

The Elephant's Child

ACTOR THREE

In the High and Far-Off Times the Elephant, O Best Beloved, had no trunk, or at most only a very small one, about as big as a boot.

(During the following, ACTOR THREE dresses as the ELEPHANT.)

ALL

IT'S NOT THAT HE'D ALLOWED HIS TRUNK
 ONE DAY TO GET LOOSE OR LOST OR SHRUNK,
 AND DON'T SUPPOSE HE CHOSE HIS NOSE
 IN HOPES THAT IF HE WENT TO SNIFF
 HE COULDN'T TELL
 (AT LEAST BY SMELL)
 A SKUNK WHO STUNK.
 HE HAD NO TRUNK.
 NOR HAD HE FLUNG AWAY HIS TRUNK
 OR DUNKED IT TILL IT SLUNK AND SUNK
 OR ANYTHING ELSE YOU MIGHT'VE THUNK.
 IT SIMPLY WAS.
 A BLACKISH TRUNK, A BULGY TRUNK!
 THANK HEAVENS IT WASN'T AN UNC-
 OMFORTABLE TRUNK.

ELEPHANT

Now, there was one Elephant --

ACTOR TWO

A new Elephant --

ALL

An Elephant's Child --

ELEPHANT

Who was full of 'satiabile curiosity'³, and that meant he asked ever so many questions.

(ACTORS ONE and THREE exit.)

³ pronounced "CUR-SHEE-OSITY."

ELEPHANT

"I WISH I HAD SIX HONEST MEN
 (TO TEACH ME ALL THEY KNEW)
 WHOSE NAMES WERE WHAT AND WHY AND WHEN
 AND HOW AND WHERE AND WHO.
 I'D SEND 'EM OUT TO HERES AND THERES
 FROM THE SECOND THEY'D OPEN THEIR EYES:
 ONE MILLION HOWS, TWO MILLION WHERE'S,
 AND SEVENTEEN MILLION WHYS!"

His curiosity was *just that 'satiabile!* He asked ever so many questions of his tall aunt, the Ostrich

(Enter ACTOR ONE as the OSTRICH.)

OSTRICH

THE OSTRICH! O THE OSTRICH IS SO POLITE!
 SHE HIDES HER HEAD OUT OF SIGHT.
 HER BEAUTY, O HER BEAUTY, IS SO SUPERIOR
 SHE IS FORCED, YES SHE'S FORCED, TO BURY HER
 HEAD IN THE SAND. SHE'S MODEST, UNDERSTAND,
 AND HATES BEING BLAMED
 BY THE BIRDS WHO ARE SHAMED
 WHEN THEY SEE HER AND FEEL INFERIOR.

ELEPHANT

"O Ostrich my aunt, O aunt my Ostrich, why do your tail feathers grow just so?"

OSTRICH

And his tall aunt the Ostrich spanked⁴ him with her hard, hard claw.

(Slapstick business: *literally with a slapstick* -- across the back.)

ELEPHANT

But the Elephant's Child was still full of 'satiabile curiosity and he so asked ever so many questions of his tall uncle, the Giraffe.

(Enter ACTOR TWO as the GIRAFFE.)

⁴ If you think use of the word "spank" might be a little sensitive, you should feel free to substitute a nonsense rhyming syllable, such as "thwank," or "squank" and consider bopping the Elephant on the top of the head.

GIRAFFE

THE GIRAFFE, DON'T LAUGH,
IS TOO TALL BY HALF.
THE TREES, IF YOU PLEASE,
WILL TICKLE HIS KNEES.
"DON'T THINK FOR A BLINK
IT'S FUN BEING TALL.
FOR IT ISN'T. NOT AT ALL.
YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO SIT AT A TABLE,
THERE'S NO BED WILL FIT YOUR HEAD,
THERE'S NO ROOF HIGH ENOUGH --

And imagine what it's like to buy a scarf!
IT'S A LARFF.
FOR A GIRARFF."

ELEPHANT

"O Giraffe my uncle, O uncle my Giraffe, what makes your skin so spotty?"

GIRAFFE

And his tall uncle, the Giraffe, spanked him with his hard, hard hoof.

(Slapstick.)

ELEPHANT

"Ow, but O, my dear aunt and uncle, why must you spank me so?"

