

# When the Sun Goes Down

*Goro wa Kamau*  
(Kenya)

Steve was aware of the people's eyes on him as he passed. They stood on the verandas of the little shops with peeling paint and pretended to be engrossed in their chitchat but he could feel the piercing gaze of their eyes like so many fires on his body. But he did not care; by God he did not give a hoot. They could stare till Thy Kingdom Come, the hypocrites! He kept his eyes on the uneven path by the shoulder of the tarmac road on which he had plied for years as a matatu driver. Matatus flew past in both directions going to Murang'a or going to Kangema.

"Wakini, age-mate!"

The salute drew Steve's attention. "Oh, yes age-mate!" he said, knowing that must be Kanja, his friend since boyhood.

"How are you, Son of my Mother?" Kanja asked.

As he always did these days, Steve scanned his friend's eyes for any hint of mischief. Kanja's inquiry seemed genuine enough and Steve was glad he could count at least on one real friend. One real friend – he marvelled at the thought. From a struggling open air mechanic with hardly any friends to a successful entrepreneur running a chain of matatus trying to jostle between the demands of family, business and crowds of friends. He had come down to this: one genuine friend. How the world shrinks!

"I am OK – or so I tell myself," Steve said.

"And how is the One-We-Never-Call-By-Her-Name? You remember the song, brother?"

Steve started to sing:

*My mother I will never call her by name  
I will never insult her  
I will call her the seer who saw for me  
My second God!*

"She is as fine as can be, given the years," Steve enthused. The two men fell in step. Above them the noon sun rode high, casting their stunted shadows at their feet.

The last block of shops stood out. It was a one-storey building and newly painted. "You must have heard I bought this building," Steve said.

"Yes, I've heard many other things besides," Kanja replied.

"I am sure of that," Steve said turning the key and throwing the door open. "In this village, nothing passes unspoken. People just can't mind their own business." There was a tinge of anger in his voice. "Come in age-mate and tell me just what you've heard." They sat behind the counter. "So what have you heard?" he demanded almost immediately.

Kanja had actually expected to discuss the rumours that were going round the village about his friend. After many days of soul searching, he had decided to approach and coax Steve into telling him with his own mouth what he was up to. That is what age-mates were for but he had not expected his friend to be so forthcoming. He was caught off-guard. Still, he quickly composed himself and said: "I hear you plan on marrying Maureen."

"Marry?" Steve spat. After a while he went on: "Well, maybe some day."

In truth, Steve had asked Maureen to marry him. At first she had refused saying she was too old for him and she had *baggage* from her first marriage. But after Steve had assured her he was ready to love her and her children as if they were his own blood, she had gradually begun to think it possible. Then she learnt she had the virus that causes AIDS and said this could never be. Steve had been deeply hurt. Still, he vowed he would never abandon her. They would beat

this thing together. But he could not explain all this to Kanja. What did it matter, anyway?

"Then what is going on between the two of you?"

"Ask the ones who told you I am marrying."

"I want to hear from you," Kanja declared.

"Are you sure you want to hear?"

"I would not have asked."

"Well," Steve stared at the ceiling for a while, "you know me better than most. Ever since we came of age, life has just been one long struggle. Family, business, friends. All drudgery and what do you get in return? It is Maureen who lit the sun in my life and made me realise that all this is vanity. Like chasing after the wind ... She's my friend," Steve asserted almost defiantly.

"Just that? I also hear you are the father of her son," Kanja persisted.

"Tragedy is when children are made by people who are not friends," Steve asserted.

"So it is true?"

"What?"

"You are the father?"

"Ask me another."

For a while, an awkward silence hung between the two men, threatening to cloud the light of friendship.

"I don't blame you. Maureen is sure a smashing beauty," Kanja smiled to break the clouds.

