

The Elephant's Child



Rudyard Kipling

The Elephant's Child

CHAPTER ONE

This story happened long time ago when the Elephant had no trunk. He had only a blackish, bulgy nose, as big as a boot. He could wriggle it about from side to side but he couldn't pick up things with it.

There was one Elephant - a new Elephant - an Elephant's Child - who was full of curiosity, and he asked so many questions that nobody wanted to answer.

He lived in Africa, and he filled all Africa with his curiosities. He asked his tall aunt, the Ostrich, why her tail-feathers grew just so and his tall aunt the Ostrich hit him with her hard, hard claw. He asked his tall uncle, the Giraffe, what made his skin spotty, and his tall uncle, the Giraffe, hit him with his hard, hard hoof. And still he was full of curiosity! He asked his broad aunt, the Hippopotamus, why her eyes were red, and his broad aunt, the Hippopotamus, hit him with her broad, broad hoof. He asked his hairy uncle, the Baboon, why melons tasted just so, and his hairy uncle, the Baboon, hit him with his hairy, hairy paw. And still he was full of curiosity! He asked questions about everything that he saw or heard, or felt, or smelt, or touched and all his uncles and his aunts hit him. And still he was full of curiosity!

CHAPTER TWO

One fine morning in the middle of the Precession of the Equinoxes this curious Elephant's Child asked a new fine question that he had never asked before. He asked, "What does the Crocodile have for dinner?" Then everybody said, "Hush!" in a loud and dreadful tone, and they hit him immediately and directly, without stopping, for a long time.

Then he came up to Kolokolo Bird sitting in the middle of a wait-a-bit thorn bush, and he said, "My father has hit me and my mother has hit me;

all my aunts and uncles have hit me for my curiosity; and still I want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner!" Then Kolokolo Bird said, with a mournful cry, "Go to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, and find out."

That very next morning, when there was nothing left of the Equinoxes, this curious Elephant's Child took a hundred pounds of bananas (the little short red kind), and a hundred pounds of sugar-cane (the long purple kind), and seventeen melons (the greeny-crackly kind), and said to all his dear families, "Good-bye. I am going to the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, to find out what the Crocodile has for dinner." And they all hit him once more for luck, though he asked them most politely to stop.

He went away, a little warm, but not at all surprised, eating melons, and throwing the rind about, because he could not pick it up. He went from Graham's Town to Kimberley, and from Kimberley to Khama's Country, and from Khama's Country he went east by north, eating melons all the time, till at last he came to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees as Kolokolo Bird had said.

CHAPTER THREE

Now you must know and understand that till that very week, and day, and hour, and minute, this curious Elephant's Child had never seen a Crocodile and did not know what one was like. It was all his curiosity.

The first thing that he found was a Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake curled round a rock.

"Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child most politely, "but have you seen such a thing as a Crocodile in these parts?"

"Have I seen a Crocodile?" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, in a voice of dreadful scorn. "What will you ask me next?"

"Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child, "but could you kindly tell me what he has for dinner?" The Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake uncoiled himself very quickly from the rock, and hit the Elephant's Child with his scale some, flailsome tail.

"That is odd," said the Elephant's Child, "because my father and my mother, and my uncle and my aunt, not to mention my other aunt, the Hippopotamus, and my other uncle, the Baboon, have all hit me for my curiosity - and I suppose this is the same thing."

He said good-bye very politely to the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, and helped to coil him up on the rock again, and went on, a little warm, but not at all astonished, eating melons, and throwing the rind about, because he could not pick it up, till he found himself on what he thought was a log of wood at the very edge of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees.

CHAPTER FOUR

It turned out to be a real Crocodile. The Crocodile winked one eye. "Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child most politely, "but do you happen to have seen a Crocodile in these parts?" Then the Crocodile winked the other eye. He lifted half his tail out of the mud and the Elephant's Child stepped back most politely, because he did not wish to be hit again.

"Come here, Little One," said the Crocodile. "Why do you ask such things?"

"Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child most politely, "but my father has hit me, my mother has hit me, not to mention my tall aunt, the Ostrich, and my tall uncle, the Giraffe, who can kick ever so hard, as well as my broad aunt, the Hippopotamus, and my hairy uncle, the Baboon, and including the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, with the scalesome, flailsome tail, just up the bank, who hits harder than any of them; and so, if it's quite all the same to you, I don't want to be hit any more."

"Come here, Little One," said the Crocodile, "for I am the Crocodile," and he wept crocodile tears to show it was quite true.

Then the Elephant's Child grew all breathless, and panted, and kneeled down on the bank and said, "You are the very person I have been looking for all these long days. Will you please tell me what you have for dinner?"

"Come here, Little One," said the Crocodile, "and I'll whisper." The Elephant's Child put his head down close to the Crocodile's musky, tusky mouth, and the Crocodile caught him by his little nose, which up to that very week, day, hour, and minute, had been no bigger than a boot, though much more useful.

CHAPTER FIVE

"I think," said the Crocodile - and he said it between his teeth, like this - "I think to-day I will begin with Elephant's Child!" At this the Elephant's Child was angry and he said, speaking through his nose, like this, "Led go! You are hurtig be!"

The Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake saw all that. He went down from the bank and said, "My young friend, if you do not immediately pull as hard as ever you can, your acquaintance with the Crocodile will jerk you into limpid stream before you can say anything else."

