

Three Poems · *Stephen Dunn*

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

Afloat between lives and stale truths
he realizes
he's never truly protected one soul,

they all die anyway, and what good
is solace,
solace is cheap. The signs are clear:

the drooping wings, the shameless thinking
about utility
and self. It's time to stop.

The guardian angel lives for a month
with other angels,
sings the angelic songs, is reminded

that he doesn't have a human choice.
The angel of love
lies down with him, and loving

restores to him his pure heart.
Yet how hard it is
to descend into sadness once more.

When the poor are evicted, he stands
between them
and the bank, but the bank sees nothing

in its way. When the meek are overpowered
he's there, the thin air
through which they fall. Without effect

he keeps getting in the way of insults.

He keeps wrapping
his wings around those in the cold.

Even his lamentations are unheard,
though now,
in for the long haul, trying to live

beyond despair, he believes, he needs
to believe
everything he does takes root, hums

beneath the surfaces of the world.

FORGIVENESS

The torturer removes a fingernail:

No forgiveness for him.

An old Nazi softens, laments:

No, put him to death.

He who hates:

Give him a mirror and a gun.

He who hates in the singular:

Forgive him, once.

The crimes of lovers:

Forgive them later, as soon as you can.

Anyone who hurts someone you love:

Saints, you forgivers,
we could never be friends.

The betrayer, the liar, the thief:

Forgive anything you might do yourself.

The terrorist pulls a pin:

Forgive the desperate, the homeless,
the crazed.

The terrorist pulls a pin:

No, no more good reasons.