"I don't know what you mean. I used to think so too but what is beauty? Just a good figure? But I ask again. What is beauty?" The silence fell again. Then Steve went on: "I will tell you. Beauty is the promise of happiness. For so long, I was unhappy. Then one morning at sunrise, I remember the day all too well, I met Maureen. She was new in this village. I was driving to Murang'a and she sat in front with me. We did not talk much but something passed between us. That promise – the promise of happiness. It was there in her generous smile, her bellyful of open and cascading laughter. Later in

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Murang'a town as I waited for my matatu to fill, we had a cup of tea and talked a little. She had been married by a soldier who was always accusing her of unfaithfulness, though she knew for sure he kept a mistress. Sometimes when he came home, he would batter and leave her for dead for smiling and laughing with men, he said. Still not wanting to break her family, she held onto her marriage and prayed that God would stop her husband's wayward ways. One day, the man came home ill. The doctor said it was pneumonia. The drugs didn't seem to work and the man was reluctant to seek further treatment. Then he closed his eyes and willed himself dead. When they tried to wake him up, he was dead. Just like that – a very unsoldierly way to die if you ask me. It was a long and touching story of a woman's love and commitment that seemed to fill an emptiness that I had not even suspected existed in my soul. I could have traded my matatus for just that one cup of tea with that woman – I swear, age-mate!"

"I am afraid you've done so already," Kanja said cautiously.

"I said it is a long story. But it is also a simple story no matter what riveting turns and twists you – I mean people here, try to give it. But I maintain you do not yet live until you reserve the right to make your own story. It is not family, money, or even friends who will tell your story. Even if you died, your family and friends can only tell the story you made for yourself and, age-mate, you don't make a story worth telling unless you truly lived!" A wan smile played on Steve's lips as if daring his friend to contradict his assertions.

"I see," Kanja said meaninglessly.

"You've seen nothing yet. Cowards do not make stories and you, my friend, are a great one," Steve charged. "Want to know why I say that?"

Kanja shook his head affirmatively.

"Be-because here you are," Steve's voice was laden with emotion, "an old good friend going on about things you've heard, about me, mind you, and not having the guts to speak the one main thing that you've heard – because nobody knows – you all suspect and then create stories and pass them around. But nobody knows for sure. Yet

you do not have the courage to ask me: age-mate, is it true that your friend Maureen, has AIDS? Instead, you sit here and like all god-forsaken hypocrites go on about what a smashing beauty Maureen is and you, like all the other frauds in this village, have absolutely no idea what beauty is all about. Tragedy is friendship that wears the cloak of hypocrisy! That's how they hanged Jesus, you know. I am no Christ though, but you can crucify me if you want. I do not give a hoot one way or the other."

*(Handwritten mark: 32)*  
"I'm sorry brother, I actually meant to ask," Kanja said apologetically.

"OK, brother. Ask. I'm afraid I lost my cool," Steve threw the gauntlet.

"So is it true?"

"Why are you afraid of speaking the word?" Steve smiled. "And is it not a four-letter word anyway? So why are you afraid?"

"OK, age-mate. So is it true Maureen has AIDS?"

"That is good. You will be surprised that when we put names to our fears, they are not as threatening as they appeared at first. Besides, it is not like you've anything to fear yourself. The last time I knew, you were a hallelujah, drum-beating Christian in the House of Miracle Tabernacle. AIDS is not for the heaven-bound, you know." The sarcasm hit Kanja like a blow, making him grimace. "...but here we go: yes it is true. Maureen has AIDS," Steve affirmed.

Oh! Kanja thought almost audibly. He remembered the first day he met Maureen and how enamoured he had been of her easy-going manner. She had politely turned down his advances. Hurt, Kanja had avoided her and hoped she would keep her mouth shut. But now he saw the hand of God in what had happened. He visualised himself carrying the virus in his body and people talking behind his back and shuddered. Steve was right. He, Kanja, was a coward. He would rather hang himself than have the whole village back-biting him. He looked at his friend. Did Steve also have the big disease with a small name? All this time, Steve held Kanja's eyes in his gaze, a bemused expression on his face. He thinks that

God loves him more because he is not ill. But how does he even know, the fool, Steve thought. He smiled wanly and said, "So now you know, from the horse's own mouth, as they say. Spread the gospel."

