

Name Thief

I have this memory: locked out
of our apartment, you wrapped me in your arms
and sang my name like a charm against shadows

while we waited for someone to arrive with a key,
until I laughed, spellbound by how my name –
my name! – could fill the hallway, how I could conquer dark.

Suddenly a shape appeared, a woman just visible
in the dim light: tall, heavy, in a uniform.
Keys clinked against the handcuffs on her hip –

I was certain that her fingers reaching along her side
were not looking for the keys, that she would
arrest us for breaking the silence in the building,

that she could take you and leave me alone
without anyone who knew my name or who I was.
You must have thought I was shy and pushed

my arm towards hers, while she smiled and said
I heard you singing (I knew, I knew she had) –
her fingers touched my palm, sudden twins

grafted hand to hand; her eyes pinned me
to the wall and still she smiled, *you have my name*.
Suddenly I knew: you had not been singing for me,

you had summoned her out of the shadows,
could summon anyone with my name which wasn't
really mine. I twisted, freed my hand, and ran.

Her scent clung to my skin and she, she had my name.

Sarah Miller