

Carolyn Elkins

Il Mercato Centrale

The last day he came out
to set up his crates on the corner
it was colder than usual.
He wore his jacket and hat
and kept one gnarled hand inside a pocket
whenever he could.
I looked through his baskets
and bought a few things I didn't need.

Maybe it was the way he looked down the street
like he was seeing something sad
far off. Maybe it was the strange way
bits of wrappers and newspapers
gathered around his feet, swirling,
rising like white birds.

What Is Required

After we buried her
her father walked out
to the edge of the wide lawn
and stood there alone.

He stood like a man
stands in the desert,
who divines Day from Night
in the ancient way,
holding two long strands
of a woman's hair, one black,
one white, in his open palm,

who waits for the moment
when it is possible to tell,
or not tell, which is which,
both at dawn and darkness,
the fault-lines of time
where life divides sharply
into yes and no.

He stood a long time,
the air around him changing
almost imperceptibly,
the dusk thickening
around his empty hands.