

## YOUR FIRST FAMILY PORTRAIT

We are at your first family portrait,  
down in the underbelly of a San Diego mall,  
your stomach wide and heavy, your marine  
husband's shaved head glimmering  
beneath the shifting lights. I am a voyeur,  
perched on the photographer's stool,  
trying to sound the right reactions at the right times.  
I twist and turn the chair, let my toes  
graze the floor, try to time my squeaks  
with the pop of the flash.

The waiting room is filled with families,  
newlyweds, all dressed up like how  
they wish they were. I am New York  
black boots, hair tied back, and smudged  
eye liner and you are maternity chic, flowered  
sundress, and barefoot. It was still cold in Binghamton  
when I left, and here the sun seems never to disappear,  
revealing the wrinkles earned since I last saw you,  
the paleness of my forearms and face.

Later we make our way to the food court,  
escalators filled with teenagers  
looking pissed off, our hands careful  
not to touch the rolling strip of a handle  
because once our friend in high school  
told us it was covered in semen and pee.

Your husband goes off to find us corn dogs—  
me a veggie one, because they have those here—  
and as he eats two with his own fries and some  
of yours I remember the year you lived with  
my family in high school, how you hid  
ecstasy and acid in my underwear drawer,  
how I told you I'd nark you  
because though I loved you  
I would always love my siblings more,  
how we'd bring boys up to my bed,  
the bed we shared,  
and learned how to turn our bodies just so,  
twist our tongues and roll our hips to draw  
noises from boys. We thought that meant we were  
doing something right, that we knew how.

Your husband talks about tanks, then coyote hunting  
and you nod along, eyes tired,  
but I remember when we'd talk all night  
wrapped under heavy blankets  
because my stepfather kept the heat at fifty-five,  
and how if we talked too loudly  
fists would bang at the wall above our heads  
until we filled our pillows with laughter,  
and how you'd tell me every night  
your feet were cold  
then press them to my calves  
until we both fell asleep.