

## Man Must Live

Connect this with Kant's notions that we are obliged to develop our talents, and that our self-love entails pursuit of life.

The following poem was written by Kwame Dawes as part of a project focused on the HIV/AIDS epidemic as found in Jamaica, where Dawes once lived. The poem expresses a stricken man's will to live and echoes, perhaps, Kant's notion that we find in us a natural impulse for life.

"Nichol," for example, who once worked in a bar, an imposing man before he contracted HIV and suffered a series of strokes.

### *Nichol*

How coolly it has broken you,  
trying to mask the knowing  
wit behind your eyes –

every smile, brilliant  
against your gleaming  
black skin, is defiance.

You stammer, push out  
words; tell your story;  
slap your knees to show

Where your stroke-frozen  
body would crawl  
across the concrete

to reach the yard,  
with the gawking  
on-lookers. You laugh.

"Man must live.  
Man must live."  
How casually broken.

Tall lanky man  
hands clawed yams  
dangling, and the sweet

club mans charm  
in your grin, still all those  
women slain by your art.

You stretch out your legs  
tell your story slow,  
persistent as the crawl

you made towards sunlight,  
the way you pulled your body upright,

the way you made tender  
the toughness of hard men  
who would soon wash you,

feed you with oily fingers  
full of mashed ackee  
and tomatoes, who have

held you against  
the night, men, tough  
as teeth, hard men.

"Man must live  
Man must live."  
The virus stalks

through your blood,  
manages to tickle,  
make you laugh

at a new sunny day –  
and yours is the posture  
of survival.

Dawes has constructed a website setting these poems to images:

<http://livehopelove.com>

Here, you will find an interview with Dawes from the PBS Newshour:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/video/47>