"Thank you for confiding in me. I appreciate," Kanja said. "I'm not confiding. Please pass on the word. I am tired of all the rumours and ignorant innuendos. Can I count on you seeing that you are a good, old friend?"

Kanja hesitated, unsure of what to say. Suddenly, Steve rose up. "Come with me," he said leading the way through the back door. They went down a flight of stairs. Walking past rooms that opened on a long veranda, Steve pushed open a door at the far end of the compound. "After you, age-mate," he said ushering his friend into a suite of immaculately kept rooms. Kanja sat on the sofa and savoured the ambience while Steve went into one of the rooms. He came back accompanied by Maureen, her three year old son in tow, tugging at her skirt. The smile was still there but the woman looked somewhat weary. The little boy went and sat on his father's lap. "Maureen, I wanted you to meet one of my old, boyhood friends. Kanja and I ate the knife on the same day on the banks of River Mukungai," Steve said sitting beside his friend.

"Oh, Mr. Kanja. I know him but I didn't know that bit about the knife," Maureen beamed.

"You know him?" Steve asked.

"Of course. Kanja is among the first people I got to know when I came to this market. In fact, we could have been friends. Unfortunately, he wanted discretion. And I did not want to live in the shadows."

"I didn't know that bit either!" Steve exclaimed and started laughing. "In the shadows ...," he said between bursts of mirth. "In the shadows," he repeated, savouring the words as if they held the key to the complexities of life. "So many of us are used to the shadows that when you dare to stand in the light of day, people behave as if you're the one in the wrong!" he said.

Maureen stole a glance at Kanja. The poor man was fidgeting and sweating. She rose and opened the window. She served several glasses of fruit juice and passed them round. Kanja held the glass cautiously, his fingers shaking like an alcoholic's. "Welcome Kanja. It is great to have you visit," she said.

"Kanja has no idea how good it was for him to come. When you are suffering from AIDS, one good friend is all you need to make life less suffocating. A person is only a person through other persons," Steve observed.

"You too? Suffering from AIDS?" Kanja breathed the one question he had been afraid to ask. He sounded perplexed.

Steve smiled vaguely. But before he could speak, Maureen weighed in. The story, she seemed to suggest, was hers to tell. "I remember I had gone for a routine prenatal check when the doctor broke the news. When I was diagnosed with AIDS, I had only one prayer. In that moment when the sun seemed to set on my life, I prayed that my unborn child be free of the virus. I prayed that somehow Steve would be free of the virus too. Oh, how intently I prayed. When my son was born and he turned out negative, my night suddenly went ablaze with a thousand stars. But there was one problem. Steve would not take the test. When he finally acquiesced, he was positive. I was devastated. My stars waned ...."

Steve knew the signs all too well. The clouds were gathering and soon there would be a storm, a deluge, he knew. He did not like the way she spoke. Her earnestness sounded almost unnatural. And why must she try to sanitise him?

"I have forbidden you to blame yourself for anything!" Steve growled.

"Oh, you don't know how it feels seeing you suffer and knowing that I brought this pestilence on you. But I swear I have been a faithful woman ... I was faithful to my husband. I was faithful to you, Steve ....," her voice broke and she burst into tears.

"Listen Maureen," Steve spoke with a tenderness that surprised Kanja. A strange light played in his eyes. "Never cry when the sun

goes down for if you do, the tears will not let you see the stars," he pleaded.

She heaved and gasped painfully, trying to get hold of her emotions. Finally, she wiped her tears and looked at her son, playing innocently on his father's lap. She had two daughters from her first marriage but this boy, the fruit of the only true love she had ever known in her thirty and five years under the sun, was the crown of her life. Still, a fear tugged at her heart leaving her belly feeling an airy hollowness. Would she live to see him grow up into a man? And if she died, would Steve care for him or would he let the boy to wander unloved, unwanted on the harsh streets of life? Maureen had no doubt that Steve would live: he had the will. She wished she too could summon up that kind of spirit. She looked at Steve and their son again, the way a seer peers at the contents of his diviner-gourd to read the secrets of life and she smiled wearily. These were her men. She could die but these two, father and son, would always be together. Nothing could separate them. She could see that in the way the boy sat and played so snugly with his father, in the way Steve held him as if he would never let go. It was such a perfect picture. Just as if the whole world was just the two of them. Still, she wanted reassurance but when she tried to speak, the words would not form. Steve held her eyes in his in that judicious manner of his and she knew he knew what she wanted to ask. And the answer was in his eyes – a more profound answer than any words could speak. In that moment, Maureen felt strangely relaxed and her heart sang: *Ngimbuka nyume thii, Magegania meekwo thii, matari mekwo!* Yes, she would fly out of this world and wonders hitherto unseen would be performed on earth ....

