‘Oh, for goodness sake – they’re here again!’

I shrink back into the long, overgrown weeds, that are slowly but surely becoming my friends, hiding me, protecting me, shielding me from the intrusive beings. Hopefully, it will be another blistering hot day and they will give up – give up to their weak skins, their dehydration, their disgusting sweat; that is sometimes so over powering I don’t know how they live with themselves.

6

When I was younger, it seemed fun, as they visit on a daily basis with a detachable eye that they need to look through to be able to see me – sometimes the eye clicks or whirrs as they spot me. I was happy to give a performance then. Dancing in and out of their vision as I played hide and seek with them. They are not very good at hiding – their smell always gives them away.

“There are two types of being,” my mother would always say “One, there is no need to be afraid of – but the other, pure evil – the smell that emanates from them is pure evil. They carry sticks, sticks that they raise, sticks that make a deafening noise.”

I never understood, how could sticks cause me a problem? I chew sticks, to clean my teeth after dinner of fresh zebra caught by my mother and her sisters, my Aunts. They do crunch but a deafening noise? But then one day – I was about four - my life changed.

As a family we walked, through the beautiful Savannah – towards the mountains in the distance. The blazing sun beginning hide as it slipped slowly downwards and the shadows lengthening as the light began to fade. when I first smelt it. We all smelt it. We froze. Lowering our bodies to the cooling earth, hidden in the gently swaying grasses – we waited. The air was thick with tension.

19

“Father?”

“Shhhhhhh – son” he whispered,

“But what is it?”

“shhhhh” my mother replied, “just wait!”

But I wanted to know – I began to move, ignoring my mother’s startled movement to remain where I was. The smell was intriguing Beings, yes, but something else. I stretch out my limbs as I stood. I felt rather than saw my father move – he was lunging towards me – his eyes bright in fear, nostrils flaring as he stretched out his body.

“BANG!” the noise was deafening. I saw my mother run, calling for me to follow. I ran too. Not looking back to see what the sound was or to discover what the smell was. We charged through the thicket, crashing past any thorny bushes, snapping tiny branches, a cacophony of noise as we disturbed the wildlife on the ground and in the air as they too tried to escape, protect their young– escape from us.

Finally, we stopped. Breathless, I slowly turned to my mother, to see her eyes wet, tears falling profusely, her shoulders quivering behind the sobs that she tried so hard to contain. My brow furrowed

“Mother?”

“Son,” she could barely talk “Son, why didn’t you listen? Why?”

I did not understand as she turned and walked away from me – I began to follow her when my aunt blocked my way, looking sadly at me, shaking her head, and sighing softly.

“Leave her!” she too walked away – I was left alone as one by one the pride walked away – the sat watching the day end.

My life changed that day – I never saw my father again and did not understand why – it was not until I was older, much older that I witnessed the stick again – and then I knew – my father had died, protecting me.

Now when I see the beings, with their glass eye, I am wary – they are not my friends and I am not their performer.