OSTRICH & GIRAFFE

THOUGH AN ITCH FOR KNOWLEDGE IS A VIRTUE
DANGERS WHICH ARE BOUND TO HURT YOU
LURK AT EV'RY CORNER YOU WOULD FIND.
THERE'S A REASON WHY WE SPANK YOU,
YOU'LL BE PLEASED TO SAY I THANK YOU
WHEN YOU LEARN WE ONLY SPANK YOU TO BE KIND!

WE ARE KIND, WE ARE KIND.
KEEP THAT IN MIND
WE SPANK, 'CAUSE WE'RE KIND.

YOU MUST LISTEN TO YOUR UNCLES
AND YOUR AUNTS WHO KNOW THE JUNGLES
AND SUPPORT YOUR NEED TO KNOW THE REASON WHY,
BUT YOUR YOUTH'S IMPETUOSITY
AND 'SATIABLE CURTIOSITY
WILL ONLY GET YOU TROUBLE BYE AND BYE.

WE'RE AFRAID FOR YOU DEAR ELEPHANT
 YOU'LL RUN OFF BY YOUR SEL'F⁵ AND
 DISCOVER WHAT IT WAS THAT KILLED THE CAT.
 (*CURTIOSITY . . . !*)
 LET'S BE CLEAR THAT OUR SUGGESTION IS,
 MY DEAR, YOUR SILLY QUESTION IS
 MUCH BETTER LEFT UNASKED AND THAT IS THAT!

ELEPHANT

"But why"

OSTRICH & GIRAFFE

NO, IT'S BETTER LEFT UNASKED AND THAT IS THAT!

(OSTRICH and GIRAFFE exit.)

ELEPHANT

But *still* he was full of 'satiabile curiosity! He asked questions about everything that he saw, or heard, or felt, or smelt or touched because

I WISH I HAD SIX HONEST MEN
 (TO TEACH ME ALL THEY KNEW)
 WHOSE NAMES ARE WHAT AND WHY AND WHEN
 AND HOW AND WHERE AND WHO.

I'D SEND 'EM OUT TO HERES AND THERES
 FROM THE SECOND THEY'D OPEN THEIR EYES:
 ONE MILLION HOWS, TWO MILLION WHERE'S,
 AND SEVENTEEN MILLION WHYS!

ELEPHANT

So he asked ever so many questions of his broad broad aunt, the Hippopotamus.

(Enter ACTOR ONE as the HIPPOPOTAMUS.)

HIPPOPOTAMUS

O, THE HIP-HIP-HIP-HIPPOPOTAMUS
 ON THE RIV-RIV-RIV-RIVER BOTTOMUS
 LIKES TO PLAY IN MUD
 THAT IS AS IT SHOULD
 BE IN THE SPRING, WINTER, SUMMER AND THE AUTUMNUS.

ELEPHANT

"O Hippopotamus my aunt, O aunt my Hippopotamus, why are your eyes so red?"

⁵ pronounced bi-syllabically: "sell-iff."

HIPPOPOTAMUS

And his broad, broad aunt, the Hippopotamus, spanked him with her broad, broad hoof.

(HIPPOPOTAMUS taunts the ELEPHANT with the slapstick; eventually she can resist the temptation no longer and smacks him.)

ELEPHANT

["You'd think I'd learn, but . . . "] He asked ever so many questions of his hairy uncle, the Baboon

(Enter ACTOR TWO as the BABOON.)

BABOON

BABOO-OON! BABOO-OON!

ELEPHANT

And he asked his hairy uncle --

(The BABOON, overly eager to wield the slapstick, grabs it from the HIPPOPOTAMUS and charges the ELEPHANT.)

BABOON

Who spanked him with his hairy, hairy --

ELEPHANT

"Wait a minute, I haven't even asked a question yet!"

BABOON

"Sorry, Elephant's Child. Please, you were asking . . . ?"

ELEPHANT

"Yes. I was wondering, my uncle the Baboon, why melons taste the way they do."

BABOON

"Now?"

ELEPHANT

"If you must. "]

BABOON

And the Baboon spanked him with his hairy, hairy paw!

(Slapstick business.)

ALL

And still he was full of 'satiabile curiosity!

HIPPOPOTAMUS & BABOON

WE ARE KIND, WE ARE KIND.
KEEP THAT IN MIND
WE SPANK, 'CAUSE WE'RE KIND.

