



# THE GORILLA

I am called Einstein. How I came by this name will be revealed to you in due course. For now, suffice it to say that it is the name by which most humans know me, and so, to avoid confusion, I will stick to Einstein.

I was born in the mountains high above a valley in a land that is known by humans as the birthplace of humanity. I have since learned that this is not entirely true. It is the birthplace of one species of human – *Homo sapiens*. But this is another matter.

Earliest memory. My mother's smell, musky and ripe, enveloping me as I suck on her teat. Nearby my father rests while my older brothers and sisters play, their joy as soothing as the sun that warms my face. I half-listen as they tumble and squeal and chase each other among the trees. I do not dream. There is no time to dream because I am barely asleep when I feel my mother's muscles tense. Suddenly, violently, she erupts. Then a crack, like a tree splitting, and from behind closed eyes I see a silhouette of mountain ridge that forms the backbone of our forest home spewing liquid fire.

When I open my eyes a murderous creature with three arms stands before me. One of his arms spits sparks that kill, and he points it at my mother. A second later I tumble from her grasp only to be snatched up and thrust into a bag. Now his companions surround us and several more cracks follow the first. I cannot see what is happening but I can hear all too well, and then it is over as quickly as it begins.

To this day memories of my family are vague, for I was very young when they were killed. Even now I cannot tell you what I felt when I lost them, for there are no words in my language, or yours, which can convey my grief. I was spared simply because I was worth more to the poachers alive than dead.

Another memory. A town. Everywhere I look there are these creatures called humans in all shapes, sizes and colours. I am mesmerised and terrified. I stare. I cannot help myself. I see that, like us, they have only two arms and two legs, ten fingers and ten toes, two nipples, eyes that face forward, and no tail. They stand and walk upright and their legs are generally stronger than their arms. And though their scent is different from ours, it is not so different. But as I study these first humans I encounter, I wonder most at their skin. Apart from their heads, they lack any hair worth mentioning, and so cover themselves in bright colours and textures called

clothes. All of this fascinates me, but it does not lessen my terror.

It is morning when we arrive in town, and already it is hot and windless. The humans that live there are packed together like ants, but unlike ants they live in squalor and chaos. The streets are crammed with cars, each one blaring its horn into a din which is already deafening. We stop and start and stall amid the traffic, the fumes choking me, until we reach a large central square. Everywhere humans jostle and shout while their ragged children dart and swoop among the stalls, vying for scraps of discarded food like vultures over a carcass. Squabbles between stallholders and customers pass for conversation, yet in the midst of the chaos many things are exchanged. So many unfamiliar objects, so many different scents, so many vivid colours and sounds. My senses are overwhelmed, but I am not alone. There are other young animals like me who have been stolen from their families. Even so, we are not the only victims.

In the middle of the square, unsheltered from the sun, humans sit cross-legged, their heads bowed. A few brave ones raise their eyes to stare at the hard-faced men who guard them, and for this act of defiance they are struck with the butt of a gun. I watch as the men are separated from the women and

children. It is the latter who are sold first. Buyers raise their fists and bare their teeth, pushing and arguing among themselves as they prod and examine each female and child in turn.

One young female in particular is sought after by many and there is much haggling over her price. When she is sold she refuses to follow her new master, and he punches her with such force that she buckles and falls to her knees. Then he grabs her by the hair and drags her until, crying and screaming, she struggles to her feet. When all the females and children are sold the men are auctioned, and the buyers bid fiercely for the youngest and strongest among them.

A human arrives who has nothing to exchange. He is easy to spot, and I watch him as he weaves among the various stalls casting hungry looks here and there. Soon he sees his opportunity, and he grabs the thing he desires and runs. He is cocky and swift and I think he will escape, but the square is teeming with merchants and the one from whom he has stolen cries out. Before long the man is grabbed by a furious crowd, beaten, and set alight. Afterwards, the stench of his burning flesh lingers in the air like a threat.

