

**Africa Day Creative Writing Competition  
(organised by The Irish Times and Irish Aid)**

**Secondary School Category Winner – Anne Wambua (Sixth Year Student  
at St Andrew’s College)**

The seat became damp as my perspiration pooled under me.

I looked out of the door into the business centre of Kitui County and watched those walking to and from certain whereabouts. Everything was hot and the man cried and the panga hit the wooden table again and again. I ignored the sobs and watched the dog under the roof of the kiosk lie. Whatever damp came off him was quickly gone, stolen by the unnerving midday sun until nothing was left; nothing was ever left. He lay and he lay and the people walked and the man cried and I sweat through my blouse and the woman walked. She turned and lifted her right hand to shield her face from the sun. Her headscarf fell. She quickly lifted it, securing it back behind her ear; she smiled only as much as she had to, and laughed a very modest laugh. When her right hand grew tired she put it down and lifted her left so it could shield her face. The man who spoke to her spoke loudly but kindly, whispering a loud whisper that moved her eyes ever so slightly that they revealed a something I could not fathom. It faded just as quickly as it came. She tightened the kanga around her shoulder so the sleeping baby behind her would not hurt her as much. Her face lowered and shielded itself from the sun as she looked for nothing in particular to keep her eyes busy so she didn’t have to look at the man whom she wasn’t supposed to love. She made an excuse in the form of a brief and fleeting sound, followed by a swift departure. Whatever scent she carried, it must have been a beautiful one and the man who spoke to her must have loved it and her eyes. He loved her and the dog lay and the man cried and I sat wiping the moisture off my forehead. The man loved and the kanga cut, over and over, hard on the wooden table and the smell of rotting meat met my nostrils and I turned to avoid it and I saw the horizon and the tree; the lonely tree that had the lonely man sitting under it.

I looked at the cracked, parched ground around me and saw no possibility for the tree’s existence. Yet there it was, a single tree up on the hill that looked over the Kitui that had sad people who walked and loved and cut. The sun began to relinquish its control and the kanga cut slower but the man cried louder. He sat under the tree and cried and yelled inscrutable things into the humid air and the people walked on and the smell of blood was strong and the dog had moved and his tears fell one by one on the ground of the tree that he sat under. I saw his shadow from where I was sitting; his dark, long, dampened shadow. It lay next to him as he cried and yelled and I sat and sweat through my blouse.