

## CAROLINA IN EXTREMIS

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*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 snuffle 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.