



Collage: "Metamorphosis 2" by Thomas Terceira. "To Lose and Catch the Trail" was written by Rebecca Valley for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, March 2016, and selected by Timothy Green as the Editor's Choice winner.

The Balcony Collapses and I Become a Bird

BY REBECCA VALLEY

I can't remember the question, exactly.
It was August, dead season,
the only blooms fat and angry
and dead if you tried to touch them.
I had tiled the floors with geography.
Angelo was white and useless in the heat.

Next door, the fields were on fire.
We would watch the rain not falling,
the bodies of teenagers rolling in the dirt.
Down the road the earth had pulled apart
the asphalt into a deep crevasse that children
flipped quarters across, back and forth until
one went clinking into the darkness.

Angelo was sure he was dying.
He hiked his shorts up his blue calves
so the sun could heat his thighs.
I was too busy watching the squirrels move,
evolving rapidly to flit from branch to branch
like birds, stretching their extra skin.
Angelo had asked me something

about the forecast, maybe. I didn't respond.
He was so high and certain. That it would rain eventually.
That our bodies would collapse, but only after a suitable
number of years together. I let a glass of water sweat
a translucent ring into my skirt and ignored him.
What did I know? That a fault-line could open
underneath you and swallow everything.

I pictured it again and again: Angelo's blue legs
clinging to the veranda. My body
sprouting the thick black wings of a devil-worshipper
from the sore nubs of my shoulders.
Birds so big and elegant and easy to become.
I emerge, hollow-boned and tongueless,
shedding loose coins in the dark.