YOU MUST LISTEN TO YOUR UNCLES
AND YOUR AUNTS WHO KNOW THE JUNGLES
AND SUPPORT YOUR NEED TO KNOW THE REASON WHY,
BUT YOUR YOUTH'S IMPETUOSITY
AND 'SATIABLE CURTIOSITY
WILL ONLY GET YOU TROUBLE BYE AND BYE.

WE'RE AFRAID FOR YOU DEAR ELEPHANT
YOU'LL RUN OFF BY YOUR SEL'F AND
DISCOVER WHAT IT WAS THAT KILLED THE CAT.
(*CURTIOSITY* . . . !)
LET'S BE CLEAR THAT OUR SUGGESTION IS,
MY DEAR, YOUR SILLY QUESTION IS
MUCH BETTER LEFT UNASKED AND THAT IS THAT!

ELEPHANT

One fine morning

HIPPOPOTAMUS & BABOON

NO, IT'S BETTER LEFT UNASKED AND THAT IS THAT!
(returning to their lives)
O THE HIP-HIP-HIP-HIPPOPOTAMUS
ON THE RIV-RIV-RIV-RIVER BOTTOMUS
(BAB-OON! BAB-OON!)

ELEPHANT

(simultaneous with above)

One fine morning in the middle of the Procession of the Equinoxes, he asked a new fine question he had never asked before. "What does the Crocodile have for dinner?"

(HIPPOPOTAMUS and BABOON recoil, in fear of the CROCODILE.)

HIPPOPOTAMUS & BABOON

"SPEAK NOT OF THE CROCODILE,
O ELEPHANT'S CHILD,
SPEAK NOT OF THE CROCODILE."

ELEPHANT

"I only want to know -- What does the Crocodile have for dinner?"

(The HIPPOPOTAMUS and the BABOON exit, singing, with soft, careful tread.)

HIPPOPOTAMUS & BABOON

"SPEAK NOT OF THE CROCODILE,
O ELEPHANT'S CHILD,
SPEAK NOT OF THE CROCODILE."

ELEPHANT

(to the audience)

"My father has spanked me, and my mother has spanked me; all my aunts and uncles have spanked me for my 'satiabile curiosity; and still I want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner!"

(The KOLOKOLO BIRD appears in the trees. It takes a little encouragement from the audience for the ELEPHANT to locate the bird.⁶)

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"KO-LO! KO-LO! KOLO KOLO!
[Psst! Elephant's Child! Up here!]
KO-LO! KO-LO! KOLO KOLO!"

ELEPHANT

"Where?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"KO-LO! KO-LO! KOLO KOLO!
[Silly, I'm right here!]"

(Enter ACTOR ONE as the KOLOKOLO BIRD.)

ELEPHANT

"Oh, there you are!] Who are you?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"I'm the Kolokolo Bird."

⁶ Also allowing an extra moment for a costume change, if necessary. The Kolokolo Bird could conceivably make a first entrance as a puppet, and then later, played by Actor One.

ELEPHANT

"The Kolokolo Bird? What a beautiful name."

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"Just so."

(THEY sing together, the ELEPHANT echoing the KOLOKOLO BIRD.)

KOLOKOLO BIRD & ELEPHANT

"KO-LO! KO-LO! KOLO KOLO! (&c)"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"Now, small but inquisitorial offspring of pachydermatous ancestors, you've been inquiring about the culinary habits of yon *Crocodilus niloticus*?"

ELEPHANT

"What?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"You want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner?"

ELEPHANT

"Oh yes, yes, very much."

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"Go to the banks of the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, and find out!"

ELEPHANT

"The great grey-green greasy Limpopo River?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"All set about with fever-trees."

ELEPHANT

"Why, thank you, Kolokolo Bird!"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"Your cordiality and civility are duly noted and appreciated."

ELEPHANT

"What?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"You're welcome. I, too, was once as curious as you, Elephant's Child."

(The KOLOKOLO BIRD flies away, calling *Kolo-kolo! Kolo-kolo!* The BABOON enters with bags for travelling, which HE loads upon the ELEPHANT.)

BABOON

That very next morning, when there was nothing left of the Equinoxes, this 'satiabile Elephant's Child took a hundred pounds of bananas --

ELEPHANT

the little short red kind

BABOON

and a hundred pounds of sugar-cane

ELEPHANT

the long purple kind

BABOON

and seventeen melons

ELEPHANT

the green-crackly kind

BABOON

and said to all of his dear families:

ELEPHANT

"Goodbye. I am going to the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, to find out what the Croc -- !"

