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Christopher Buckley

A Few More Things I Should Have Learned from Vallejo

un vaso para ponerse bien, como decíamos, Y después, ya veremos lo que pasa—César Vallejo

I've been complaining to the deaf clouds all along when I should have been picking up the pocket change of chancea cigarette filched in the bar, a dollar in the street. Smoke floats up from the sidewalk grates with my ghosts . . . suitcases stand in doorways like a destitute aunt. I shine my shoes with a coat sleeve and see I've been trailing my own footprints around the park thinking I knew where I was headed, though I kept stopping time to time to look over my shoulder as I read a discarded newspaper or pulled scraps of paper from my pocket, never deciphering the ink blots or palimpsest of branches up above that I hoped might reveal some insight made into the subtext of the blue. into a sun glint

off the windshield

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of a passing car that might have me nodding confidently to curlews and godwits skimming the spindrift below the cliffsome line for which I could congratulate myself and walk over to the wine shop for an honorable, if affordable, bottle from a moderately tortured terroir to celebrate a Tuesday or Thursday in autumn a glass for me, a glass for you, one for our healththen we'll see how things turn out? A gang of crows working late, scavenges the bread crusts of the poor . . . business as usual, they say, taking the opportunity to strafe my bench, mock my lack of stylethe scuffed cowhide of my shoes, pant cuffs from the '60s. Look, half my friends are dust— I'm going to worry about fashion? And considering the distances, the health hazards available on the air, chances are slim that I'll see my comrades again, even those who, like me, are still verticalif a bit wobbly-and cautiously navigating the produce aisles, appraising Chilean pink ladies for bruises, ignoring green bananas

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from Ecuador. a three-pack of endive staring out like bald Presocratic philosophers as I debate whether eating kale could make a difference at this point. Too late, I think, to worry . . . too late for the Inca, the last boat to Byzantium, for navigating the Horn of Despair ... too late for the fallen republic of desire—probably, for the planet.... Just time enough for this bench, for shaking out crumbs from a Ziploc bag of chips tossed beside the bin so I can sustain my fellowship with the grackles and blackbirds dropping down from palms and fence posts on wind that's never going to catch up with the past . . . too late to worry about that. I have half a sandwich in my coat from the other daysuch is the bounty in the world. Chestnuts bloom pink and white for nothing, effortless in their splendor. A bright effervescence of a comet zooms by every decade or sojust bits and pieces shooting overhead as you walk aroundin what looks. for all the world, like slow motion . . . each one awarded a name.

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but who's kidding whonone of us will be here to see or call out to them again.... Evening stars arrive with their ironies, and anyone who looks closely can see the missing cargo of details is still there, our bones filling in the gaps, in no time.... And my thrift-shop karma's expired, the discards of the rich have quit coming round last time through the nebula of racks, I couldn't find a single shirt that didn't crimp my shoulders, come up short in the sleeves. Never mind that I'm never going back to Paris. not going to get comfortable or anything close to content here and now, even if I manage a nap for half an hour beneath the bare candelabra of a coral tree. It's going to rain . . . but not in southern California, not on a Tuesday, or any other day that finds me here looking out to the islands that also aren't going anywhere. All I come up with is a little channel fog, a light drizzle of speculation obscuring the shore, the empty plate of possibilities....

or possibilities....

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