

DENNIS WARD STILES

The Calf

—*for my father*

I understand now that you broke
its back with a cane
because it wouldn't suck.

A calf is supposed to suck.
There was other work
to do, the cow was moaning

and you were mired in debt.
The calf wouldn't take the teats,
your fingers, or the gloves
you had soaked in milk.

It stood on wobbly legs
with its back to the problem,
too stupid to seem innocent.

The calf died quick.
You took a long look
at me, and I was afraid
then not. A calf is supposed to suck.