When the commotion dies down signals are exchanged. Now it is our turn, and I and my fellows are brought out in our baskets and cages and stacked – one on top of the other – like the carpets and rugs

that lie in piles behind us. Among us are bright green snakes, exotic birds with feathers as vibrant as tropical flowers, chimps, monkeys, even baby tigers and lions. Eager buyers approach, pushing and shoving one another while deals are quickly struck. Afterwards the buyers depart, and later, when the market is spent, we are delivered to our various destinations.

I am one of the first to be sold to a human called Middleman. He lifts me roughly from my basket and inspects me carefully, lifting each arm and leg in turn, checking my eyes and mouth, my teeth and ears, turning my head from side to side and finally, flipping me onto my stomach and running his hand along my spine. When he is satisfied he hands my trader a wad of paper called money and leaves. Many hours later I am delivered to his house where his children prod me with sticks, shrieking and laughing and baring their teeth in hideous grins while their mother sits in a chair sucking on a pipe and blowing smoke from between cracked lips.

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I remained at Middleman's house for several weeks, tormented and desperate, too frightened to sleep and too tired to stay awake. Finally, he sold me to another man. This other man lived far away and it took many

weeks for me to travel to his land. I do not recall much of the journey. My guards stuck needles into me and afterwards I slept. But when I was awake I was hungry and thirsty and very frightened, so frightened that by the time I arrived at Circus I could hardly remember feeling anything else.

## THE ELEPHANT

*The morning you were born, says my mother, the sun rose late and the sky wept for joy.*

Her gaze shifts from me to the herd, and obediently the herd nods. Before I was born we had the longest dry season any of them could remember and, like me, they sense that her words are more than just a reminder.

*Listen, she continues. My son brought into the world life and luck. For this reason I have named him Bahati. Look well and remember.*

A few of the younger ones turn away. I have other names, you see, names they've given me. Newby, Flatfoot, Patch. Before that Speckles, Spotty, Pink. As long as they play with me I don't care, but my mother has grown tired of their teasing and so she's laid down the law. She can do this because she's the matriarch of our herd.

She turns and motions for me to step in behind her. We're off, the two of us at the head of the herd. I grab her tail while the others fall into line. She's leading us to water. Always to water. No one questions



whether she will find it, even though each day we travel further and further. We settle into a steady plod. There's no hurry. We'll keep going until we find it, and if we don't, we'll keep going anyway.

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There used to be a river nearby. It ran fast in the winter and in summer it wound long and cool. We drank from it. Splashed in it. Not now. Now it's an oily sludge lying still as a bloated snake.

Dust swirls and fills my trunk. I drop my mother's tail and blow to clear it. All around us the earth is parched, the rains that welcomed my birth a brief reminder of what once was. I blink. Through my mother's legs I catch glimpses of the horizon. A snow-capped mountain strains to grab the rising sun. But there's something else there now. Before there was nothing, and then skeletons appeared, and those skeletons grew, and very quickly they became solid, angular and immovable, as if saying to the surrounding landscape, *We are here and now you must go*. My mother calls them 'the hills that spit poison'. They huddle beneath our mountain, nibbling at the sky and spewing fumes the colour of sunbaked earth.

A bump from behind. I stumble and turn my head. My friends run past me, trunks raised, ears catching

the wind. They've broken ranks. It's time to play. *Wait for me!* I hurry to join them. I'm the youngest and always the last to catch up. Kesi stops and turns to wait for me. She's older than me – only a few months, but because of this she likes to pretend she's my mother.

We reach the others. They swirl and run circles around us. Kesi charges, breaking the circle. Now the others follow and soon it's a game of tussle and tag. Squeals and grunts fill the air. Not for long. My mother trumpets softly and we quickly fall into line.

Hours pass. Each grows hotter and dustier, and all around me I feel fatigue stealing over our herd. It's late afternoon. We've been travelling since dawn. I'm tired and I want to rest. I pull on my mother's tail, but she ignores me. We carry on, the sound of our plodding like fat raindrops.

