

Shifting With My Sandwich Hand

DAVID OATES

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Sandwich
Hand*



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Athens, Georgia 1999

SHIFTING WITH MY SANDWICH HAND

Haiku, Senryu, & Such

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THANKS TO THE EDITORS OF THE FOLLOWING JOURNALS, WHERE THESE POEMS FIRST APPEARED—

ant ant ant ant ant: “By Ed’s Grocery,” *Asahi Evening News*: “For her pesky, dear friend,”
“From mountaintop,” *Black Bear Review*: “After Easter dinner,” “From the visitors,”
black bough: “Carrying sleeping daughter,” *Canadian Writer’s Journal*: “Curved on the winter field,”
The Daily Mainichi: “What a lovely daughter,” *Hummingbird*: “Playing king in the ballet recital,”
point judith light: “Cool night wind,” “The crazy burst,” *Raw NerVZ*: “After quitting a job,”
“Leaving the drive-through,” “Playing king in the ballet recital,” *Tight*: “Christmas show,”
“Graceful dancing,” “Inching through dark,” *Woodnotes*: “Valentine’s Day.”

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*For my parents, John and Meredith;
and sibs, Larkin, Jim, Hiro, and Jen*

Alone in the house,
little dog startles, then listens —
answering machine





In the doorway
at tap-dancing class
watching mother tries a step

Inching through dark, strange room
suddenly
chair





Playing king in the ballet recital,
cloak makes me sweat —
what's a regal way to scratch?

Brown weed
coated in shining ice —
Cinderella





All week before the sleep-over
kindergartner goes to bed
in sleeping bag

Twelve-spot ladybug
climbing in the lampshade.
From watching it near
the light's glare,
spots on my vision





Trying to catch her gaze
it flicks away —
frightened bird

Valentine's Day,
a paper heart hangs
over the condom rack





Christmas show, graceful dancing
“five golden rings” —
spray-painted hula hoops rattle

Going around the corner of the house
walks through the spider web,
apologizes





After quitting a job,
he goes to the grocery store,
buys and buys

As we're dickering over car,
scribbling alternating bids,
little salesman pleads —
“Don't make me get
another sheet of paper!”





Keep hearing cars outside,
but none of them is yours

On the computer keyboard,
faded from scrubbing
“Jesus loves you very much”





“What a lovely daughter you have,”
the waitress says,
as I’m figuring the tip

Amsterdam hotel
in the hall
maid hiccups





From the visitors
to Anne Frank's house,
an occasional small sigh

The man with Alzheimer's
seems lost,
until the big-band music comes on
and he takes a partner





The crazy burst
of branches —
tree jazz

After Easter dinner
sitting by the still-covered pool
the women start to talk about a campus rape.
One old lady asks, repeatedly,
“Was she black or white?”





Late summer, slightly uneven road
driving behind a truck full of standing pigs —
their   b a l a n c i n g

TV reporter, oranged face,
no makeup on his ears —
parentheses





Girl spills silver glitter,
for weeks her family sparkles

Wife and daughter in the car ahead,
punctuating unheard conversation
hands





Soon after the big dog died,
using the can opener,
still listens for the whine

By Ed's Grocery & True Value Hardware

Between the Pepsi machine and the rusty trash barrel,
a breeze plays with a lone moth's wing





From mountaintop,
a vision of valleys and hills —
rumpled green blanket

Carrying sleeping daughter to bed
with each of his steps
the slight wave of her feet





Leaving the drive-through,
shifting with my sandwich hand

From mountaintop,
a vision of valleys and hills
rumped green blanket

Broadway peep show
blue neon sign:
“Buddy booths”





Car ahead
Weimaraner's head out one window
black Lab's on other side
as it accelerates
their ears, flapping

Curved on the winter field,
that improbable purple,
blackberry canes





Huge policeman to daughter, two,
as the family shares restaurant breakfast
before his shift, “You don’t put that there.
Pancakes don’t require salt.”

For her pesky, dear friend,
the little girl makes a play cake
with cocoa, butter, sugar,
and half a cup
of pepper





Finding forgotten cup of cola
ten drowned yellow jackets
I shoo another

Water exercise class,
Lone male focuses on the ceiling
to avoid staring —
the huge, bobbing breasts
of the young and comely fat women





Tying up tomato vines
on my hands afterwards
the scent

Around his head
as he washes dishes
tiny bubbles





In the motel alone
startled by thump through wall —
at home, it would have been
child falling out of bed

Laying the circling strand,
spider's fast careful footwork





Sixty-year-olds, brother and sister
working politely together
though tense, cross, on the verge of tears,
dividing their dead mother's things

Fluttering down
towards approaching windshield
maple wing





Playing with her hair as she dozes.
On my thigh, her head's warm, sharp weight

Trace of your scent lingers in my mustache —
the ache of knowing it must fade





Cool night wind
empty hammock bucks —
ghost lovers

Ziping along the highway
Evacuating beach house
before the hurricane
elderly aunt washes dishes





As we drive down curvy mountain road,
she says, "All of this is an illusion."
I say, "Still, I'll keep
my hands on the wheel"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 

Zippping along the highway
at twilight on a clear day —
in the car ahead,
the driver fluffs her hair
at the rearview mirror





Tiny raindrops shine
in my daughter's dark hair —
starry sky

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*DAVID OATES lives and works and watches
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at tap-dancing class
watching mother tries a step

Fluttering down
towards approaching windshield
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