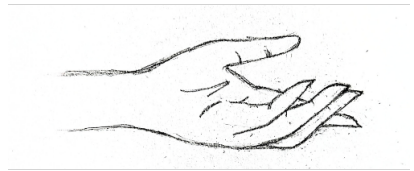


BASICS:

A Chapbook of Poetry



J. LANDON SHUMAN

basics

:a proverb

things are kept for a time/and then get left behind/
when we hold on too long/things begin to unwind/
if you don't stop to look/at the lines on your hands/
the basics will become/your most pressing demands.

salt:

a haiku

"Brings the flavor to the fish, brings the flavor to the rice. It's the number one spice." -Young Cardamom

there was a shortage
and Government sent money to
press it to the wound



air

notice the puncture in the tire,
slow leak hissing a warning

wander over tranced
by a sense of duty

stumbling slightly but
regaining tight composure

you put a finger out to stop
the flow, a capitulation

futility floods your phalanges
fickle, feeble, flawed, full

your pointer feigns failure
like a miniature Atlas

trembling to keep up what
was at your own behest.

Eyes shuttered tight you
release the flow of air

expecting satisfaction,
some sort of deliverance,

but don't feel a thing
only soft air on your face

betwixt by the breeze
you prolong, pause

and breathe in deep
respiring delicately

weightlessness grows
sensation overtakes reason

a question—forming—blows
and fills the air all around

tangible now, asking
what you needed to pose

like the middle of a psalm
or a kite crashed into

your neighbor's yard,
which is visible now

and your eyelids flutter,
open and dilate (twice).

you, full of hot air,
“rise to the occasion”

above spire and fence
lawn and lane

until the gasps get thin
until your lungs stop

and the air begins
and you remember

a line of two of a song
that said something

about the winds of change
even though they don't.

vanilla

The scent of the tropical seed-bearing sleeve
Erupts into the air as I slice each pod open
With the sharp end of a paring knife.

I cut them, one by one, slowly and methodically
And my hands turn black like coagulated blood,
The air sweet with the promise of future bakes

And I shake off the thoughts that speak slowly
Stating that I, too, am just another pawn
In the scheme to take, and take, and take

And with every repetition, knife-to-bean,
An accusation goes up declaring guilt
Even though I bought the pods
fair and freaking square

From a guy in Zanzibar who,
As far as I could tell in the moment,
Had no qualms or unanswered questions.

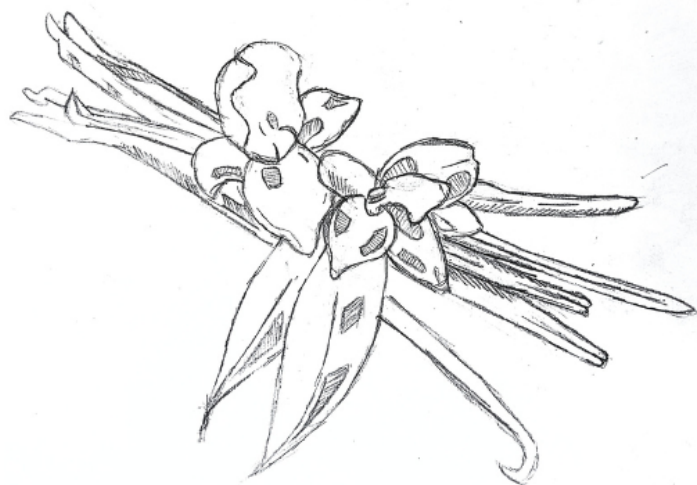
But now, could it be that the blackened bouquet
I just mutilated may be crying out
From my fingernails like lifeblood long spilled?

I wash my hands several times.
But the intoxicating fragrance still
Floats in the air, clings to my skin.

And I want to cry, but know *my tears*
Are no help in the watering of African soil
No consolation for the generations
Of little-known desolations behind.

All I can do is clean up my mess,
Millions of microscopic seeds
Littered across the countertop

Like millions of potentials unreached
Millions of lives scattered across
A vast and endless plateau.



vanilla by Amanda Shuman

water

"It watches us cry and doesn't understand why we would waste the water". -Katherine Lamb

As I let the water run full force over the dishes in the sink
my wife comes in to tell me that the city has cut
the water again due to a shortage on
the Upper Ruvu River.

I always seem to feel confused that an entire city
of greedy and restless water users might be
dependent on the Upper Ruvu
for our lives to keep running
endlessly from our faucets and our toilets.

I shut off the tap and tell the kids to stop flushing anything that isn't solid.

