The Woman on the Road from Kamari

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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,
the sand backslides and rattles.
I could never learn to distinguish
between the true breast
of the local goddess,
and all the ordinary stones
scattered over the mountain.
And although the woman’s eyes
are lifted briefly
from the same deep pool
as my own,
I could never summon the nerve
to walk like that, body bent
into the world’s oldest question,
carried up the mountain,
death after death.

Initiation, 1965

Because a boy must murder something,
because a boy must be implicated,
we were shooting the doves
with a pattern of shot as wide
and heartless as the hand of God,
because one of us would be sent to war
in a country he couldn’t find on the map,
because one of us would stay alive
by a series of academic maneuvers,
because one of us would remember
how the wind flapped through the blades
of milo, how we baited the field,
crouched in the dirt of the roadside.

You have to lead a dove, you have
to aim for the next move he makes,
which is a move into nothing,
which is a shattering of iridescent