BABOON

And they spanked him once more for luck --

(Slapstick.)

ELEPHANT

And he went away!

(Ad-lib BABOON exit: "Goodbye. Don't forget to write. Give my love to Uncle Orangutan if you see him.")

ELEPHANT

He went east by north, eating melons all the time, and throwing the rind about, because he could not pick it up on account of his blackish, bulgy nose, that he could wriggle about from side to side but couldn't pick up things with.

IT'S NOT THAT HE'D ALLOWED HIS TRUNK
 ONE DAY TO GET LOOSE OR LOST OR SHRUNK,
 AND DON'T SUPPOSE HE CHOSE HIS NOSE
 IN HOPES THAT IF HE WENT TO SNIFF
 HE COULDN'T TELL
 (AT LEAST BY SMELL)
 A SKUNK WHO STUNK.
 HE HAD NO TRUNK.
 NOR HAD HE FLUNG AWAY HIS TRUNK
 OR DUNKED IT TILL IT SLUNK AND SUNK
 OR ANYTHING ELSE YOU MIGHT'VE THUNK.
 IT SIMPLY WAS.
 A BLACKISH TRUNK, A BULGY TRUNK!
 THANK HEAVENS IT WASN'T AN UNC-
 OMFORTABLE TRUNK.

Till at last he came to the banks of the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, precisely as the Kolokolo Bird had said.

(The ELEPHANT momentarily exits for the CROCODILE (ACTOR ONE) to slink on. NOTE: Also an opportunity for ELEPHANT to put on a different nose, if desired.)

CROCODILE

(singing slyly)
 CROCODEE, CROCODILE
 WITH YOUR BELLY IN THE NILE
 CROCODIRE, CROCODEAR,
 DON'T LET HUNGER INTERFERE.

Now, you must know and understand, O Best Beloved, that till that very week, and day, and hour, and minute, this 'satiabable Elephant's Child had never seen a Crocodile, and did not know what one was like.

(Re-enter ELEPHANT.)

ELEPHANT

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

CROCODILE & ELEPHANT

"HAVE I (YOU) SEEN THE CROCODILE?
HAVE I (YOU) SEEN THE CROCODILE?"

CROCODILE

"O ELEPHANT'S CHILD,
YES, I'VE SEEN THE CROCODILE!"

ELEPHANT

"You have!"

CROCODILE

"Yes, I have."

ELEPHANT

"Could you kindly tell me what he has for dinner?"

CROCODILE

"COME HITHER, LITTLE ONE"
said the Crocodile,
"COME HITHER, LITTLE ONE!"

ELEPHANT

"If it's quite all the same to you . . . I'd rather not do much come hithering as I don't want to be spanked any more."

CROCODILE

"Spanked? Oh dear, dear, no. Come hither, Little One, for I -- am the Crocodile!"

ELEPHANT

"You? You are the Crocodile?"

CROCODILE

"Oh, yes." And he wept crocodile-tears to show it was quite true.

(Business: *Weeping.*)

ELEPHANT

"My! Well, you are the very person I have been looking for! Will you please tell me what you have for dinner?"

CROCODILE

"Come hither, Little One," said the Crocodile, "and I'll whisper!"

ELEPHANT

(only a very little doubtful)

Then the Elephant's Child put his head down close to the Crocodile's musky tusky mouth --

CROCODILE & ELEPHANT

DINNER FOR THE CROCODILE

DINNER FOR THE CROCODILE.

O ELEPHANT'S CHILD

CROCODILE

"For dinner today"

CROCODILE & ELEPHANT

OH!

CROCODILE

"I think I'll begin with"

CROCODILE & ELEPHANT

OH!

CROCODILE

"The Elephant's Child!" And he caught him by his little nose!

CROCODILE & ELEPHANT

THE CROCODILE!

(Business: The CROCODILE closes its jaws around the ELEPHANT'S nose.)

ELEPHANT

"Led go! You are hurtig me!"

(Business: *struggling*. The KOLOKOLO BIRD appears in the trees.)

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"*Kolo-kolo! Kolo-kolo!* My young friend, if you do not now, immediately and instantly, pull as hard as ever you can, it is my opinion that the Crocodile will jerk you into yonder limpid stream before you can say Jack Robinson."

ELEPHANT

"What?"