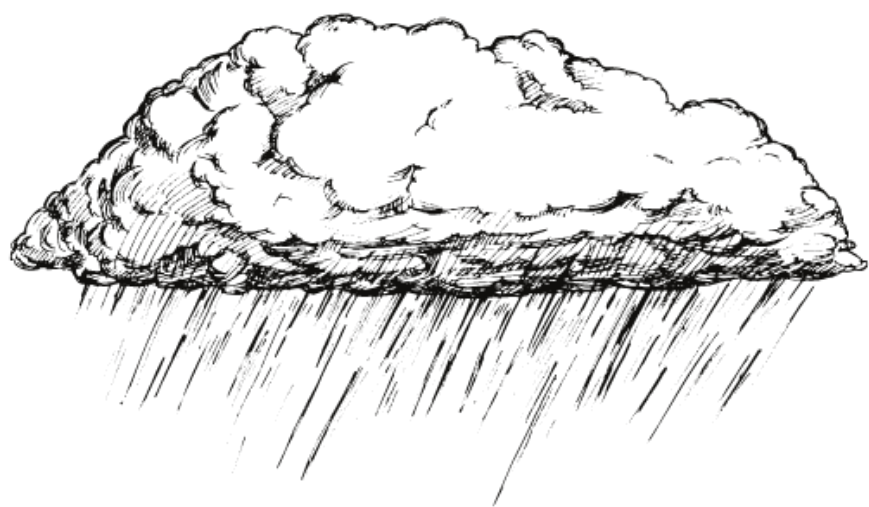
Then I tell them that we are water, we are a mirage and an
oasis overlaid by ocean, sea and river,
and that we don't drink luxury out of
magical, refillable Stanleys.

They ask to go to the waterpark and go on believing that the water
from our Berkey filter
is just more water from the rock, a living self-replenishing
source, and I give up
and go shower and think to myself,
"They just don't know about the Upper Ruvu".

In these times we pray for tempests to refill the estuaries
that will demolish homes
in mudslides and I wonder what this living water would wash
away if the trees still stood in their places
and we hadn't ravaged the hillside to build cement factories.

Sometimes I avoid looking at my hands because it
reminds me I had something to do
with the water disputes and
toxic runoff and contaminated groundwater and other
disasters, but I also remember that the

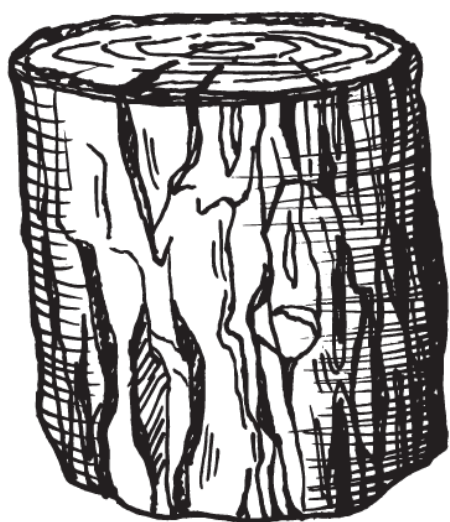
dishes won't do themselves and find myself over the sink scrubbing
to the rushing sound of running water.



wood

cracks and snaps
In the hearth of
a brick home on
the hill overlooking
rows and rows of
sisal and jungle
fire flickering in
the eyes of a
Greek farmer who
chews snuff and
thinks viciously
about old days and
old ways when
it was all ours
and they couldn't
take a step without
asking permission
but now demand
fair pay, fair say
slowly taking
piece by piece
inch by inch
until nothing is left.
And who am I
and my children,
who are they?
mixing and
matching with
them
singing their songs
and dancing
their dances
and eating
their food.
And loving it.
Our home here
will never be
theirs, ever.

Not even the wood in the fire.



coffee

"Coffee is bitter. Grief is bitter, but we don't have to stop there. . .

- "Coffee and Grief", JohnO

Solitary fingertips tug at everyone.
Fingernails painted deep red (for reference)
The saliva from a billion tongues lather
And foam and wait and crave and
Each and every piece comes
One by one by one.

Loneliness sets in to the sound
Of carbonic maceration, a tearing of seams
On the microbial level: deep, deep
In the molecular makeup
Of every single, single,
One by one by one.

We live in post-colonial processes
Packed and placed in popular places
Screened (literally) and processed
Subjectivity seeping in pools made black
By us, by every single
Stereotype on the planet.

Most of us don't make it.
How could we? We are ground to a pulp
As if it were our destiny, a right of passage.
Everything within us exposed
And for what benefit, whose pleasure?
For who, which one?

