Orchardist: At Home
(Cassatt, SC)

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

toward Pisgah. 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.