My Brother’s Work

by Stephen Dunn

My brother who knows

the indignity of work

rides home with the taste of it

turning peptic, that odor

of swallowed pride rising

into his breath, his wife waiting

for the kiss that’s so full

of the day she can’t bear it.

My brother who hears the shout

of bosses, who is no boss himself,

only shouts at home,

thinks shouting is what permits

the bosses to move

with the easy self-

fulfilled gait of leopards

who’ve eaten all they’ve killed.

My brother who will not leave

his job wonders how Gauguin left

the world and found himself

on the other side of it.

“What balls,” he says, “braver

than a suicide.” My brother

who is no less than anyone

circumstance has made

to do its bidding, who wants

to rise one morning against

all odds and slip

into his leopard body,

my brother is coming home now and his wife

is waiting for the kiss.

NOTES- Gauguin is a famous artist who in the middle of his career left his home, family, and work and went to live in a completely different location and produce a completely different style of art. His wife and children went to live with her parents.

WRITER’S WORKSHOP: It’s time to belly ache! Think of something that is a part of everyday life, like a job. Write a poem of your own, expressing all your distaste for this everyday event. Try to avoid rhyming in your poem.

*Setting*- when and where the story takes place

I am hesitant to use the above definition because setting is so much more than a simple definition will allow for. Setting is not merely scenery; it is part of the action, the characters, and every detail of a story.

The setting of a story must be familiar to the author and be made familiar to the reader through words. Even when writing a fictional or exotic place, the author must be able to see every detail of the place. Think about some of the great fictional settings you have read: Oz, Camelot, Avalon, Atlantis, Utopia, Hogwarts, Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory, and Wonderland. These settings are so familiar that the author and the story become separated from the setting, and the reader can imagine innumerable stories taking places in this setting, much like a real place.

WRITING WORKSHOP: Create a fictional setting. What year is it? Where is it? What bad things could happen to someone here? What good things could happen? What is the weather like? What do the people who live here look like? What plants grow here? Think of every detail of your setting and draw it on your paper. Then, write describing it.

WRITING WORKSHOP: Think of a fairytale that you are very familiar with. Rewrite the story set in a different setting. What would the three little pig’s story be like in outer space?

Have you seen the movie Enchanted? This is an example of changed setting. In that film, the Cinderella story takes place in modern New York.

*Plot*- the actions of the story

Are these people traveling, seeing someone off, or waiting for a traveler? Who is arriving or departing? What is the occasion? Holiday? Duty? Tragedy? Is the couple united or in conflict? Decide and write.