I've been through the fire.
Pain to the preset rate of rise (ROR)
Pure possibility on your lips as
We fall asleep to the sound
Of internal explosions erupting
One by one by one.

Go right ahead, sir, madam.
Hold up your pretentious pinky
And salute me for this moment I made for you.
I am your momentary vision now
And I disappear with every drop that drips
One by one
by one.

run

errands that needed to be run/that led to the nearest suburb to ours/
and the power was out/driving back empty-handed/and all I see in
front of me/the bridge built by the Japanese/and power lines
donated by the Americans/all a-tangle with one another/along with a
Chinese 18-wheeler/overtaken into the river/oil and blood running
out from its organs/and all I can imagine is the driver/running from
the wreckage/filled with Konyagi and terror/with one knock-off Air
Jordan dangling from his mangled foot/chewed and twisted by his
modern simba/But there is nothing to be seen/the crowd that
gathered is running the show/since the police cost more than the
loss of cargo/and I drive back home/and I put on my trainers/and I
run and run and run/until my foot finally remembers/that I don't even
own any Air Jordans.

-Konyagi: cheap Tanzanian clear spirit

-simba: Kiswahili for "lion"



poetry

if you can manage
to stay completely still
and quiet
you can hear the poetry
rattling door handles
and trying to pick
the lock on the
back left-hand side
of your mind's
navy-blue station wagon.

the poetry, though seemingly
therapeutic and innocent
often breaks into things
and just hangs out
like the squatter of your mind
and only leaves if it
is found
or is somehow evicted
onto the page.

oil
: a sestina

"Do you still talk to Jesus? . . . We fall, and we pray, and we live most days without meaning and we need it" -DWLLRS

You keep asking me if I still talk to Jesus
as the pan gets hot, splattered with oil
and I hesitate without the slightest reason
—It's not like I'm talking to the windows
or whatever. I am like a dog that pants
for water; your question knocks the breath

out of my lungs. But I take another breath
and let out another short one to Jesus
Before telling you to go put on your pants
for school while the eggs sizzle in the oil
and the birds are chirping outside of our windows
as if they piped up for Jesus (or some other reason)..

To me it's less a matter of faith and one of reason
that one would at least see one's breath
—as it expels from the lips and fogs the windows—
fluttering with the birds all the way to Jesus
as he uncorks the bottle and pours the oil
over our heads. Choosing a pair of pants

doesn't take you long, but it's your pants,
of all things, that provides you a reason
to skip out on eating these eggs cooked in oil
and your questions and your life and breath
keep me in the conversation with Jesus
which somehow keeps me from breaking windows.

Off you go, as birds do through open windows,
but you run back to the door and through pants
you tell me you are still talking to Jesus
even though sometimes you don't have a reason.
Your words, never-are-they-ever wasted breath.
They are salt, they are lemon zest, they are olive oil.

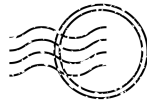
I sit down to eat the eggs I cooked for you in oil
and the silence now slides in through the windows
—the only thing to hear, my own breath.
The sound, sometimes coming like gentle pants,
reminds eternity that there is likely a reason
for birds, and wisdom, and children, and even Jesus.

*We bathe in the oil when we whisper to Jesus,
And sprint, out of breath, rip our new pants,
and smash windows without a reason.*



envelope

you told me that I needed
to push the envelope more
and so I stood up and I
walked across the street
to the post office and bought
a book of stamps
and the only ones they had
were priority mail express
And cost me \$121.80.
They had a nondescript
Image imprint called
“cosmic cliffs” with some
falsified stars shining
above what apparently was
some great unknown oblivion
or planetary phenomenon,
you know, something my
regular poetry would usually
have me falling into or out of,
so I took them like a chump
and walked out to find you
had been enveloped by
a violet haze that obscured
your face and you were
just a motionless, voiceless
blur that, at the sight of
my expensive stamps,
let out a yelp and
promptly compacted and
squeezed right into the
landscape of my “cosmic cliffs”.



Peel/lick/stick.

(dream) tree

*"It is dangerous
to remember the past only*

*for its own sake, dangerous
to deliver a message
that you did not get." -Wendell
Berry*

I.

*You know I don't make promises
but I will to you vow
to uncurl my tightened fingers
from around your dreams
that I so longingly lived into—
so desperately sought as an oracle,
a prophecy.*

II.

May we remember that a dream
is a sapling planted in time,
rooted in skin, bone, ash, stone,
watered by memory and desire,
and breath from the mouth of
the Divine.

