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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.