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When comes such another? He taught us how to live, and he taught us how to die.

He carried a perfect disguise. He walked among us as if he were ordinary—just like everybody else. You could not look at him and tell that he was different from the rest of us. He had to touch you with his mind, with his heart. Once he did, you were never the same.

People often say they have stood on the shoulders of giants. But in our case—we walked beside a giant, stood beside him, worked beside him, lived beside him. Yet he lived and worked among us as if he were an ordinary man. He fooled us.

Kimenyi loved life. He had been through hell, but he loved life. He suffered: death, terror, and destruction swirled about him. His health was often far from good. His luck was horrible, yet he called himself the lucky one. In the first house he and Mathilde bought, he converted his garage into his study. He put all of his books, his manuscripts, and ongoing research into it. It burned down.

In the days when he did not have a passport, he could not travel outside the country. He decided to go to Hawaii—as far as he could go, and an island paradise. It rained day and night the whole while he was there, and he had to spend his entire visit in paradise looking out of the hotel window. He laughed about that. He had rotten luck, yet he loved life, understood how precious it is.

The first time I saw Kimenyi, I liked him, and the longer I knew him, the more I liked him, until I loved him. I was not alone. So many people wanted to be around him, in his presence, that it was hard to go to Kimenyi's and Mathilde's house and not be part of a crowd. We could not leave them alone.

He loved life. He loved the life of the mind. He was a brilliant intellectual. When he got his Ph.D. from UCLA he was recognized as one of the 10 top young linguists in the country. He lived up to his early promise. But he fooled us. MIT, the top linguistic department in the country, made him a job offer. But he came to Sac State, which didn't even have a linguistics department. He was not like the rest of us.

He was a linguist who transformed his discipline. He was fluent in Kinyarawanda, Swahili, French, and English. He had a fascination and love for words. He was a poet.

"Can you imagine," he'd say. "I couldn't believe it," he'd say. He never lost his wonder at improbable things. He was like a child that way. His mind was always open, amazed at the world around him.

He laughed and made you laugh. He was a son, a husband, a father, a friend. He lived life fully and he was able to take us with him in his delight. He loved Rwanda. He poured his mind and his soul into Rwanda. With the journals *Impuruza*, *Rwanda Nziza*, and *Wighora Rwanda*, he opened the door of hope to an exiled people, to an internally oppressed people. He gave voice to them, and light. Though it was illegal to bring his publications into the country, people smuggled them in, and read them out loud to hidden gatherings. They became torches for change. He was dangerous to his enemies—this slim man, this gentle man, this soft-spoken man.

"Can you imagine?"

Who so loved his family. Mathilde, in her, for once, luck was on his side. She is as beautiful inside as she is outside. I remember when they were engaged, and she was still in Burundi. Kimenyi kept her photograph on his mantle. He said, "This is my fiancée." I laughed. I said, "Kimenyi, you'll never marry anyone so beautiful. You cut that picture out of a magazine." But I was wrong and he was right. He loved his whole family, his parents, his brothers and sisters, his daughter. His sons—he was proud of them.

Kimenyi was a man of courage. Such courage most of us cannot imagine. People associate courage with a battlefield, war. Kimenyi was courageous in the way he lived life every day. Prizes were put on his head. The leaders of his country demanded from the President of Sac State that he deny Kimenyi the use of university stationery. Death threats were common in his life. None of it could shut him up. Even now his enemies are rejoicing because he has died. Nor will that shut him up, either. I can hear him saying, “Can you imagine?”

He always told me he wanted to take me to Rwanda, so I could love it, too. He didn’t realize he had already taken me there: in him, in his family, and in his friends. He had put Rwanda inside of me. Despite the beauty of its hills, its cloudy mists, the brilliant blue of its skies, the deepest beauty of Rwanda is its people, and he had long since planted them in my heart.

Kimenyi lived courageously. As I held his hand last Friday, before he died, he said he knew it was over for him. He preferred to face reality—as he always had. He said there were things he wished he would live to see, but such wishes were only selfish. He would like to see his sons graduate from college; he would like to see them marry. He would like to see his grandchildren. But that was only selfish. What manner of man could say that such normal human wishes were selfish? He was someone who was not like the rest of us.

He said he’d had a good life. He was glad to be able to end it as he would. Seeing people he loved and telling them goodbye. He was glad he hadn’t died suddenly in a car accident with no chance to say goodbye. I’m sure he was also glad he did not die being hacked to death by machetes, hearing the screams of his dying loved ones around him. But he didn’t say that. He died the way he lived, surrounded by those he loved, and who loved him. He died the way he lived, with uncommon courage, making his departure easier for those he loved so deeply.

His presence in this world made it a better place for all those who loved him—and for untold multitudes who did not know him, and many who will never know his name.

While he lived, I did not need to see him often, it was enough for me to know he was alive and in the world.

Now, a light has gone out in the heavens, and on this earth.

Kimenyi was a light in the darkness of this troubled world. We are all the better for having stood beside this giant, who always fooled us and made us think he was the same size we are.

Now, he belongs to the ages.

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