Maureen felt ready to fly.

Witnessing all this, Kanja felt like a fraud, like a sneak and an eavesdropper – desecrating something sacred. He had not touched his juice yet. The glass, nay the cup of suffering, was still there on the table where he had put it. He kept glancing at it as if the HIV virus was a genie he expected to any moment emerge from the glass and

strangle him to death. He wished for a miracle that could remove the glass before him.

"I want more juice," the little boy said.

Steve took Kanja's glass, drank half the contents and then holding the glass to the boy's lips let him drink the rest of the juice. The boy smacked his lips contentedly.

"It is getting late," Kanja said, feeling very small. "I've got to get going."

"I will see you off," Steve said.

The boy would not agree to be left behind. Steve held his hand and together they walked Kanja out. Together as one, Maureen thought watching father and son walk out. A perfect picture: let the maddening crowds take it, frame it, and look at it from all dimensions. Yes, let them bring one better, cleaner, holier picture from the darkly shadows in which they lived! Long after Steve and the boy had left, Maureen stood in the middle of the room gazing at that picture in her mind. The beauty of it tugged painfully at her heart and in spite of herself something gave way. Warm tears flowed freely down her face. If only people were more compassionate . . . .

The sun was already dipping behind the Kianderi hills. "How time flies!" Steve exclaimed when they came to the road. "Let's see you again when the sun rises."

"Yes, let's," Kanja said.

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When he returned, Steve found Maureen coiled up in bed; a picture of dejection. Her Bible, ever-present these days, open at Psalms Twenty-Three. "What is it, Ma?" the little boy asked. He tried to turn her over but Maureen buried her face in the pillows and wept.

The boy started to cry. Maureen sat up and took him in her arms. "You know why your friend did not drink the juice?" she asked between her heart-wrenching cries.

"Yes, of course I know," Steve replied.

"Why are people so cruel?"

"No, Maureen. Normally, people do not mean to be ~~envious~~  
Most are just selfish and ignorant. It is normal, I think, to fear the  
unknown."

"It hurts ... when your age-mate comes to my house and refuses  
to take what I serve him, it hurts," Maureen moaned.

"You must learn to ignore people like that. What they say, what  
they do. What does it matter? Are they not the same people who  
while ago used to speak of how beautiful you are?"

"They didn't mean it!" Maureen scowled like an angry cat.

"Of course they didn't. *Githiekio ti kwendwo*, to be smiled at is not  
to be loved. That's how the elders caution us. But do we listen? No!  
The result? I will tell you. Dysfunctional, loveless families that weigh  
like a millstone around our necks or we are condemned to living  
shadowy, demeaning lives that turn the best among us into mean  
and cruel monsters. I don't consider that living. And verily, verily I  
say unto you: do not be deceived. Despite all the pretences, not many  
people can say they have lived as happily as we have lived these past  
three or so years. That is something. That is everything. And we can  
still live if you always remember to forget the things that make you  
sad, and remember to remember the things that make you glad. Like  
our son, here. Let's always count our blessings, dear."

"You should have been a preacher," Maureen smiled.