Finally, we stop to lie down, all of us in our mother's shadows. When it's time to go my mother reaches out her trunk and caresses my head, but I don't want to get up. Not yet. She signals to the others to go on ahead and with her trunk points the way. I open one eye to watch them leave. Then I go back to sleep.

## THE SOW

You'll have to forgive me. I'm a bit short of breath. It . . . oh dear, here we go . . . it comes and goes. Are you in a hurry?

Good. Then bear with me and, well, I'll begin.

I woke early. I'd slept – you could call it that, I guess. I'd slept on my chest, same as always, my hooves poking through the metal slats. Once I woke up and tried to sta . . . stand, but my hoof was caught. Caught so that I twisted it. There's no room in my stall to turn around, no room in any of our stalls, or to lie down on my side. That's the model now. *More efficient*, Boss says. *More economic*. Too much trouble to put us outside is what he means. But it wasn't the pain in my chest and joints that woke me that morning. Or the cold steel pressing against my legs and sternum. Or the smell of my own feces wafting up through the slats from the pit beneath me. Or even the agony of my sister sows. I was used to that. What woke me was something else. It was farrowing time.

The day before the one I'm telling you about a new face appeared in our shed. Not unusual. No, not

unusual at all. The humans that moved among us, they .... forgive me .... they changed often. What was unusual was the expression on this one's face. At first I was frightened. Yes, I'll admit I was frightened, and then just plain curious. This was unusual. Shouldn't have been. Shouldn't have been unusual to be curious, but I hadn't been curious about anything for a very long time.

The new face was being shown around by Boss, and none of us *ever* looked at Boss. Why? For fear of drawing his attention. You didn't want to be singled out by Boss on any account because you could guarantee that it would be unpleasant. Sometimes fatal. Boss's wife, she was .... you could say she was even worse, but she rarely made an appearance. The smell of our waste was more than she could bear. There were a thousand of us crammed into that shed. A thousand. The smell was more than any of us could bear, but we were stuck. Each of us confined for life in a six-by-two-foot metal enclosure. Imagine that. Go ahead. I'd like to see you try.

When he entered the shed the first thing the newcomer did was lift his blue bandana from around his neck and cover his nose. Covered his nose and just stood there. He seemed confused. No surprise there, because as soon as he stepped inside it took his eyes a moment to adjust. Not to the light, mind you. To

the sight of a thousand sows crammed together like piglets in the womb; a womb made of steel bars and slatted floors. As soon as he got his bearings his confusion gave way to disbelief. Disbelief then disgust, and disgust to sheer wonder. None of these made the least impression upon me. I'd seen it all before. What caught my attention was his look of pi . . . . pity, I guess you'd call it. It pushed all other emotion from his face until he stood there wide-eyed and speechless and near to tears. We could hardly believe it. The only time any of us had ever seen a human cry were the times Boss and his wife argued. The boy tried to wipe his eyes before Boss noticed, but he was too late. Too late, because right away Boss said, *Pull yerself together, Billy.*

I watched the new boy called Billy. He straightened and tried his best to look tough, but it was no use. He caught me watching him, the boy did, and when our eyes met I could see that he wasn't going to be like the others that came and went. He wouldn't grow hard after a few short weeks, and then later, after a month or two, join in the abuse and cruelty we endured daily. He was different. How did I know this? I can't say. A sixth sense. An animal sense. A sense that humans have long since lost.

