

## WORLD WITHOUT BIRDS

By George Kalamaras

*I wonder what the world would be like  
without birds?* she asked. Bring me the soup—  
make it hot. I tended to over-worry  
about the next incarnation.  
Would I have a hound? Could I  
sleep through the night? *With* the night as if it were  
a knife? I wonder about a tornado  
without pale-anemic green. Without the small-flung  
bodies of terrified ants. Let my blood into a cup.  
The wind. Let the wind in my throat. The full-throated  
howl of a hound treeing a coon. Full-bodied mirror  
when I've eaten too much. When I've had too much  
to bleed. I dreamt a world. I dreamt  
a world without birds. All the setters  
seemed confused. Irish setters. English setters.  
Gordons. All the dogs that pointed birds.  
All the spaniels forgave the rivers  
without ducks. Can you spot the otter  
in the picture of a left hand  
trying to scoop soup? The bawl-mouthed  
sound of a hound is enough to make me  
want to give it all up and live in the woods  
again and again. Life upon life  
we come into our bodies, half-afraid  
of salt. We look to the river. We bend  
to the sky. We open our mouths for a cloud  
of birds to enter. Half-afraid. Half-afraid  
to show us their hollow-boned bodies.  
I want to play them like a flute. Cull the air  
they've gathered in their bones. The space  
from all the wind they've stirred passing through.  
Flush them from this crown of thickets and that.  
To be so sure of the dark places. To cramp oneself  
in a covey of starlight waiting out  
the veritable washing of the womb. I wonder  
what the world would be like  
without setters to track birds. Without hounds  
to continuously till the soil scents  
of the ground. Blueticks. Treeing Walkers.  
Redbones. Whose gangly pups have yet to have grown  
into their skin. Old-man wrinkle around  
a two-month snout, showing what's young  
to be impossibly old. Loose-faced yet smooth.

How we come into our bodies again  
and again. Older than what we are.  
Scenting the coon we hope to one day tree.  
Looking to the sky full of dark  
darting spots that show us the wingèd way  
we came. The pull of our silken ears  
holding us all the way down to the ground.