Steve felt a strong craving for a cigarette. His lips and fingers  
quivered. He looked longingly at the three cigarettes he had strung  
together and hung at the head of his bed the day the doctor asked  
him to stop smoking. For a while, he struggled with the temptation  
to reach out for one. "Actually, when I was young I toyed with the  
idea of becoming a Catholic priest. My mother discouraged me. I  
was her eldest child, you see, and when my father passed on, I knew  
I had a duty to my ancestors to keep the family name alive. That's  
why for me it is such a good thing that Kimotho is free of the virus.  
When we are gone, he shall bring us back – you and me – to earth  
through his own children. Do you realise that in the next generation,  
we two shall be brother and sister?"

Maureen now laughed. This man, the things he spoke. "But you don't know whether he shall have only sons or only daughters, or even no children at all," she said.

"I am positive . . ."

"Of course you are. The doctor said so," she interjected.

Steve laughed. He felt good. If she could joke about their status, that was a good sign. There was hope. "It is not of that I speak. That I accept. What I meant to say is that I am sure our son shall have a son of his own, who as is customary, he shall name after his father; and a daughter whom he shall name after his mother. In our next life we shall be brother and sister! Don't you see Maureen, today we may have no names in the street. For those who know no better, the virus might be our first names but our names, our remembrance shall never be erased from the face of the earth!"

It was true, Maureen thought. The cycle of life of which Steve spoke was so true. So comforting. Wasn't she herself the reincarnation of her grandmother? Were these not the wonders to be performed when she was gone? How had she forgotten such a natural principle of life? The revelation was so uplifting. She hugged Steve. "I will always love you – in this and the next life," she smiled and for a moment it was just like in the days when they met. "Let me tell you something. One day, I will meet your mother just to tell her what a wonderful man she managed to bring into this world. You know, women don't bring forth boys like you anymore."

In the corner, Steve put a record on the gramophone. In a while, Kamarū's silky-smooth voice filled the house with wistful love lyrics "Till Death Do Us Part." It was one of Steve's favourite records. As he sang along, he marvelled at the power of love to overcome:

*My love*

*I love you like a ring on the finger*

*Or like my bedtime clothes*

*I love you like a mirror directed towards the sun*

*Or like an orange in the month of dryness . . .*



The song held Steve in its spell. And it dawned on him how true the words of the song were. The greatest is love. It was the only sanctuary for those who suffered. Yet, what a short supply it was in! He wished people would not horde love, the way businessmen hid flour so that the price could go up. Always thinking about their profits while across the country, hunger trailed the poor to their beds. What selfishness! what cruelty! God, forgive them for they know not what they do!

It was now dark. Steve stood at the window. A smattering of stars was barely visible in the sky. He switched on the lights and blinked against the sudden brightness that flooded the room.

Maureen was like the sun; the way the pendulum of her moods swung these days, shining bright one moment and hiding behind dark clouds in the next. Now she lay on the bed, the little boy asleep in her arms, looking forlorn, woebegone.

Steve went to the kitchen and started preparing supper. As he fell to work, he smiled to himself with a new remembrance. According to the people, Steve's woman had bewitched him. See how he goes shopping in the market, and I hear he even cooks for her . . . Now what's that if not medicine? A man cooking for a woman? That woman, she's ruined a fine man just so that she can reach his money! Such talk used to enrage Steve. Now he just savoured it indulgently, remembering many years ago when his mother traded clay pots at the Murang'a market. He would help her sometimes. But on many a day, he would be left at home to take care of his sisters – washing for them, cooking for them. So what was the big deal? Let those who must speak because they have mouths to speak. Yes, let them talk.

The food was ready. Mwea *pishori* served with *kunde*, lentils, spinach and fried liver. The little boy gobbled up the food happily but Maureen would not eat no matter how hard Steve tried to coax her. It was a waste of good food, seeing that she was dying anyway, she argued. "You can't hold your health if you don't eat," he pleaded.

"You just must eat and take your drugs every day."

"Oh Steve, you don't know how weary I am. I just wish to rest," Steve tried to jostle with Maureen and managed to force some food into her mouth. She gave in but after she had eaten just a few spoonfuls, she started to gasp as if she would throw up. Nausea. "I just wish to rest," she repeated.

Steve knew very well what she meant by rest. "I have told you many times that you should banish thoughts of death from your mind," he admonished.

