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Christos and the Tomato

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Christos and the Tomato

On the sill of the window by the bookshelves,
in full sun and sea-light
a tomato ripens.
It absorbs the clamor of the harbor,
it blesses the burbles of the doves

and the bursts of laughter from the workers
four rooftops over.
It blesses the pick and shovel and the smell of tar.

And if I call it *the temporary icon of this house*,
like the painter of a still life, I will eat it before it spoils.

How long does it take to spoil, to go wrong and stay wrong,
Evagrius of Pontus? How long
to learn *practical* contemplation, how long
to see *the logos of things*—how long to fill with light that is
no other than *the primordial simplicity of God*?

A lifetime, lifetimes—and how long is a life?

The tomato I was given
in the little shop at the bottom of the hill, where Christos sells
fruits and vegetables, eggs, Turkish figs, and jars of honey
whose bees have worked the blossoms of wild thyme in Kalymnos.

I had picked it out of *a bin of wounds*,
as I thought them, too many tomatoes soft, bruised—
one so overripe it was a bag of blood.
Lightly I ran my fingers over them, touching as if they might
be the wounded who'd fled their shoes and sandals,
hundreds of shoes left behind on a bridge in Baghdad
as women and men, the lucky ones, scrambled clear of the car
bombs.

Above my head hung a television, a buzz of syllables in Greek,
images of war. *We haven't invaded Iran yet, have we?*
I asked Christos, anxious—
adding, *We haven't had news of our country for weeks.*

Ah! Meeseez Boosh, Christos smiled, and I don't know
how much of the smile he meant. He liked
my daily business; I thought perhaps he liked me.
And your husband, how is Meester Clinton? He tallied
the euros I owed him on a scrap of paper torn off a bag.

I will teach you some Greek, he said as he gave me change,
knocking on the counter to fix my attention.
Poli blakos—he wrote on the receipt, in an alphabet I could read.
Say the B as a V—poli blakos, very stupid.
The war, poli blakos. Boosh, poli blakos. Christos paused.

He takes us all down, he said.

The tomato he gave into my hand directly—he wouldn't chance
bruising it in the bag of onions and beets.
Put eet on the weendow, Christos said. *Eet will teach you.*

Ef-karisto, I nodded and carried the red globe up the hill of stairs,
as if I held in the palm of my left hand
a naked soul.