Carolina in Extremis

Sarah Townsend*
Into my disaster strolls a hallelujah morning of sweetbreeze and birdsong. What am I to do with all this excess of zephyr and bloom? My chorus’s cantankerous snifflle can’t rally to the tune of this mocking bird, his twit-witted arpeggios grating on my dolor, by god. He might instead sing a dirge to lips parting and forgone conclusions, snap out of this cheerful fervor, quit frittering March away in tra-la-las. I’d knock him like a shuttlecock, given an appropriate implement—taste the tang of birdblood for a temperamental instant. What say you, Francis?

A te convien tenere altro viaggio,
responded he, when he beheld me weeping,
—we who’ve nursed orphaned fledglings on our palm in Ann Arbor and Assisi, who’ve pressed fingers against tiny hearts drilling away under fragile down.
I’ll set aside my fantasy of raquets for you, Frank. I’ll take the higher road though the way be dark, trim my ears and hark tenderly to hawks sallying across the hemlock-scented strata. As the girl with fading hair startles the juniper future, a host of coal-dark crows will carry off the West Virginia mountain tops.