

KUKI GALLMANN

*I Dreamed of Africa*

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For Anne,  
with fondness love  
and total respect -  
I shared love to Africa  
your friend



Nairobi, 18th July 1991

*In memory of Paolo and Emanuele*

A hope beyond the shadow of a dream . . .

John Keats, *Endymion*

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which could affect many people and have far-reaching results without relying on Paolo's judgement and experienced help. But a plan of action to protect the wildlife was needed: however much it cost, I was determined to succeed.

## Death of a Rhino

The immense longing not just to protect, but to rehabilitate the Earth.

Laurens van der Post, *A Walk with a White Bushman*

One day, Luka found the corpse of another rhino down the Mukutan. It was Bianco. He was the huge male who used to come regularly to drink at the springs below the little hut on the Mukutan, and Paolo had called him Bianco because of his very pale powdery coat. His death meant more to me than all the others' because I knew that rhino: it was now time to do something consistent and effective, and I consulted with Colin.

Including Bianco, nine rhinos were killed on the ranch between the end of 1979 and 1980. If no action was immediately taken, all would go. To make the anti-poaching Security effective, we needed to double their numbers and to equip them properly. We needed guns, radios, uniforms and adequate means of transport. Colin could provide the training and leadership. I could renounce my profits, and invest them in maintaining and paying the salaries of all the extra personnel. With the drought and the resulting effect on the breeding of cattle which affected our sales, it was a gigantic burden. I felt, however, that I was a trustee to the land. Paolo and I had found the place teeming with wildlife. I could not give up. My task was to protect it, and to do that the first step was to improve our Security. I gave Colin *carte blanche* to employ as many people as he felt were needed. The Security was now



doubled to thirty-two men. I could not, however, afford to equip them.

To my rescue came Richard Leakey. I had not yet met him, but I had known his brother Philip since the early days. Richard was then Vice-Chairman of the East African Wildlife Society, and Director of Museums. He was young for that task and had a reputation for being ruthless, ambitious, and not suffering fools gladly. Philip, who knew Colin well and was aware of our problems, suggested that Richard might be able to help. He organized a meeting and I went to Richard's office at the Museum.

The first feature I notice in a person is always the eyes. Richard's brown eyes radiated intelligence, wit and curiosity. There was a restlessness about him as if he could not bear to waste time, but he could concentrate on an issue deeply and competently, and deal with it with flair. If he chooses, he can be charming. He greeted me with: 'I have heard a lot of things about you.' He grinned. 'All good.'

'I have also. Not all good.' I grinned back. 'But I like to make up my own mind about people.'

We discussed the ranch, its wildlife, the Security and my commitment to curb the poaching and to protect the animals which happened to be on the land. He understood the problem immediately, sympathized, and promised to help. I could see he would never support me if he did not believe that what I was trying to achieve was worth it.

Ol Ari Nyiro was home to the largest known population of indigenous black rhino remaining on private land in Kenya: this was a known fact, and invaluable from the point of view of conservation and research. They needed to be protected, as their loss would be irreparable.

Before I left, Richard said, 'I am very interested in your circles. Perhaps one day you will let me investigate them.'

I did not have the faintest idea what he was talking about. I looked puzzled, and at myself, as if I feared I might have grown some strange spots. Richard explained that flying over the ranch

on his way to Koobi-Fora he had noticed unusual formations, in a circle shape, of darker and thicker vegetation, which defined the perimeter of very large areas on the ranch, and he was curious to discover what they were. The idea was most exciting to me who, as a little girl, had followed my father on his archaeological expeditions in Veneto, searching for fossils and ancient artefacts.

It took Richard only a few weeks to organize radios and old .303 guns for the Security: our anti-poaching campaign was born. From that first encounter, a relationship destined to last, based on mutual respect and trust, was established between us, and over the years we became true friends.

Richard pursued his goals with clear-minded determination and great intelligence. He was a workaholic. He worked like one who cannot bear to waste precious time. Waking up long before sunrise and going to bed early, refusing social commitments at night, he produced a tremendous amount of work. He had no patience with people who were slow or inconsistent or stupid, but he was very fair, and was worshipped by his staff. His achievements were staggering, and it was difficult, when he made one of his speeches on anthropology or on anything else, not to fall under his spell. I imagine that Richard had learnt the value of time when he thought he had none left, when his kidneys became infected and he had to undergo a kidney transplant. It was his brother Philip who had then given him one of his kidneys, and another chance of life. Richard was a gourmet and loved good food and wine, and sailing north of Lamu where he had a house. He was an excellent and safe pilot, but he regarded flying as a means of getting somewhere quickly, not as a pleasure in itself: he valued his life too much to take risks, and during the rainy season he avoided the sky. Like all Leakeys he loved dogs, and some of Gordon's progeny became his lucky pets. Richard had an exceptional family, and I became fond of his wife Meave and of their daughters, Samira and Louise, bright lively girls who often came to Laikipia to stay, and who loved riding camels, racing them up and down my airstrip with mad screams.

