

KIRUN KAPUR

Family Portrait, USA

One photograph—the only—with another woman's writing on the back:
New Mexico. Novitiate. 1963?

Nearly impossible to see my mother beneath the Benedictine coif—
Nineteen young nuns in a row, each face

Framed separately by immaculate white wimples.
This was my mother's family,

Between the family she left and the family she made—
Nineteen sisters carved like cameos, bright, but indistinct.

*It was cold. We milked cows in a barn.
When we sang, "Cast away the dreams of darkness," I could see*

Those words carried over the hay, on our breath.
At night, in the basement, nineteen women swabbed the backs of refugees.

*I didn't know who they were. It didn't matter. An open sore
Is an open sore. You don't need to know anything about it.*

I want to see, though I know my mother's face:
The French nose; the brown eyes greened in anger.

I have no faith, just a sore and a story. I want to come to a place
Where I don't need to know anything more about it.