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## Blade

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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.