"Knowing that every sun that sets brings me closer to the grave?"

"But it does that for everybody."

"Well, yes. Life is a fatal disease. But with AIDS coursing through my veins, I am the living dead already," Maureen declared.

"That's the wrong way to look at it and you know it," Steve retorted with a tinge of impatience. "Why is it when we agree that we must fight this thing together, you keep on retracting? Why?"

"But I am just a woman you know. The mind agrees with you but the spirit is weak," Maureen said.

"You insult yourself. You insult all womanhood. What on earth do you mean, the mind is willing but the spirit is weak?" Steve demanded. But maybe she was right, he mused, Maureen had simply allowed the virus to kill her spirit to live. On second thought, he concluded that this was not even true. This had nothing to do with the fact that she was a woman. It had nothing to do with the virus either. It had to do with her deep-seated sense of guilt. The feeling that she was somehow responsible for his illness. It was an idea that loose speaking mouths had so rooted in her unconscious mind that it was always lying somewhere just below the surface, ready to bubble up any moment at the least excuse. Like a refrain in a dirge or a stuck gramophone record, those idle words repeated themselves so

regularly in her heart that she too had come to believe them. That woman, she's ruined a fine man just so that she can reach his money! No matter how much you loved them, how did one uproot a thorny thicket that grew inside another person's heart? Without Maureen, Steve knew that there should be no sunshine in his world but for the first time ever, he allowed himself to contemplate the terrible possibility of her death.

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"I was a faithful woman ... faithful to my husband ... faithful to this other man, the only man who ever truly loved me and treated me like a woman should be treated. With love. Respect. I was a faith—"

"Maureen, are you alright?" Steve asked, roused from his sleep by her rumbling. He switched on the lights. Maureen coiled away to the far end of the bed, her back against the wall and a dazed expression on her face. She was trembling like somebody who had just woken up from a nightmare. A burst of panic sent spasms of fear cascading down Steve's spine. Gently, he touched her brow. It was scalding hot. Was this the moment he had dreaded?

"Though I walk through the valley of death ... thy rod and thy staff ... comfort me!" Though she sounded coherent, Maureen's eyes had a glassy and empty look.

Steve jumped out of bed and started to dress. His mind was in a turmoil.

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies ..." Maureen mumbled on.

Steve shook her, trying to snap her out of her reverie.

"... my cup overflows"

"Maureen!"

"I- I sha-ll dwe-ll in the hous-e of the Lo-r-d for ever!" She was losing coherence.

"No Maureen, please! Please don't leave me *mama Kimotho*," Steve cried. He held her in his arms and felt her go limp as she lost

consciousness. They say a man's tears flow into his stomach – not to be seen. Steve felt his drip like rain drops. He stormed out of the house to where he parked his pick-up truck in the corner. It had been a long while since he used it but when he turned the ignition, it started readily. He drove it up to his door. He saw a neighbour peeping through the window and gestured to him to come out. He was a young teacher at the local primary school. "Tom, Maureen is very ill. I want to rush her to the hospital. Please help me carry her into the truck."

"The truck cannot be comfortable if she is so ill," Tom pointed out.

"That's true but . . ."

"Mr Kobia's house is just behind the shops. I will see if he can lend me his car," Tom explained and dashed off before Steve could say anything. He came back almost immediately without the car. Steve did not ask what had transpired. They carried Maureen out and sat her in the front seat. She was limp and heavy but her pulse was okay. The hospital was only twenty minutes away and they arrived within no time. Steve explained what had happened. "She is HIV-positive and of late she has refused to take her drugs."

"That's dangerous," the doctor said. He examined her for a while and had her admitted right away. As the nurses wheeled her to the ward, with Steve and Tom trotting beside them, Maureen regained her consciousness.

"Steve dear . . . What's happening? Where are they taking me?" Then realising that she was in hospital, she screamed. "Hospital!" She spat out the word like a bitter pill. "I don't want to die in a hospital, Steve."

"You're not dying, Sister," one of the nurses said soothingly.

