song for san rocco

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i.
THE EAVES OF NONNA’S HOUSE ARE CROWDED WITH DOVES:
huddled together, shivering a little
in the dense calabrian heat that peels paint and curls
the ends of my hair into soft swirls, like little hearts.
the streets are splitting open with heartache here, but the night
is gentle and quiet. stray dogs shuffle through the weeds.
feral cats slink by. this house sat untouched like so many others:
insides scooped out like pumpkins on the doorstep,
sides caving in with rot. from the metal roof echoes
the sound of birds’ feet shuffling anxiously:
cooing, tapping, eyes wide, feathers ruffled, waiting—
waiting perhaps (perhaps) for me. (maybe.)

ii.
MY FATHER’S FACE IS BRIGHT BUT TIRED, EYES SHARP
but mind drifting miles away: like he is returning to ithaka,
drifting lost overseas for a thousand years.
the heat does not flush his face like it flushes mine.
the mosquitos, so fond of my legs, do not dare to touch him.
daddy tells me that my uncle used to scamper
up and down the alleyway, pointing. it yawns wide and dark,
beckoning me to enter. i step back slowly and
it touches my side with ghostly fingertips, inviting me to stay.
no, grazie mille, (my clumsy tone
trips over each syllable,) and i hurry away.

iii.
DOWN THE STREET SITS NONNO’S HOUSE, CRACKED WIDE
and left lying beside the road like an open ribcage.
his palms were dark and calloused. before his strokes,
he would take me by my little hand and lead me around the yard;
he would sit on the porch and slice apples with a pocketknife
while i curled up in his lap.
but i know his garden
and the echo of his voice
we linger at broken window
a fig tree sprouts
(nonno taught your daddy
(yes; think of branches
like a second skin.)
the season is wrong, still,
reach elbow-deep
and grasp around,

i don't remember much of that,
and his makeshift scarecrows
when he yelled across the room.
to look deeper inside:
from the heart of the room.
how to graft, yes?)
with tea towels wrapped around
i study the tree: the figs are not ripe.
i close my eyes tight,
into my memory
longing for the taste.