

Adderlaide

*The Story of the Adder*

By Sarah Hancock

Curling her brown, zig zag patterned body tightly, Adderlaide buries herself into the cool shade of the woodland trees. Soon, her peaceful afternoon will be met with the sound of clomping boots, clicking cameras and the chitter chatter of humans, all desperate to get their shot. Adderlaide has gotten used to this. Most mornings, when the sun is highest in the sky, the humans swarm to the woodlands for one thing and one thing only - a glimpse of Adderlaide.

Right on cue, Adderlaide feels the ground begin to vibrate. She firmly tightens her curl, perfectly camouflaging herself within the shrubby undergrowth. Here, she is close enough to make out what the humans are saying from their muffles and grunts, but far enough away to make a quick exit if approached. The humans clamber and stomp into the woodland.

“I think there will be one round here somewhere,” cries a middle aged, stocky man, pointing toward the grasslands, his camera swinging around his neck.

The group begin to prod and poke the nearby grass, sticking their human shaped noses into the blades to get a closer look. Adderlaide remains safe in her tucked away lookout post. For years she has managed to slink and slither around, undetected, but as of late, things have got a little more tricky.

“Be careful love,” says a blonde haired lady, “you wouldn’t want it to bite you.”

Adderlaide sighs. She knows she is referring to her. Each week, more and more humans flock to the same spot in the woodland in the hope they will see a dangerous viper! It all began a few months ago, when Adderlaide was enjoying a bask in the warm, toasty sunshine. After snacking on a rodent shaped meal, she needed the cosy beams to help warm her cold blooded body. As she soaked up the sunshine, eyes closed, enjoying the tranquil surroundings, she was awoken to find the lens of a large, black camera shoved into her face. In a panic, she darted away as quickly as she could, hearing nothing but the sounds of high pitched clicks, lumbering feet and bright, white flashes following from behind.

“I’m not going home until we’ve found one,” a voice calls. “Steve said he saw one round here last week. He posted the picture on Facebook.”

This was true. Adderlaide was again spotted last week, but not by choice. The more humans that flock with their cameras, the more difficult it becomes to remain hidden. Once free to slither where she likes, she now has to keep a low profile.

“Maybe it will come out and see us if we wait patiently dear,” the blonde lady replies.

Nonsense! The last thing Adderlaide wants to do is slither into the direction of a human. To her, they are large and noisy.

“It might even do a snake dance for us, like you see on the tele,” chuckles the man.

Gibberish! Adderlaide rolls her red eyes. From listening to humans chatter nonsense to each other, she has discovered they clearly do not know very much about snakes. Last week, one silly human was searching for eggs in order to track her down. He was unsuccessful of course, considering Adderlaide gives birth to live young.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” cries a small voice from behind her.

Adderlaide tucks herself up even tighter. Often she has thought about just peeking her tail or head out of the undergrowth and posing for the humans to get their snaps. Other times she has thought about slithering over their feet so they really get a good shot, but she would never do such a thing. Adderlaide is shy, timid, and reserved. The thought of posing for photographs leaves her feeling instantly overwhelmed. She doesn't like to be in the spotlight and prefers her woodland privacy. Instead here she finds herself, a local celebrity to these persistent humans and unable to do anything about it.

Suddenly, Adderlaide's attention is turned to the snapping of a stick in close proximity. Calmly, she lifts her gaze to see four smaller feet sneaking through the undergrowth. Adderlaide remains still, hoping that her camouflage will keep her safely disguised.

“Did you know that if you got bit by an Adder, all your arms and limbs would go numb and your fingers would fall off,” says the one small footed boy. “That's what Alfie told me in school.”

“Would they? I guess that's what happens when you're poisoned,” replies the other.

Adderlaides sighs again. Yes, her fangs may be dangerous, but she would not waste her precious venom on humans.

“Yeah! I heard that even if you touch its skin, it could kill you,” the boy announces, as he scrapes a fallen branch along the ground.

Simply not true! Adderlaide hears this misconception all the time.

“Yeah, there’s probably one watching us now,” says the boy whilst looking sheepishly around.

True.

“And at any moment, it’s going to jump out and bite us!” cries the other youngster, making his friend scream and jump.

Not true! At this point, Adderlaide debates whether she should in fact jump out and scare the two away, but it’s simply not in her nature. Her timid and shy personality keeps her hidden in the safety of her secret spot.

“I’ve found it!” an excited voice bellows from the other side of the grass.

The ground quivers and quakes as the herd of humans race to the same spot.

“Pick it up!” squeals one young boy.

“No, don’t!” yelps the blonde lady, “it might kill you!”

Watching intently from her lookout post, Adderlaide is confused by what they may have found. Hopefully, whatever it is, it gives her enough time to slink away, deeper into the privacy of the undergrowth.

“Give me the stick,” instructs the middle aged man, “and get your camera’s ready!”

The man now armed with the fallen branch, starts to wrestle in the tall blades of grass.

“Stand back,” he cries, as the other humans excitedly prepare their shots.

Slowly the man drags the stick back and forth, in an attempt to fish something from the undergrowth. After a few seconds, his catch is hooked. He steadily reels the branch towards him, to reveal something dangling from the end.

“Ew!” cries the young boy, “that’s gross!”

Adderlaide feels her face redden and flush, as a wave of embarrassment ripples through her seventy centimetre long body. She cannot believe her eyes.

“What is it?” the woman gasps.

“It’s a snake skin,” replies the man, “looks like it’s been shed from an Adder.”

Not only have the humans invited themselves into her home, but now they are waving her old skin around for everyone to see. The sheer embarrassment makes Adderlaide recoil even further, as she dips her head in shame. This was something private, meant only for her.

“Ew! It looks like an alien,” shouts one of the boys, as he snaps a picture on his phone.

“Here,” says the woman, “let me hold it. Take a picture of me with it please, love.”

Adderlaide cannot bear to listen anymore. Although mortified by the humans fascination with her discarded snake skin, it has given her a welcomed opportunity to slide away. As they flail it around, Adderlaide stealthily uncoils herself, cautiously not making a sound. She begins to slither and weave her body through the thick undergrowth, until she reaches a dark, shadowed area.

Adderlaide sighs. This is not how she planned to spend her morning. Here she will wait, hiding in the shadows, until the humans have become bored of their snake searching. She looks up at the small circle of blue, like a skylight in the thick shrubbery and hopes that soon, her life will once again become private.