

VALERIE STETSON

The Ponderosas

Living here, in the playground of the ponderosa pine
 we are meant to admire. Yellowing sheepdog needles
 moult every spring and fall, fill fifteen bags by the curb.
 Do the garbage men appreciate their beauty
 while they pour out of trucks, their naked arms
 a convoy of swivel and throw, swivel and throw?

Blurred by wind, the needles paint the landscape.
 Their poodle-tufted branches wave at the sky,
 their adoring public. They know they're special,
 dropping their cones and dirty pitch
 like the cigarette ash of leggy supermodels,
 confident that we'll sweep it up.

They're too gorgeous in the way a friend
 once complained of the art in my house—
 of the swirls and cluttered panels, the overuse
 of gold leaf, shouting like new money.
 But step into the painter's head
 and look, it's the same landscape:
 the crazy, malevolent excess of growth,
 branches heavy with golden, phallic protrusions
 nestling between two pinecones, tacky,
 six-inch needles and curly branches
 showing off to the Douglas fir, to the blue spruce,
 dwarfing the Christmas tree and littering witchy,
 three-pronged claws in junipers and cedar bushes,
 on cars and wildflowers, on decks and gutters,
 branding the landscape and asserting their dominion
 while posing, feet deep in fire hazard,
 with the casual arrogance of birthright.