"I am dying . . . Why don't you just tell me I am dying!"

Even as she protested and pleaded with Steve not to leave her in the hospital, the two nurses eased Maureen into a bed. When it was

obvious nobody was paying any heed to her protestations, Maureen coiled up in bed in her familiar manner. "Steve, bring your mother to see me. I've an important message for her. Please do not fail." After that, she did not speak any other word – not even to Steve.

The following morning, Steve was up early. After making breakfast and feeding the boy he left him in Tom's house and went to the hospital. He went to the ward. One of the nurses who had attended to them the previous night was at the report desk. Was she avoiding his eyes? With a sense of trepidation, Steve glanced towards the bed in which Maureen had lain. It was empty.

"I'm so sorry, Steve," the nurse said. "Please come with me." He followed her into a small office. "She passed on at around four this morning," she informed him.

Steve was in a daze. Did pass on mean die? "How? Why?"

"Pneumonia," he heard the nurse speak from far, far away.

Opportunistic diseases, Steve thought. The doctor had warned that those were the main threats to a person living with HIV and AIDS. He felt as if his legs would give in under him. He sat down. A bout of dizziness overwhelmed him. Around him everything went dark.

They buried her within the week. A great many people turned up that Saturday for the brief ceremony. Many stood in small groups conversing in whispers. What will he do with the child now? Maybe Maureen's daughters will take care of him. You know, a child once born is never thrown away.

Throughout the ceremony, Steve stood by the grave. He could feel the hundreds of eyes drilling into him, but he did not mind. They could stare till their eyes popped out. Soon the grave was a mound with freshly planted flowers. The people retreated to the perimeters of the farm, talking, whispering and staring.

Steve started looking around. Where was Kimotho? He saw the boy leaning against a banana tree. He walked towards him. "Boy!" he called when he was within ear shot.

"Time to go home, Daddy." The boy came running.

Steve hoisted the boy up, like a flag, and sat him spread-eagled across his shoulders. He could feel the tears dripping into his stomach but he was determined that they should never flow down his face. And in his sadness, the words he had always spoken to Maureen in her moments of depression, now spoke to him with a meaning so profound. When the sun goes down, do not cry because the tears will not let you see the stars. Maureen might be dead but she had left him with this boy, their son, to always remind him of she who once lit up his life so brightly.

As Steve walked away, people cleared the way before him, and the boy waved at them. Bye!

### **Understanding and appreciating the story**

1. Where is Steve when we first meet him?
2. What change has occurred in Steve's life?
3. In your own words, explain Steve's understanding of beauty. How does it differ from the common understanding of beauty?
4. What is Steve's attitude towards those spreading rumours about his condition?
5. Why does Steve consider Kanja a great coward?
6. Why do you think the author uses Maureen to explain how Steve contracted HIV rather than let Steve himself do it?
7. Explain the difference between Maureen's and Steve's attitude towards their HIV status.
8. Does Maureen die because she is infected with HIV? If not what do you think kills her?
9. Contrast Steve's attitude towards women with that of the society in general.
10. Why do you think Mr. Kobia refuses to lend his car to Steve?
11. In note form, discuss how we should treat those infected with, or affected by HIV and AIDS.

12. Why do you think it is important to get tested for HIV?
13. Describe Tom's characteristics. Why do you think Tom seems the only one willing to assist Steve?

**Discussion questions**

1. "Love is a sanctuary for those suffering from HIV and AIDS and other related illnesses." In light of the events in the story and even from your own experience, discuss this statement.
2. "A person is only a person through other persons." What does this mean in the context of the story?
3. One of the greatest challenges to HIV and AIDS is the issue of stigma. How does this affect Maureen in the story and what can we do to eliminate stigma in our society?

Goro wa Kamau  
When the Sun Goes Down  
(Kenya)

**Goro wa Kamau** obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Literature from the University of Nairobi. His first published story was "The Last of the Ogres". He worked as a writer-cum-editor with Jacaranda Designs who published his poems in the anthology *Beneath the Rainbow*. He currently teaches Literature at Egerton University.