

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Sean Thomas Dougherty: Three Poems

Sean Thomas Dougherty · Tuesday, February 25th, 2025

Third Shift Time

When everyone is sleeping
& I can hear the florescent lights

hum, the freight train to Chicago
rumbling in the distance

carrying its load of fracked gas.
Here the machinery of night

is still. I walk the long hall
& listen for human words.

For everything else is speaking,
the converted motel walls

full of the ghosts of fishermen
& traveling salesmen,

trying to sell us the last century's—
but no, this is not that kind of poem.

This poem is about the still
slightly wet tile floor

I mopped an hour ago,
about the snot

I scrubbed off a wall,
about a pill I gave

to a woman
whose back aches

even when she dreams

from all this life has given

her to carry.

*

What Word to Make the Body Listen

To the pull the barrel out of your mouth,
 to drop the clip & finger the bullets
 one by one into the box, & stop staring
 at the wall above the desk, to get up out of the chair.
 Let the ghosts go on without you. & what of the wounds?
 Soon they will be hard as a scab
 before the scar: The drawer is locked.
 The kids are finally in bed. Go & watch them sleep.
 Smell that smell since they were born.
 Grab one of the tiny whisky bottles your wife hides in her room.
 Open it & place it by your youngest child's hair.
 Now cap it quick. Tie a string around its neck.
 Wear it like a cross. Next time it is hard,
 open this bottle & inhale what is inside it
 will remind you nothing is as hard
 as your daughter's arms reaching for you forever.

*

Exile

The tight ponytail of your thin hair slung onto one shoulder like a talisman. You are off to your appointments & tests, a good day you are able to drive yourself, the pain lessened, leaving its knives on the kitchen table. After you are gone, our three-year-old daughter repeats the mantra of *mamo, mamo* in a whisper over the weeds we pull from the garden. The light is long even at the beginning of day & the shadows sometimes say things too. The black dirt doesn't speak, as I dig into it up to my wrists, to urge out a root, our daughter wreathed with daisies, she bends with her yellow plastic shovel, she hands me a rock & says here is a ruby dada, she holds up a twig & says, here is a tiny horse, her hand gallops in front of my eyes, she fawns & flutters, with each thing she finds she orchestrates the world behind the veil, her hair a nest the sunlight weaves, we don't even have seeds, we dig because it is what we do, & suddenly we begin to rise, up into the clear June sky, & all around us the turned earth opens, & the worms.

(Featured image from [Pexels](#))

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