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.