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Judy Clark
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1987

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Kuwasi. Now he's gone.

And its like his last loving joke on me, his last gentle bursting of my egotistic bubble. Because i was all ready for a long, lingering heroic battle against disease and death. Ultimately lost, but great tragic courage and sharing. And he did it his way. Fast. Kuwasi was never cut out to be a tragic hero. Or any kind of hero. He hated it and fought it. And subverted many people's attempts to mould him into one or create a myth with which to bury his real self. Which was simple human.

Simply lustful of life and life's sensuous pleasures – food, people, wine and laughter. Lustful too, for battle against the enemy.

He hated hypocrisy and I am writing this because i want to combat our own need for hypocrisy, for myth. Let's not make him bigger than life – but simply human.

Let's not distort his ideology, but claim him as the anarchist he was, who allied with New Afrikan nationalists because it was the best way he saw to fight for the human rights and liberation of his people and all people.

Let's not bury those parts of him - his kinkiness, iconoclasm, individualism, because like it or not, they are part of what fed

his courage, his idealism and willingness to make his life the revolution.

For Kuwasi, fighting for Freedom and living free were one and the same thing.

Maybe Kuwasi died so quickly because he got to that point, looked around at the party that was planned for him and it sure wasn't one of those wine and music and a million people rockers he loved and he escaped before he could be trapped off.

Some people might wish that Kuwasi died a more properly "revolutionary" death, in combat against the enemy or at least from a more respectable disease than AIDS. But AIDS is a scourge of the people, oppressed people. Its endemic because those who suffer its wrath are mainly the dispossessed, the hated, the marginalized. So the system has refused to address it and has punished its victims. Many of our communities have disowned our own in the face of it.

In this prison, (Bedford) women with AIDS are isolated into a filthy ward mixed among other sick women whose germs will kill them. They are punished double, disowned, humiliated, feared and hated. i am glad that Kuwasi did not have to suffer that indignity, even though i greedily wanted him to live longer, because i was not ready to lose him.

Did Kuwasi get AIDS from his transvestite lover, who he persisted to love and insisted entrusting despite pressures and conflicts from the rest of us? i would like to say "from those others" in the revolutionary movements who hardly celebrated that part of his life. But having called for an honest accounting i have to look at my own bourgeois moralism, hypocrisy and self-hating anti-gayness.

But Kuwasi was persistent and consistent in his own way. Kuwasi could love women and men fully, freely, lustfully and most of all with such generosity of spirit that it never felt exploitative.

He didn't live by the rules. Not society's or Christianity's or Islam's or feminism's or the New Afrikan Independence Movement's.

But he did have principles and integrity and honesty.

He'd fight like hell for his positions - but if you convinced him he'd change, and he realized that one's actions had to be consistent with one's principles.

We used to fight furiously about his love of pornography, i can still recall my fury at his exchanging short ice with one of the prison guards! Yet i felt more comfortable, intimate and freer with Kuwasi than almost any man i've known. Comfortable enough to hug and kiss and massage and play through our legal meetings in the county jails. And when he once said that for him making love could mean anything, could mean playing footsies, as long as it was fun and with love, as he sat there, gleefully massaging my bare foot in his lap, i believed him and was delighted and thrilled.

i am fighting the allure of putting my own stamp on Kuwasi, as though it would be any more accurate than any others.

Only Kuwasi can define Kuwasi.

i hope people collect his poems and his theoretical writings, because that will be the truest reflection.

All i can do is speak for myself. That's one of the things Kuwasi taught me.

We are each ourselves and can only vouch for our own partial truths and when we ennoble that into dogmas, or try to enforce or assume collective assumptions through social pressure, we delude ourselves and will pay for it in the end.

Kuwasi believed that and clung to his own ideology and dreams as dogmatically and subjectively as the rest of us.

Which is to say, he was contradictory.

Like the rest of us. Human!!!