

CATALOG OF SHADOWS CAST IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF LIGHT

after Richard Siken

You send me a postcard that says *Greetings from Hell*,
and it's not a joke, and that's why it's funny.

It's funny!

Last time you used my address was when you blew a hole through my parents'
front window like some 80s movie, you holding a gun over your head,
blasting love songs
to get my attention.

I bet you're in some white girl's bed right now
complaining
about how I never sang along.

I'm sorry, if sorry means *I wish I'd never been there at all*.

Same end result,

but see, that was always the difference between us.

I was results-focused and you were all about the process;
I wanted compromise
and you had a gun.

I think of the word *awesome* and feel awful,
both words meaning to be struck by awe,
but which side is the palm of the hand
and which is the back?

Which word wraps around my throat and dresses
us both in your fingerprints?
That's how you like it best,
you told me once
when I keep squeezing
after you try to say no.

I didn't try to tell you no,

I never did.

You'd ignore the feather flutter of my hand
against yours

and I'd float above the bed

in the only place where you could love me back,
blood rush cluttering my ears with a casket song
as I tried to be good and dead for you.

I am sorry

says the postcard,

for the too-soft bed and the laced up shoes,

neither of us could unknot the knot

and so we wore attire for the wrong season.

Summer chamber, winter bullets,

there's that gun again,

wandering around this story like it owns the place.

The gun wishing me well as I go.

The gun in your hand like my hand.

But that's skipping scenes, missing our cue. We were talking about
the day you taught me I'd never

truly been afraid before.

No, not that day;

not that day, either.

I forgive you for one but not the other, if you understand me
to mean me as the one and you as the other —

I mean you were *mean*, my love,
ruler-tongue rap-tapped on my white-knuckled heart
whenever I broke out of turn.

I kept a catalog of your cruelties, what you would call me,
what you'd later say you never said.

Should I say them now? Should I tell you
who you are?

Or is that asking a silhouette to look inward?

I kept a catalog of your shadows
cast in different kinds of light,
so sure that one of them might change your shape
or love me back,

but by dawn the wrong one always won
and the sun erased the right.

Once we were sleeping in a stranger's mother's guest room,
me on the bed, you

somewhere else, except when I woke up
there you were, in front of me, and I smiled,
but you didn't. You were angry,

You were screaming
you told me
She'll think I was hurting you
and later

What were you even dreaming of?

I didn't remember, but I knew,

I always knew, and she did, too,
and her, and her, and him, them,

and now people push me into confession booths to say they knew
all along and demand,

"Would you have left? If I told you? Wouldn't you still have stayed?"

In a dream I can be anywhere and I am —

alone in the summertime, alone on the beach,
alone in the city of love —

but in the bad ones you're back
and in the worse ones you're sorry, you're apologizing,
you're better now

and we can start again
like baking bread back into unthreshed wheat.

In the worst dreams you're back and you're happy and I'm hungry
and I wake up

to a growling bed, no one
to ask me what I dreamed.

Yes, I would have left.

I knew,

not from the beginning, but the knowing
was its own beginning, when I first
painted a tunnel on a door and told myself

Run.

I painted tunnels on the cliffsides, tunnels on the walls,
but you were always there waving at the end. I couldn't imagine
a direction that wasn't towards you.

It took you leaving for me to stay gone, and I did,

I've stayed good and stayed gone,

I stared down the Styx as I backed out of Hell

but still you followed me out.

Look at the restraining order I framed on my wall like a diploma,

graduate from the school of wrong clocks,

and how below it

smashed glass glitters in the dark.

You, though? You dissipated, you disappeared.

Years you spent scratching in my walls,

following me, hollowing me out, and then

one day

I glanced at the silence and found only silence.

Now it's missing posters papered over the bullet holes

and I'm mailing myself

postcards signed with your name

because you might have fooled your family, the state, fate,

but I know you, Leo,

I buried you myself,

I know you don't stay dead.

I'm painting tunnels on tombstones,

I'm sending greetings from Hell.

I leave the porch light on and it casts an awful shadow.

I stand outside at noon and I cast an awful shadow.