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The Problems

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The Problems / Stephen Dunn

The problems come to me
dragging their owners behind.
I am the listener
they've always hoped for:
a Satanic dream life,
a built-in nod.
The problems take off their shirts
for a heart-to-heart.
Before long it's their pants.
I'm no shrink, I'd just like to be
their owners' friend.
But the problems know
sooner or later everything
comes round to them.
Even in moments of happiness
they wait in their bright clothes
just off to the side.
Their owners apologize for them.
But the problems begin their whine,
their monologue of sighs.
Gradually, though, they resent
my problems' silence.
They pause, but my problems
don't step in.
The problems of others begin
to despise me, it's always this way.
They say *they* must be my problems too.
Something's wrong with me, they say,
if they are not mine.
Deep down, the problems of others know
their accusations are, in fact, problems
and are secretly pleased.
They start to tell me how much
I need them, why I'll never get up
and walk away.