

Propositions

By Stephen Dunn

Anyone who begins a sentence with, “In all honesty ... ”
is about to tell a lie. Anyone who says, “This is how I feel”
had better love form more than disclosure. Same for anyone
who thinks he thinks well because he had a thought.

If you say, “You’re ugly” to an ugly person — no credit
for honesty, which must always be a discovery, an act
that qualifies as an achievement. If you persist
you’re just a cruel bastard, a pig without a mirror,

somebody who hasn’t examined himself enough.
A hesitation hints at an attempt to be honest, suggests
a difficulty is present. A good sentence needs
a clause or two, interruptions, set off by commas,

evidence of a slowing down, a rethinking.
Before I asked my wife to marry me, I told her
I’d never be fully honest. No one, she said,
had ever said that to her. I was trying

to be radically honest, I said, but in fact
had another motive. A claim without a “but” in it
is, at best, only half true. In all honesty,
I was asking in advance to be forgiven.