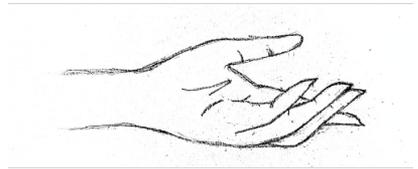


# BASICS:

*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

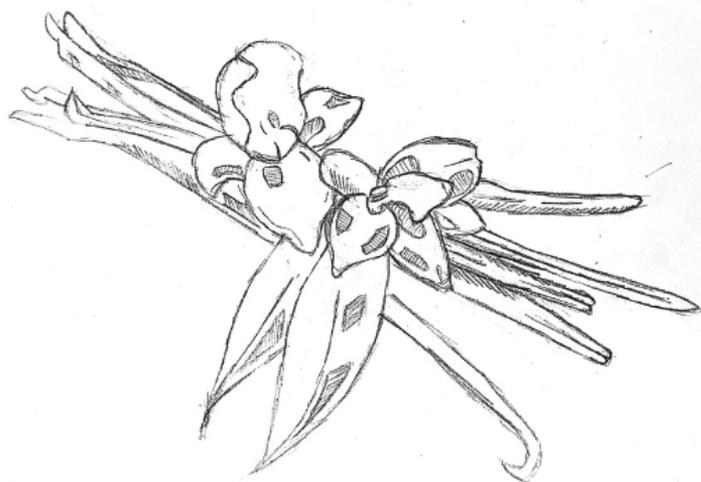
until the gasps get thin  
until your lungs stop

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 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

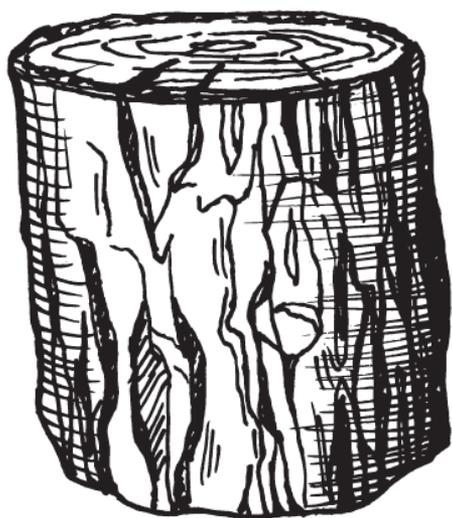
dishes won't do themselves and find myself over the sink scrubbing  
to the rushing sound of running water.



## 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.

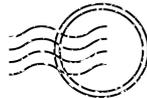
I sit down to eat the eggs I cooked for you in oil  
and the silence now slides in through the windows  
—the only thing to hear, my own breath.  
The sound, sometimes coming like gentle pants,  
reminds eternity that there is likely a reason  
for birds, and wisdom, and children, and even Jesus.

*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.

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“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

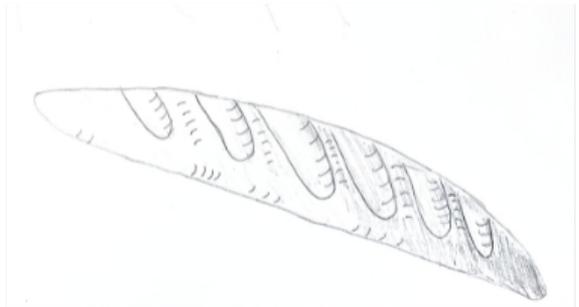
mostly because bread now  
is infinite  
until it's gone

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