Spring 1982

*from* Letter to a Dead Wren

Bob Ross

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2.
Wren, I have watched
an uncle, a tough, tired farmer,
lean himself against a post after milking,
facing the delicate and marbled and blazing west,
and let a striped kitten chew his thumb;

the same man capable of coming drunk
to work not done and the light gone
and beating his thin-skinned Guernseys
to a weird confusion,
the floor of the milk-barn slick with manure,
spilled grain everywhere, a stall in splinters,
himself near blind with headache,

no one speaking—

Here is the worst thing I've done.
I had a wild dog once, a stray.
He came to love me, and I him. When I was gone

a few days, he left the place.
He didn't return when I came home.
It was winter.

Nights later, when I was sure he was dead,
a howl came from Hagan Lake.
I heard it once, clearly.
It was dark and I'm afraid of the dark.
I didn't go look for him.