They all grow up.
Bark and branch brandishing
bright light, and darkness
so deep. And they are yours;
yours to tend, yours to turn,
yours to grow,
yours to learn.

Tender shoots turn into trunk,
and bear all fruit at once.
One bite is enough beauty
to know it has ripened
ready for reality.

But we, in our haste,
pick prematurely
And prune precious pieces
to graft and grow elsewhere
against our heart's behest
and nature's law.

It is in this way
We, individuals, become amassed,
in sharing and giving and
planting and harvesting in circles
and forget to rest the soil of our
hearts
or even remember the root,
the original heirloom.

And we find our dreams
are no longer our dreams at all
but amalgamations of industry
Built on quips and one-liners—
the taste without the Taste
a root withering in wasteland after
superficial wasteland.

III.

I so desperately sought an oracle,
a prophecy
and all I did was stack firewood
and set a bonfire.

IV.

I love you.
I'm sorry.



live/fear

Some say you only live once
but truth says we have lived a billion
hummingbird wings and
pine tree sap oozing from cracks
in pavement and eyelids and doorways.

Even right now, typing mechanistically,
I, personally, have been alive in four
ceiling fans, cranking out harmony with
a hornet's nest nestled into a black metal beam
and, also, the [Bombay Bicycle Club \(feat. Rae Morris\)](#).

Senselessness says we should fear missing out
but truth says a red fire extinguisher,
the uncanny way you fill space and time with magic,
and the memory of a chocolate-banana muffin
is enough to levitate above everything you might (or might not) do.

Even right now, keys are rattling in the
doors that lead to miles of atoms and molecules
that autocorrect into lilac-breasted rollers and
newly formed ice crystals at the back of the fridge
and the fresh steam in the cup, out of the bowl.

*Living life longs for lasting legacies lengthened latitudinally
and fear follows forgetting foundations formed firm inside eternity.*

fire

dysregulation, doorknob
confessional
heat licking the edges of the
bureau
voices rattle door frames, fine
china

trembling beneath particle board
pyres rising along the edges
of the old cedar wardrobe

tongues tessellate trapezoids
stacked in unkept rows that
Decimate door frames, day
beds

licking egregiously across
the queen-sized bed frame
like a fiery message from above

and it doesn't stop there, no.
Flickering fingers feel along
the window frame, too, and

touch the tamarind, acacia
stretch across the fever tree
and burn until the baobab,
black.

The entire forest aflame
the circle of life is set on fire,
set on fire by the flames of hell.

The house fire, forest fire
untameable and unleashed
unlike anything Dante imagined.

in the midst of the inferno
we stand like modern-day

Shadracks, Abednegos

flesh sizzling, yet we feel
nothing, nothing, nothing
except our fiery breath

and we know we aren't alone,
not in here. Another stands
in this hellish hearth

blowing ash, inhaling dust
disposition dark, dispossession
definite, infinite, permanent.

We turn toward the light
that engulfs the world around us
knowledge, wisdom alight

unsure which of us—
in American English—
lit the first match.

"A small flame can
set a whole forest on fire.
The tongue is a small flame,
a world of evil at work in us.
It contaminates our entire lives.
Because of it,
the circle of life is set on fire.
The tongue itself is set on
fire. . ."



glowing fire by Radyn Shuman

be

requirements to be:

Justification letter stating the purpose for your stay

Passport photo, blue background

Proof of purpose and succession plan

Board Resolution, Certificates, Extract from Registrar

Memorandum of Articles and/or Certificate of Incorporation

Lease Agreement

Blood, preferably cooled in a secured facility

More than \$4,000 (trust us)

Physical Verification Report, if necessary

Hours, Days, Minutes

Renewable, up to two years

bread

keep eating and eating
like there is no more tomorrow

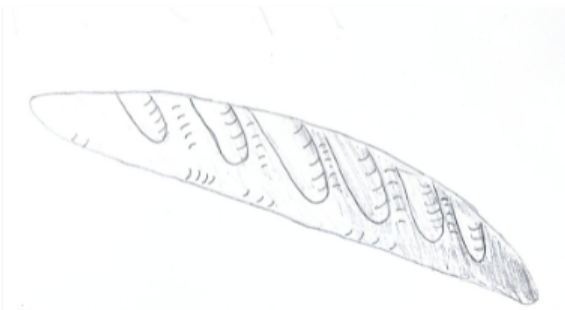
mostly because bread now
is infinite
until it's gone

and you're fingers crack
inflammation
and the realization hits:

industry cares nothing about
your heart or your hands

just that you keep eating and eating
like there is no more tomorrow

until there is no tomorrow.



bread by Radyn Shuman