Boss looked at Billy, and at the same time gestured a hand down our row. *These here are ready to farrow,*

he said. *They'll be moved tomorrow morning. We start at six. Don't be late.*

Billy nodded and followed Boss as he made his way down our row. The sister sow on my right lost her first litter. Premature. One by one they'd fallen into the manure pit below. Wasn't the first time that'd happened and wouldn't be the last. Boss was furious and fired the shift worker for not noticing she was in labor. So the shift worker beat her. He beat her, and now five months later she was ready to give birth to her second litter. Her number was branded on her rump just like the rest of us. Hers was 889, but she called herself Ina, and she bore the scar on her head where the shift worker struck . . . . oh dear, I . . . . forgive me. I need to stop for a minute or two. I'm having trouble . . . . trouble breathing.

There, that's better. Where was I? Oh yes. He struck her with a metal rod. I was there when he did it, and I remember it like it was yesterday. The boy Billy noticed her scar but said nothing. Wasn't anything to say.

When they'd finished their rounds Boss took Billy's arm and moved him out of the shed. He wanted to show him the farrowing crates, he said, and the nurseries, and the grow-out barns, and introduce him to Mrs Boss. And so they disappeared beyond the shed doors to the place where the light was different from

the cold, harsh light of our shed. Brighter and fresher and fierce in summer, but somehow kinder even so. Sometimes the doors would be left open and we could, some of us, we could see that there were times when there was no light at all in that unfamiliar place beyond the doors, and we told this to the others, and all of us thought it must be soothing now and again to have darkness like a soft blanket thrown over one's eyes. We'd never experienced it, but we knew. We knew instinctively that it would comfort us.

## THE ORCA

Mad. Unpredictable. Psychotic. Violent. Stubborn.  
Depressed.

All of them have been used to describe me by the humans that know me best and by others who don't know me at all. Am I all of these things? Some of these things? None of these things?

Do I know? Do I care?

At one time I would have said yes.

But not now.

The park vet came to see me today. He said I have a bacterial lung infection and I'll be dead in a year.

Do I believe him? Do I care?

At one time I would have said yes.

But not now.

Now there is only one thing I know with certainty.  
I am bored. Bored to death.

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I suppose you've heard the rumors. Of course you have. Everybody knows that I'm responsible for the



deaths of three of my trainers. The first two I dispatched with the help of my harem. The last one? That was *all* me.

But I'm jumping ahead of myself. *Jumping the gun* as my trainers would say. What's the hurry? Start from the beginning. Give the folks the whole picture. That's what they paid for, right? The whole picture. The whole shebang. The whole enchilada.

Are you ready? Ready, everyone? Clap your hands if you're ready. That's it. Come on, folks. Let me see *eeeverybody* put their hands together and give a great *BIG* welcome to the star of our show. Ready? Oh, jeez. That's pathetic. I know you can do better than that. Come on now. What's that? I can't hee-*earr* you. All right then! Give it up for the greatest! The one and only! Our *VERY* own killer *whay-luhhh* ...

TUPILAK!

Excellent. Now let the show begin.

## THE FOXHOUND

I'll start by describing Sir Robert, shall I? What's that? Yes, why not indeed.

He presented a dashing figure, Sir Robert did. He knew it too. One could tell by the way he admired himself in his dressing-room mirror: scarlet coat, black-brimmed cap, white breeches sleek against muscled thighs, and black boots with tan tops freshly polished. When he readied himself for the first formal hunt of the season I alone was permitted to attend. Because of it the others referred to me as the butler. I took no notice. I knew their remarks were born of envy. *Small minds*, as Sir Robert used to say.

I looked forward to the hunting season. We both did. The thrill of the hunt was, quite simply, exhilarating. But there were the social events as well: the picnics, drinks parties, dinners, balls and, of course, plenty of admiring young women. Sir Robert – or Robbie as he was known to his friends and Sir Rob to his staff – was invariably the centre of attention, and this meant that I, Major, was also the centre of attention. A role, I don't mind confessing, I relished

as much as Sir Robert did, and one which I exploited for all it was worth.

