Almost nothing more . . .

than what I have is what I want. The first full
day of spring, forty, raining, raw. Raining with
a fine intensity, thin sprays. My son tells me
he likes the poem I e-mail, even though it’s one
more about my fears for him. My sister-in-law
phones to tell me my brother’s drinking again,
despairing. The grass is greening along the creek,
the alley, in my own garden, a change I’d hardly
noticed. Are the river regulars walking in the cold
spray? Morning will shower them with spring’s
insistence: wake, live. Yesterday at the river, raw
March belies the calendar. In gray light, on dun
grass, the robin’s burning breast. A fisherman casts
his line, then waits, quiet as the river whose verge
is fouled with scum the color of sawdust. A fat
muskrat swims up out of an inlet near the shore,
wriggles onto a log, sits a moment, swims off.
I want to shake my brother, make him live. One
rainy afternoon my husband and I drive through
half-green half-dun fields to the farm market where
we buy pansies, small tongues of summer. We are
mellow as fall, laughing at nothing. The garden
we come home to is brown and rich and waiting,
a dark nursery. Our son is coming home next
week. I’m flooded with happiness for a moment.
I will plant pansies at the base of the sourwood
—rose, gold, purple, lavender flags, faces; I will
weed and cultivate the beds which are winter-
fouled, strewn with debris, until the pale green
flames of perennials gleam in the hoed, raked
soil. I will wash all the windows in my house so
that the longer light permeates every corner.
I can’t touch my brother’s darkness.