

REQUIEM FOR MAINDA

by Kuki Gallmann (An extract from my diary)

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Today Mainda, one of our male black rhino, has been speared to death by a Pokot tribesman, just inside the ranch boundary, on the Kurua hills. When I heard the news on the radio, I just could not believe it. This is the first incident of poaching in about ten years.

Mainda was the first rhino Rob Brett had immobilized and outfitted with a radio transmitter back in 1987, on a breathless July day, a fine young male who kept going out of the boundary looking for a female.

Batteries do not last forever. Another radio was fitted when the first one eventually stopped working. It sent signals that allowed Rob to locate him, asleep below some lelechuwa bush during the day, or trotting off out of Ol Ari Nyiro in his restless search for a companion. Our antipoaching team went after him several times, far into the hills, and pushed him back again and again to where he was safe.

And why should Mainda have known of man-made boundaries to safety? No fence, no ditch mark that environment. The hills look the same, the food is still there along the slopes of the Makutan Gorge where he was born. Perhaps a female waits, yet unclaimed by the dominant males of Ol Ari Nyiro, which do not let him breed. In his drowsy existence, which follows ancient patterns, why should he know that all other free-ranging rhino in Laikipia have been killed long ago? That danger, born of hunger, ignorance and greed, lurks in wait where our protection cannot reach?

Ol Ari Nyiro is not an island. Surrounded by settlement where little wilderness has been left: perhaps a shy nocturnal hare? a scared dik dik? a clever duiker which has managed to escape the snare? a cunning scuttling snake? the birds free as the wind, and which, like the wind, know no boundary?

I can so well see what happened.

Mainda trots about, sniffing high, intoxicated with the fresh scent of growing things, tender sprouts of new leaves, euphorbia, spiky and sweet. The heat makes him drowsy. The welcoming shade of a lelechuwa bush waits for his noon rest. He stops, unaware that someone carefully, slowly, step by step, parting with trembling hands the crackling shrubs, is prowling towards him. The wind carries no smell of danger: the hunter knows better.

In a flash of incomprehensible pain, the spear is deep into his side.

Twice, it was the dart of the friendly gun which made him, after a brief sharp pain, dizzy, comatose, and oblivious. Burned deep in the foggy memory of his life experiences, are hushed human voices, the busy shadows of people working around him, inserting needles into his thick hide, drops into his half-open eyes to keep them moist, pouring water on his back and head to keep him cool. Fixing an annoying little device to his ear, which will allow that pale human to find him always, asleep in the thick bush in the heat of the day. Soon it was over and he was free again.

Now it is somehow different. There is not the noise of the small red plane circling above to check on him, the pain gets sharper, deeper, tearing away at his tender intestines, cutting through veins and arteries, reaching down to the life core of his being.

Instinctively, he turns and runs back to the familiar land, covered in sanseveria and aloe, of his native country up