

For a month, I have been living here,  
and often sit near the back bedroom  
wall, mice scuttling behind

the tiny framed self portrait of Rembrandt,  
laughing, skin crinkled like gold leaf.  
He's Zeuxis in that one, I think—

Zeuxis and Parrhasius, I remember  
the contest between them, how Zeuxis  
painted grapes so true—what do I mean here?—

that birds flew down to feed, yet Parrhasius  
depicted a curtain concealing his work,  
the verisimilitude fooling his competitor.

Yet of the two paintings, I'd most want  
to see the grapes, not a curtain, of course,  
these grapes clustered purple, reminding  
me of walking with Marcel, one or two  
blocks away from here, the mulberries  
bloodied on the sidewalk. My son—

he gathered in his small hands the fruit  
fermenting, this wild sweet melt,  
this jam scooped from the ground.

It's true. There were no birds.  
About our backyard beech, my father  
once told me a lightning bolt singed  
the heartwood and pith like a wick.  
He blanketed the little fires charring  
the sapwood. There were no birds  
on the snag for weeks, he said, which  
must be untrue. I prefer imagining  
the tree swallow in the cavity, and I know  
it was summer then, but what if I say  
winter? What if I want the swallow's  
blue glare? I cannot tell you how to love.