

**Orchardist: At Home**  
**(Cassatt, SC)**

*I say I dreamed the old Haile mine split open,  
rained blank copper coins and rock salt,  
and a whole host of brown cardinals flew north*

*toward Pisgab.* The too-hot butter pops in the pan  
and she doesn't turn around. Back two months  
from my state-sponsored bardo and she still won't speak

before noon, but the sun's coming up quick, like Mother  
used to say as she sent us to bed. She said *Nothing*  
*in the world to be afraid of,* and then, first thing: *Get to work, boy.*

Down the road, Paw joining the stripe of pickers  
heading north to McBee. All those mule men,  
those roughneck ambassadors of the season cycle,

day wage, summer crop. The collective mumble—there  
but for the grace of god—each day. *Best not look away,*  
*sugar,* she said and slit the gray-pink throat of a sow.

Now, I can tell the size of the pit if I hold the peach tight.  
Boss says land always needs tending. Doesn't matter much  
who does it. Kids come by the busload and do cartwheels

between the trees, heels sliding on dropped fruit, and I  
think of Mother singing absentmindedly to the hens. I say  
*It's good to think the marvelous might still happen, even if*

*you know it won't,* and my girl throws scraps to the dog,  
sits cross-legged at the table with a plate, says  
*Crazy, ain't it?* without looking up.