

Short Rains

Karen Shepherd

Rings spread out and blur the bricks beneath. His reflection alters when it rains. He is not a man with a briefcase walking through the city to get to an office. He is the ripples that touch the surface, the circles that start from one small point and stretch outward, widening beyond a single moment before thinning out and disappearing.

He told her when he went home that he would live in a place where storms sanctify the terrain. He loved the smell of the earth after the short rains doused the Rift Valley. Standing in her doorway watching the pock marks form in the red soil as the rain first released, he observed how the dirt path in front of her home turned auburn before the sun dried it again. The acacia trees, shaped like umbrellas, dotted the hills beyond the tea plantations. He lay with her, listening to the pinging on her corrugated tin roof as he ran his fingers along her braids, their bodies braided together.

He imagined what the moon would see if the clouds broke and it peered through her metal frame window. Would it have nodded in recognition of beauty in the contrast of pale and dark, how each were able to hold their own lines as they wrapped around each other?

She used to trace the blue-green vein on the inside of his wrist, said it reminded her of when she was a girl and her parents would take her and her siblings to the coast. She told him how they had stood on a bridge over a teal creek, white sandy shores on both sides. Her father had said water was the earth's blood, pumping oxygen to all the planet's corners, touching the toes of children on beaches across continents.

As she showed him how to add more maize meal to the boiling water and stir out the lumps, he told her she could come with him and of all the places they could live, all the trees they could settle themselves under. He told her about the redwoods that could live thousands of years, that Steinbeck said instilled silence and awe. The eucalyptus, he explained, had bluish leaves, bark that could be pulled in long pieces, and a scent like infused pine and honey. She handed him the spoon, her smile visible in the lantern's glow, and said she knew he didn't need reminders to stir constantly. She finished cooking the greens and tilapia. He spooned the ugali onto their plates.

Her head bowed, he watched her give thanks to a God that he had only known to lurk in places hidden to him. She said Mungu was not hiding, but that he just didn't recognize Him. *He is there, she said, in your pine and honey scented trees, in the rain you love to hear when we lie together and whose drops I catch so we could prepare this meal.*

Her trees were the Meru Oaks, parasols, bananas and pawpaws. She was like the baobab, absorbing the rains to sustain lives during the dry season. *My roots are here, she told him, but we share the rain.*

He asked before he returned home if she thought they would see each other again. *Mungu akipenda*, she said. As God wishes.

The trees in the city are mostly ornamental, selected for their flowers, seasonal colors, bark texture and hardness, heights that are convenient to the buildings they stand in front of. Maples, dogwoods, oaks and hawthorns are pruned and tidied within their concrete surroundings.

He does like the cherry trees, though, their pink petals strewn like confetti on the sidewalks after a spring rain.

The rain falls again and he looks down. He sees not the man he is in this moment, but the man he is across short rains, long rains and storms that fill creeks that flow to oceans. He sees himself as a single drop, as circles that spread and stretch to touch far away edges before they fade away.

Karen Shepherd lives with her husband and two teenagers in the Pacific Northwest of the United States where she enjoys walking in forests and listening to the rain. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in various journals including *Constellate Literary Journal*, *The Literary Nest*, *Halfway Down the Stairs*, *Riddled With Arrows*, and *Wales Haiku Journal*. Follow her on Twitter @karkarneenee.