When my sister cries, she takes photographs of herself. *That is when I feel most beautiful,* she says, sipping her coffee.

My sister also finds beautiful: collapsing row houses; shirts with stars on them; and vitiligo.

Vitiligo being a condition concerning the pigments in skin.

Setting down her coffee, my sister stretches her hands and imagines her skin rippling with color.

Colors of my sister: brown (her eyes); galaxy (her shirt); polluted sunset (her hair).

Two people with blue eyes cannot have a brown-eyed child.

Blue eyes being a recessive gene.

This is one of two statements made by my father’s mother to my mother.

The other being, *If Robert ever lays a hand on you, you can stay with us.*

My sister makes her living making coffee for strangers.

Often, she will absorb so much caffeine through her skin that she will shake.

*I asked Poppy about it,* she tells me.

*Poppy* referring to my father’s father.

‘Well of course you’re not one of us- look at you,’ Poppy said.

He referring to her brown eyes and thick hair.

Watching ducks shit, we sip our coffee on a bench and wait for our brother to join us.

He having been indisposed with women.

This being a result of how his eyes will shift from blue to green with springtime.

*So, don’t tell mom, but I contacted José,* my sister starts.

*Bio dad,* she offers to my confusion.

*I’m going to call him later,* she says. *After my shift.*

That night, my sister calls up José and hears for the first time in her life her father’s voice.

His wife and two children asleep, he speaks softer than Havana the morning after independence.

*Your mother and I went back to the hotel and we made love,* he begins, and my sister becomes a forced voyeur to the start of her life.

*The next morning, I had asked her to come with me to New York,* he says.
To start a life.
José says, *In Tucson, on the mountain, she kneeled amongst the agave and mallow, and I shot her like that.*
*When I developed the photograph, the land looked as if it were on fire.*
Professional grade film comes on rolls of thirty six shots, which leaves thirty five other photographs from that night, that morning.
For instance: my mother covering her face with her hands.
On the phone, José hangs up, and my sister feels cacti blooming in her belly.
She cries, trying to flood a desert.
She shoots herself like that.
In Baltimore, in the darkroom, my sister lets her face swim in solution until she is nothing but light.