\*



The challenges were enormous, and more difficult than I had ever imagined. My solitude was beginning to become a burden to me, and my friends and my small child could not really fill it. These were the toughest years of my life, but as I had decided to stay and make a success of it, I cried my tears unseen in the night, and during the day I got on with the job.

Paolo's daughters were away. The elder, Valeria, in India with Mario at the time of the accident, only discovered what had happened months later through a chance phone call to her maternal grandmother in Italy. When I heard about this, I was happy that Mario was there to take care of her, which he did and has done since, as they are still happily together. The younger, Livia, was sixteen, and Paolo's death affected her badly. Artistic and bright, original, unpredictable and highly-strung, Livia had never been an easy child. Her mother's death when she was only five years old had created an emotional gap no amount of love and care could ever truly fill. She had been Paolo's favourite daughter, and his disappearance added to her misery.

I had Emanuele with me. He was fourteen, and coped as I expected: deep in his school work, he drowned his sorrow at Paolo's absence in his books, and in the passion which could somehow substitute for the excitement of those forever lost adventures after a buffalo or a lion. It was an odd and unusual passion, which he had had since he was small, but which I felt I should not restrain.

Snakes.

## *A Dangerous Passion*

The serpent, subtlest beast of all the field.

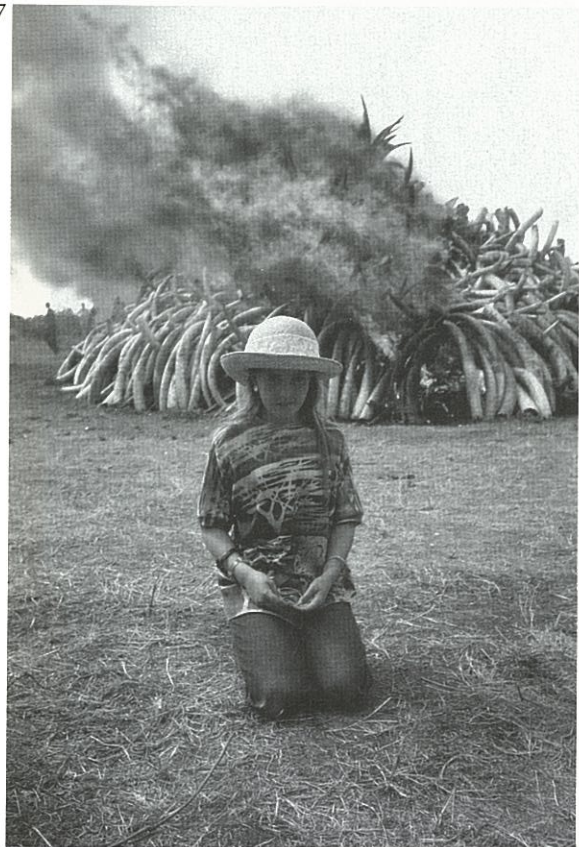
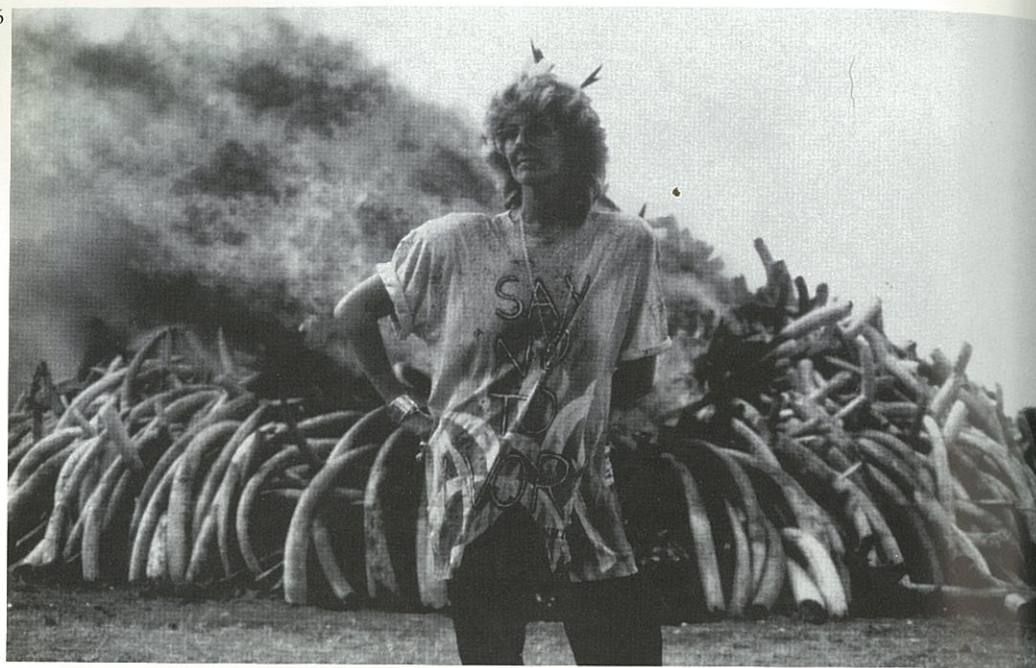
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

