

**Babysitting My Adolescent Brother**

When again he's powdered the couch with flour  
or smeared the bathroom mirror  
with the turd he scooped back out—  
his brackish grin watching me  
go in, after—  
when I've scolded him and pointed  
up to his room, escorted him there,  
clicked the door shut. I think again  
of Emerson's brother, Bulkeley, in McLean Asylum,  
taken out then put back in, who took the train  
to Mont Vernon—impromptu toodle-oo—  
collecting names, door by door,  
for the singing class he'd teach  
until he was returned, like a mislabeled package, home  
before anyone could learn  
a thing. My own brother, the one now sitting  
on his bed behind the door I closed,  
was also driven home like that  
on mornings he, ten years old, naked as dirt, rose  
before the birds began  
shuffling in the yard's imposing oak  
and crossed the main road that wore  
blemishes of flattened squirrels,  
went porch to porch, slurping the lukewarm dregs  
from beer cans forgotten overnight.  
He knocked on doors to express his thanks.  
*What a nice boy*, they'd say, eyebrows raised,  
returning him to my father, still groggy  
in his boxers, as my brother,  
exposed and luminous,

flashed from the foyer to the stairs  
back to his room where he's crying

on his bed, and this bafflement keeps  
walking me back, to open the door again.