



1990

Introduction to the Phenomena, circa 1959

Max Garland

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Four Poems · *Max Garland*

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHENOMENA, CIRCA 1959

It was all those weather predictions
and local politics; who made money,
whose wife left with whom,

combined with the opened bottles
of tonic and dye, that eventually
stained the windows of the barbershop
green—

a light cast outward
over the sidewalk and street;
an eerie shade, like stumbling
into someone else's dream.

It was simple human loneliness
that swept the same piece of paper
down Broadway every evening;
stopping to press the curb, here;
wrapping around a meter, there.

It was the will of God the pigeons
didn't fall from the ledges
above the Columbia Theater.
They looked as heavy as mallards
up there, such waddlers
and constant complainers.
In other words, made for love.

Such lovers, in fact, sometimes
we had to shoot them down.

A few hours after the roosting
an assortment of dry goods men,
grocers, and sheriff's deputies
loaded their sons' pellet rifles

and before morning the dead
would be gathered.

And before a year had passed
the pigeons were back,
neither fewer, nor wiser;
maybe even the same pigeons.

And everything below
began to acquire the same patina,
the same splatterings and leavings of love,
spilling over the cornices
and acanthus leaves, the awnings
and facades; the same pigeons,
the same grey-white frosting
we killed them the first time for.

THE WOMAN ON THE ROAD FROM KAMARI

I could never walk like that, never
tighten my scarf with such finality,
or wear such a constant shawl
of darkness. I could never
tap my cane like a clock
along the cobbles, or learn
to separate the herbs of downfall
from the everlasting ones.
I can only say *good morning*
and *good evening* in Greek.
In between them, the gulls
swing and lapse into the surf,