There lived in Ol Ari Nyiro an old Turkana herdsman with a long curly grey beard – very uncommon for Turkana – which made him look like St Joseph in the Crib, and this is what Paolo and I called him. He had a noble countenance, a proud and handsome profile, like the saints painted on church ceilings. They brought him to me at Kuti one day, one leg hideously swollen by the bite of a snake which had escaped unseen, and which could have been a burrowing viper or a small puff-adder. It was my first experience of snakes in Laikipia.

Simon, who took any Turkana cause much to heart, came to announce this event, and gravely brought me to inspect the man. He lay on the back lawn, mute, with closed eyes, wrapped in a threadbare blanket, looking more than ever like a dying saint in a fresco. Ngobithu stood by, waiting to see what action I would take.

I was used to treating all sorts of illness at the ranch, from children's coughs to septic wounds, from dehydration to female problems. I even set a couple of broken bones, and dealt with twisted ligaments, and I had found that there was a touching, unending faith in our people in my ability to perform miracles on their minor illnesses: I had never yet had to deal with a snake bite,



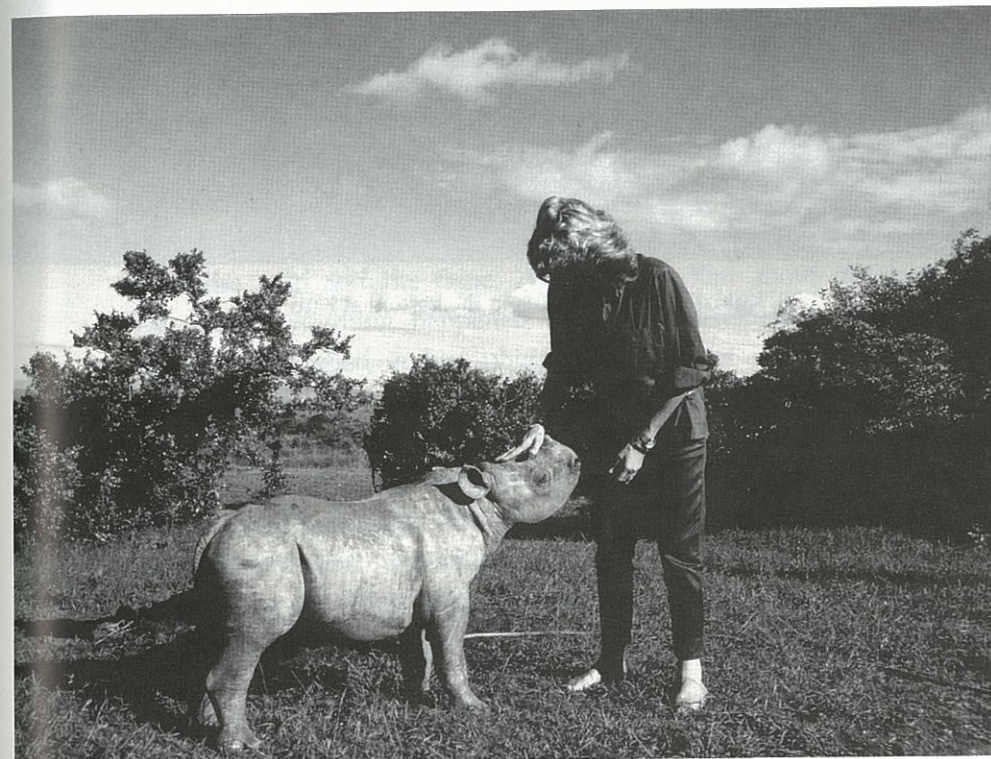


26. Kuki: the ivory fire

27. Sveva: the ivory fire

28. Richard Leakey at Kuti

29. Kuki with a baby rhino







22. Sveva and rhino skulls

23. Rhino in thick bush at Ol Ari Nyiro

24. Kuki with Michael Werikhe, who raised funds for black rhino by walking through Europe and donated some money for their protection at Ol Ari Nyiro

25. Elephant rescue: Colin reviving a wounded elephant