

1-1-2016

Blade

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Araguz, José Angel, "Blade" (2016). *Faculty Publications*. Published Version. Submission 32.
http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englfac_pubs/32

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university of cincinnati graduate poetry prize, 2016

Blade

by Jose Araguz

Was she flirting with me, this woman that claimed
she only expected three things from men:
to be strong, quiet, and to carry a blade.
I tried to talk again about her homework.
She said of all the men she'd ever met
I talked the most. My being paid to do so
didn't factor in for her. When I asked
if her son walked around with a blade,
she asked if I had ever driven with
my mother past a church. I knew what she
was getting at: the passing of hands and words,
the sign of the cross, the need to feel protected.

*

A rosary or this, back pocket charm
heavy as a rock in my hand. A rosary
or this, steel that unknuckles into lightning.
Each at this hour with the gleam of moonlight and tears.
Each in the hand tallies the night, the shadows gripped
and turned over on each breath. Like a man
refusing grace, I'm silent. Like a man who has found
the whispers taught in childhood to be distracting,
I focus, forget everything but the pressure
of metal that never fully warms against my palm,
and only trust a fist against the fisted world,
my hand closed tonight around this cold peace.

*

I've been told: never pull out your blade
except to use it. If the other guy
has made up his mind, you might as well throw
your wallet at his feet. Me, I've opened
boxes at work, cut roses for my girl,
whittled off the thorns. Even peeled
an orange once. Each time, I felt clumsy,
and wielded the thing like I would a girl's hand
in high school: could never just grip,
had to keep treading the creases, each line
and bump called and recalled, unsure, almost
if what I felt was really there.