

Vaya Con Dios

RUSS ALLISON LOAR

I could kill you with this little finger,
He says,
Jutting the scabrous thing out into the shivering night,
Pointed menacingly toward the enemy
Only he can see,
While tourists scuttle by
Keeping a wary eye on this ragged man
Who has me cornered by his confessions,
And his need
To tell me how three tours of duty
Left him so - strung - out.

He is enlarged, distended,
Eager to tell anyone on this street
About his hotel room and how much it costs,
Only a few dollars a month left over for food
From disability checks that come in the mail,
How his first wife drove him crazy,
How he was crazy anyway because of the war,
How he killed a man he thought was the enemy
But it was long after he returned
And the man was just a man,
How he spent thirteen years in prison
And how *I don't want to be like this anymore*,
And the hospital

Where he missed his last appointment with the psychiatrist,
 How he wants to find his way back to something good inside,
 But this guy grabbed him by the throat last night
 And threw him against a wall,
 How he gets so angry sometimes
 He just explodes,
 How the woman he lives with made him so angry
 He punched his fist through a window
 And he shows me the open cuts
 On his dirt-encrusted hand and arm.

I am tempest-tossed
 Between seeing him as my forsaken, younger brother
 And my murderer,
 My insane executioner who forgot why,
 Why he was on the street in the first place,
 To get a little money so he could buy something to eat.

I give him five dollars and he nearly weeps,
 Puts his festering arm around me,
 Hugs me tight as deeply disturbed tourists
 Sidle by apprehensively.

Vaya con Dios man, Vaya con Dios!
 He shouts as I walk briskly away,
 Inspired,
 Repulsed,
 Ultimately torn.

Vaya con Dios to you too buddy.