It may interest you to know that I can trace my ancestry back to the late 1700s, a fact which, in spite of everything that's happened since, I'm still rather proud. I learned of this through Sir Robert. He often bragged of it to members of the hunt, referring to me as the *other* aristocrat. Among his hounds – some forty by last count – I was the undisputed favourite, and Sir Robert was frequently approached by breeders asking if I might be available to stud. On these occasions he was all too willing to recount for them my rise to top dog, a position that brought with it many privileges and much praise.

He would begin the tale with the story of my first cub hunt when, as a young hound, I was taken with my siblings and other juniors for trial. It was in early September of the year following my birth. The kennelman roused us just as the sun breached the horizon. Upon waking we were, as usual, famished, but on the morning of the hunt our ration was withheld in its entirety, and we wondered if we were being punished. It even occurred to us that the kennelman – silly old chap – had got sloshed the night before and had simply forgotten to feed us. It wasn't until we joined the hunting staff, horses and members of the hunt on that chilly October dawn that I

understood something out of the ordinary was about to take place.

After being roused from sleep we were marshalled into the courtyard where Sir Robert, mounted, awaited us. On either side of him, also mounted, were the master of hounds, the huntsman and the first whip, and behind them the second whip, the field master and mounted field. The spectacle nearly overwhelmed me. Each member of the hunting party was dressed informally, as befitted the occasion, in standard ratcatcher attire: black hunting caps or brown bowlers, tweed hacking jackets tailored and vented, and light-coloured shirts. Some opted for ties, others preferred stock and pin. Sir Robert wore buff breeches while the others wore tan. All wore black or brown leather boots with spurs worn down and carried whips with thong and lash removed. It wasn't as flamboyant a sight as that of the formal colours worn for the season's opening meets, but it was impressive nonetheless, and over it all hung an aura of giddy expectation. Around me my pack swarmed, singing and wagging their tails, while men and women struggled to contain mounts eager to set off. While we waited several of the men laid odds on various hounds. My name came up repeatedly, and I could not help but notice that Sir Robert was paying me close attention. This gave me a sense of importance

but also added to the pressure I was already feeling, and so made me more determined than ever not to disappoint him.

At a command from Sir Robert we held hard. A moment later the huntsman blew his horn. This was the signal we'd been waiting for. By then a few more experienced hounds – old buffers, we called them – had joined us, and as the huntsman and first whip moved off, I and my pack and the other whips followed. Then came Sir Robert and, finally, the field master followed by the field. Soon we youngsters took the lead, forcing the huntsman, first whip, Sir Robert and field to follow at a gallop.

What's that? Yes, you're quite right. It was up to the huntsman and the first whip to prevent us from rioting – chasing prey other than fox. The old buffers among us had been seconded to keep our attention focused and our curiosity from getting the better of us, but I needed no such reminding. I was the first to pick up the scent. I opened, alerting the hunt and my pack (I have the good fortune to possess a distinctive baritone), and as soon as Sir Robert heard me speak he concentrated his full attention on me. I also boast an exceptionally cold nose. I can pick up a scent, no matter how faint, in grass, fields, brushy woodland, roads, puddles, ditches – what have you. Even the widest streams did not prevent me from

tracking my quarry. While others struggled to keep the line I never faltered, and it wasn't long before the pack honoured my lead.

Earthstoppers had been active the night before blocking the foxholes on Sir Robert's estate, and the poor sod whose scent I owned had nowhere to hide and so took refuge in a covert. At the huntsman's command I cast in to flush him out. He was quick to break, and the hunt began. We chased him over the countryside, my fellow hounds and I at full cry, eager to get our teeth into our first kill until, once again, we had him surrounded. At a command from the huntsman we held hard. I had only one thought – to go in for the kill before the others – and upon the huntsman's command I cast myself once again into the covert where he was hiding to draw him out. The fox fought back valiantly despite his tender age. He was still shy of adulthood and had not yet left his family group, but he fought like a trooper. I went for his nose, and grabbing his muzzle between my teeth, I shook my head violently from side to side. He sank his claws into my neck, but I wouldn't let go. Still, he fought to the bitter end. A courageous chap, I'll warrant you that.

