

## 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,