I wear her ring.

No one I knew: a lady, childless, dark
Her silver watch, now mine, repeats her lonely hours
 Long past
These bracelet charms? Grandfather's fobs
—Those are faux pearls that were his eyes
 Like father he went blind—
Masonic signs not meant for women's view
Fritter their enchantments at my wrist.

In gentle chat unseeing
The women tend the symbols of the race
There's more than craftsmanship and carats
And anecdotes to things we pass from hand to hand
Masonic mysteries from watchchains clasped round necks
Dangle their codes, meaningless talismen
Heirlooms—like the blindness gene that *we* pass on.

DILYS WINEGRAD