When he was dead I released him and watched as the first whip sliced off his brush, pads and mask to distribute as trophies. Afterwards, what remained of

his carcass was thrown to us. We needed no encouragement. We hadn't eaten properly since the previous evening.

I can admit to myself now that, despite an eventful career, nothing which followed my first cub hunt was ever quite as exciting. Afterwards, when we returned to Sir Robert's manor, the others were shown to their kennels while I was kept aside. I was tired and thirsty and, once watered and fed, wanted only to lie down among my pack and doze. But Sir Robert had other plans. From that day forward I slept in his private quarters, and though at first I missed the companionship of my fellow hounds, I don't mind confessing that the attention, affection and privileges lavished upon me more than compensated.

## THE GORILLA

At Circus any hope of finding myself delivered to a kinder fate was soon dashed. It was a barbarous, filthy place where everything was unfamiliar, even the air I breathed. Many animals were imprisoned there. All were new to me, and all were suffering.

I was put in a cage with another orphaned animal called Joey. It was much too small for the two of us, but there was no other place for me, and it was better than sharing with one of the great cats. Joey was very young, like me, and like me he had lost his mother – not to poachers but to something called a cull. When I asked him to explain the meaning of ‘cull’ he turned away. For days afterwards he barely spoke, sitting silently in a corner of our cage, scratching the fur on his stomach until the skin underneath was raw and red. He had never seen a gorilla, and I had never seen a kangaroo, but, in spite of this, we became friends.

When winter came it was bitterly cold. Frozen water fell from the sky, covering the ground like a thick white fur, but unlike fur it was brittle and bright and provided no warmth. Those who had seen it



before called it snow, but for Joey and me it was new, and we were not used to it. We gathered the straw strewn on the floor of our cage into a corner where we tried unsuccessfully to build a kind of nest, but the straw our keeper gave us was as sparse as the hair on his head and provided little warmth from the freezing metal floor of our cage.

The weeks and months that followed were unbearable. We shivered constantly and slept little. I became very sick. My body burned and my limbs caused me unspeakable pain. Days and nights passed, and in that time I became so ill that I was unable to eat. Joey tried his best to comfort me, nudging and grooming me, and attempting to keep me warm by pressing his body close to mine. Finally, the leader of Circus, a man called Vicios Crood, arranged for Old Man to come and tend to me.

By then I was so unwell I hardly bothered to look up when Old Man entered our cage. I lay on a bed of thin straw, my head resting on Joey's flank, but I could feel Old Man watching me. I raised my head and opened my eyes. He had an enormous red-and-purple nose and was covered in wrinkles like an ageing elephant. And he stank. It was this, not his manner, that caused me to shrink from his touch.

All the while Crood stood watching. When he saw me shy away from Old Man he entered our cage,

came forward and made to strike me. Old Man put up his hand. He never looked at Crood or uttered a word, but Crood withdrew. Then Old Man whispered to me and at the same time crouched and again reached out a hand. Joey recoiled and retreated to a corner, but after some moments I allowed Old Man to touch me. Slowly, gently, he began to stroke me. It was the first kindness I had ever experienced at the hands of a human, and I have never forgotten it. We remained like that until Crood began to grumble and mutter to himself. Then Old Man reached into his pocket, withdrew a small brown bottle and held it to my mouth. It tasted as bitter as it smelled, but I drank it, and the next day I began to recover.

Our cages stood atop trailers attached to huge round wheels, and when it was time to move we rolled away in a great line like a python uncoiling from sleep. We travelled all day and all night, stopping only to allow our drivers to rest. Some journeys lasted for days during which time we were left in our cages with no exercise and nothing to distract us from our misery and boredom. When, finally, we arrived at our destination Crood and his family wasted no time. They put up great tents, airless, shabby affairs – yet in spite of this many humans, big and small, male and female, came to gather.