

LORI VOS

FAMILY PARTY

They have learned to hide themselves,
my lovely nieces. Their eyes, ringed with black smudge,
dart from face to face, measuring us for safety.
They shield their tender selves with displays
of rounding bodies, tightly wound in strips of skirt
and shirred polyester. We see each curve,
each exposed crevice, but not
the gnawing, the thirst.

The jawline of the younger one reveals
the line of liquid camouflage too orange
for her skin. She forgets herself, though,
and confesses how she lies—leaves unsaid
what she thinks we should not know. The threat
in those silences drifts into our minds like smoke.

The older one, more subtle in all her ways,
fires facts aimed expertly at our willingness to know
only the best of her. Face impassive, she hugs us all
before she leaves for school and her dorm.

But then, in a rush of something
like sweetness, and maybe need, she turns,
clutches me again, and is gone.