KOLOKOLO BIRD

"PULL, you idiot!"

ELEPHANT

Then the Elephant's Child sat back on his little haunches and pulled, and pulled, and pulled --

(Business: Pulling; groaning, straining.)

ALL

(with awe)

And his nose began to stretch.

OHH! OHH!!

(The ELEPHANT'S nose begins to stretch . . . and stretch.)

CROCODILE

And the Crocodile floundered into the water, making it all creamy with great sweeps of his tail, and pulled and pulled and pulled,

ALL

And his nose kept on stretching.

OHH! OHHH!

ELEPHANT

And the Elephant's Child spread all his little four legs and pulled, and pulled, and pulled

ALL

And his nose kept on stretching.

OHHH! OHHHH!

CROCODILE

["Yipes! Cut that out!"

ELEPHANT

"Well, how do you think it feels from this end?"]

CROCODILE

And the Crocodile thrashed his tail like an oar, and he pulled, and pulled, and pulled,

ALL

And at each pull his nose grew longer and longer!

ELEPHANT

And it hurt him hijus!

[CROCODILE

"Give up?"

"Never!"]
ELEPHANT

OHHHH!
ALL

And the Elephant's Child pulled --
ELEPHANT

[Ahhh!"] And the Crocodile pulled --
CROCODILE

But the Elephant's Child pulled hardest --
ELEPHANT

OHHHH!
ALL

And -- at -- last -- the Crocodile -- let -- go!
CROCODILE

(The CROCODILE lets go; the ELEPHANT tumbles backwards and backwards.
Offstage, if desired, to affix yet another nose.)

CROCODILE
The Crocodile let go of the Elephant's Child's nose with a plop that you could hear all up and down the Limpopo.

ELEPHANT
(uprighting; or entering)
The Elephant's Child sat there for three days waiting for his nose to shrink.

(Pause. Nothing happens.)

ALL
But it never grew any shorter.

ELEPHANT
And, besides, it made him squint.

CROCODILE
For, O Best Beloved, you will see that the Crocodile had pulled it out into a really truly trunk --

ALL
Same as all Elephants have to-day.

IT'S NOT THAT HE'D ALLOWED HIS TRUNK
 ONE DAY TO GET LOOSE OR LOST OR SHRUNK,
 AND DON'T SUPPOSE HE CHOSE HIS NOSE
 IN HOPES THAT IF HE WENT TO SNIFF
 HE COULDN'T TELL (AT LEAST BY SMELL)
 A SKUNK WHO STUNK.
 HE HAS A TRUNK!

ELEPHANT

And 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! And it wasn't long before he learned how to use it to pluck up large bundles of grass, and stuff them into his own mouth, or schloop up big schloops of mud from the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, where it made a cool schloopy-sloshy mud-cap all trickly behind his ears.

CROCODILE & KOLOKOLO BIRD

(continuing underneath)

HE HAS A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
 A TERRIFIC TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
 GRANDIFIC TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
 MIRACULOUS TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
 SPECTACULOUS TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!

(repeat or ad-lib if necessary, with "*sensational/inspirational*" or "*desirable/untirable*, etc. until:)

ELEPHANT

BUT -- !

(CROCODILE and KOLOKOLO BIRD stop singing to listen.)

ELEPHANT

The greatest 'vantage of them all, it occurred to the Elephant's Child one day, is how usefully useful a trunk might be towards aunts or uncles, who might every now and then, need a little spanking of their own! Just to be kind, you understand. And so, O Best Beloved, all the Elephants, from that day to this, have visited the Crocodile so that they, too, might have trunks precisely like the trunk of the 'satiabale Elephant's Child!

ALL

A WONDERFUL TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
A MARVELOUS TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK, A TRUNK!
STUPENDOUS TRUNK, TREMENDOUS TRUNK!
FABULOSITY TRUNK! GRANDIOSITY TRUNK!
BUT, WE'RE SORRY TO TELL YOU, IT'S STILL NOT AN UNC-
URTIOSITY TRUNK!

ELEPHANT

"I just have one last question"

CROCODILE & KOLOKOLO BIRD

No!

ALL

AN ELEPHANT'S TRUNK! AN ELEPHANT'S TRUNK!
AN ELEPHANT'S TRUNK!
TRUNK-A-TRUNK-A-TRUNK-A-TRUNK-A-TRUNK!

(Bows.)

THE END