The Elephant's Child sat back and pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and his nose began to stretch. And the Crocodile dived into the water, making it all creamy with great sweeps of his tail, and he pulled, and pulled, and pulled. So, the Elephant's Child's nose kept on stretching. The Elephant's Child spread all his little four legs and pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and his nose kept on stretching; and the Crocodile stuck his tail like an oar, and he pulled, and pulled, and pulled, and at each pull the Elephant's Child's nose grew longer and longer - and it hurt him! Then the Elephant's Child felt his legs slipping, and he said through his nose, which was now nearly five feet long, "This is too buch for be!"

The Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake came down from the bank, and knotted himself round the Elephant's Child's hind legs, and said, "Rash and inexperienced traveller, we will now seriously devote ourselves to a little good deed, because if we do not, the Crocodile will spoil your future career forever." So he pulled, and the Elephant's Child pulled, and the Crocodile pulled. Yet the Elephant's Child and the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake pulled hardest. And at last the Crocodile let go of the Elephant's Child's nose with a plop that you could hear all up and down the Limpopo. And the Elephant's Child sat down suddenly.

CHAPTER SIX

First he was careful to say "Thank you" to the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. Then he was kind to his poor pulled nose and wrapped it all up in cool banana leaves. "What are you doing that for?" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake.

"Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child, "but my nose is badly out of shape, and I am waiting for it to shrink."

"Then you will have to wait a long time," said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. "Some people do not know what is good for them."

The Elephant's Child sat there for three days waiting for his nose to shrink. But it never grew any shorter, and, besides, it made him have each eye looking in different direction. At the end of the third day a fly came and stung him on the shoulder. And before he knew what he was doing he lifted up his trunk and hit that fly dead with the end of it.

"Advantage number one!" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. "You couldn't have done that with a mere-smear nose. Try and eat a little now." Before he thought what he was doing the Elephant's Child put out his trunk and plucked a large bundle of grass to stuff it into his own mouth.

"Advantage number two!" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. "You couldn't have done that with a mere-smear nose. Don't you think the sun is very hot here?"

"It is," said the Elephant's Child, and before he thought what he was doing he took some slop from the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo. Then he poured it on his head, where it was sloshing behind his ears.

"Advantage number three!" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake. You couldn't have done that with a mere-smear nose. Now how do you feel about being hit again?"

"Excuse me," said the Elephant's Child, "but I should not like it at all."

"How would you like to hit somebody?" said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake.

"I should like it very much indeed," said the Elephant's Child. "Well," said the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake, "you will find that new nose of yours is very useful to hit people with."

"Thank you," said the Elephant's Child, "I'll remember that; and now I think I'll go home to all my dear families and try."

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Elephant's Child went home across Africa frisking and whisking his trunk. When he wanted fruit to eat he pulled fruit down from a tree, instead of waiting for it to fall as he used to do. When he wanted grass he plucked grass up from the ground, instead of going on his knees as he used to do. When the flies bit him he broke off the branch of a tree and used it as a fly-whisk; and he made himself a new, cool, slushy-squishy mud-cap whenever the sun was hot. When he felt lonely walking through Africa he sang to himself down his trunk, and the noise was louder than several brass bands. He went especially out of his way to find a broad Hippopotamus (she was no relation of his), and he hit her very hard, to make sure that the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake had spoken the truth about his new trunk.

The rest of the time he picked up the melon rinds that he had dropped on his way to the Limpopo - for he was a Tidy Pachyderm.

One dark evening he came back to all his dear families, and he coiled up his trunk and said, "How do you do?"

They were very glad to see him, and immediately said, "Come here and be hit for your curiosity."

"Pooh," said the Elephant's Child. "I don't think you peoples know anything about spanking; but I do, and I'll show you." Then he uncurled his trunk and knocked two of his dear brothers head over heels.

"O Bananas!" said they, "where did you learn that trick, and what have you done to your nose?"

"I got a new one from the Crocodile on the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River," said the Elephant's Child. "I asked him what he had for dinner, and he gave me this to keep."

"It looks very ugly," - said his hairy uncle, the Baboon.

"It does," said the Elephant's Child. "But it's very useful," and he picked up his hairy uncle, the Baboon, by one hairy leg, and hove him into a hornet's nest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The bad Elephant's Child spanked all his dear families for a long time, till they were very warm and greatly astonished. He pulled out his tall Ostrich aunt's tail-feathers; and he caught his tall uncle, the Giraffe, by the hind-leg, and dragged him through a thorn-bush; and he shouted at his broad aunt, the Hippopotamus, and blew bubbles into her ear when she was sleeping in the water after meals; but he never let any one touch Kolokolo Bird.

At last things grew so exciting that his dear families went off one by one in a hurry to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, to borrow new noses from the Crocodile. When they came back nobody spanked anybody any more; and ever since that day all the Elephants you will ever see, besides all those that you won't, have trunks exactly like the trunk of the curious Elephant's Child.

For you to see and understand that the Crocodile had pulled it out into a really truly trunk same as all Elephants have today I wrote about the Elephant's Child having his nose pulled by the Crocodile. I would paint how much he is surprised and astonished and hurt; and how he is pulling very hard, and so is the Crocodile; and how the Bi-Coloured-Python-Rock-Snake is hurrying through the water to help the Elephant's Child; and the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River (but I am not allowed to paint these pictures), all set about with fever-trees that grow there, and African animals walking into an African ark. There are two lions, two ostriches, two oxen, two camels, two sheep, and two other things that look like rats, but I think they are rock-rabbits. They don't mean anything. I put them in because I thought they looked pretty. They would look very fine if I were allowed to paint them.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

Come back to <https://english-e-reader.net/> to find more fascinating and exciting stories!