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photo by Sandy Scott

Sean McQuinney

Writers Block

by Sean McQuinney

To understand the difference between art and apathy
Watch the sea breaking against the shore at dawn:
You have to wait for the stars to fade from black water
With the horrible patience of a murderer
And ignore the wet sand embedded in your skin
And the sound of lovers somewhere close by
Either sleeping or whispering between kisses
And ignoring you, purposefully ignoring you;
And you can't call the sunrise orange or red
Or say that the water reflects the sky,
Or that you are alone.
You cannot say these things.

Against Sunsets

by Sean McQuinney

Ensure kept my grandfather alive
For seven months after the glimmer in his blind eyes
Yielded to the strokes tearing at his mind.
Watching him, one night towards the end,
I let my hands rest on his thigh, soft and wet:
A flexing birch holding up the weight of dew.

A decade later I stood in a parking lot waiting for sunset
Listening to the drone of frogs mating in the ditch.
One frog, intestines crushed,
All but one leg turned to fragments,
Saw me through his half-turned eye
And mouthed the wet air noiselessly.
He tried to jump to a puddle of lazy sky
But couldn't rip himself away.

The Forgotten Sins of Ft. McCoy

Here, in Florida, you can still taste the river.
The Ocklawaha still bears catfish
When you let chicken liver sink to the bottom
And the glimmer of the hook hides in the sand,
And it still breathes out before it ducks
Under foot-bridges to cool the boys skipping school.

I remember my first fish, so slick,
With needle whiskers and eyes
So desperate and afraid I started to choke,
Freeing the single barbed hook.

Sometimes the fresh river air clings
To the upholstery of passing cars
And hitchhikes with them past
The burnt foundation of the general store
Where I stole my first Baby Ruth.
That store burned down a few years back,
But kids still meet their buses
Next to the black-tarred lot

Dew still runs off the kerosene tank
The fire department showered for hours
The night the building was consumed.
I was sorry for the little shiners in the tank
Beside the ice chest just outside the front door.
Gossip holds the owner set the fire
After he drove, half asleep and drunk
Into the De'Latore's car at midnight.
There is no marker, now, for the scene,
But the three crosses used to glow white

If the fog still swells the way I remember,
Not down from the clouds, but up from the grass,
The only traffic light in town
Will still feel like a red sunburst
Against my sleep-robbed cheeks
But wet with the dawn,
Wet with the dawn and memory,
And I will take deep breaths
And taste the river again.
Land of my young hands
Land of errant pine needles!
Land of my first sin
And my first wet wound.