

Stephen Dunn

Working the Landscape

They've taken me to a small lake surrounded
by large, dead trees.
Gypsy moths, they say. Voracity.

They're taking a little too much pleasure
in this. The day
is overcast, the water gray as a gun.

The night before they re-introduced me
to their marriage.
It was like being invited to dinner

by people who are fasting: May we offer you
a little spectacle
with your dessert? I'm their friend,

and they were loveless and unlovable.
listened, and went to bed.
Now these trees, dendritic, a bunch

of nerve endings reaching skyward.
Isn't it beautiful,
they say, and it is beautiful

as often pollution is as it swirls
from smokestacks.
But I don't wish to agree. I'd prefer the sound

of idiot birds, or a crane to swoop down
prehistorically, begin to fish.
I tell them I've begun to love sunsets

and people walking off into them. I love
old melodies, and melody itself.
They're smart enough to get my drift.

They stop working the landscape, stop, awhile,
beating themselves up.
A tern dives and makes a tiny efficient splash.

And then the rain comes, the rain comes
angel-driven to distract.
There's only that sound now—

desolate, heartening, whatever each of us wants.

Ordinary Days

The storm is over; too bad, I say.
At least storms are clear
about their dangerous intent.

Ordinary days are what I fear,
the sneaky speed
with which noon arrives, the sun

shining while a government darkens
a decade, or a man
falls out of love. I fear the solace

of repetition, a withheld slap in the face.
Someone is singing
in Portugal. Here the mockingbird

is a crow and a grackle, then a cat.
So many things
happening at once. If I decide