On Getting a Trunk

(with apologies to Rudyard Kipling)

It is a hot day in Africa.

Two friends are under an acacia tree.

One is Elephant, one is Rhino.

They are old friends.

Rhino is lying down in the little shade he can find.

Elephant is standing, with his trunk hanging down to the ground.

Let’s try to hear what they are saying.

If we creep up very slowly and quietly, they won’t notice.

--oo00oo--

Tutor: So, where was I, Rhino?

*Student: You were telling me about elephant’s child.*

Really?

*How he got his trunk.*

Oh, yes.

*And I wish you’d get on with it!*

Get on with it?

*This story is going on for ever!*

Too long?

*This story will soon reach from one end of Africa to the other!*

Sorry, Rhino.

*You were telling me about his family.*

His hairy uncle, the baboon?

*Yes.*

His tall uncle, the giraffe?

*Yes.*

His broad aunt, the hippopotamus?

*Yes. One big, happy family.*

Well, not always.

*No?*

In those days, Rhino, the elephant’s child was not quite the same as Elephant is today.

*No?*

No.

*Really?*

In those days, Rhino, the elephant’s child had no trunk.

*No trunk?*

No. All he had was a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot.

*A mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot!*

That’s right!

*Oh?*

And everyone spanked him because of it.

*Because of his nose?*

And because he asked so many questions.

*He asked questions?*

Yes. From morning to night. So everyone spanked him.

*Ouch!*

Exactly!

*Surely he could have spanked them back?*

Well, not really. He was only young, you see.

*Well, yes.*

And he only had a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot.

*Not much use to an elephant.*

He couldn’t spank anyone with that, could he?

*So what happened next?*

Pardon?

*How did the elephant’s child get his trunk?*

Well, he got sick of being spanked.

*Of course.*

And he hit upon a really good question.

*A really good question?*

It was a really good question.

*What was it, Elephant?*

It was so good that nobody could answer it at all.

*It must have been a really good one.*

It was, Rhino. It really was.

*So what was the question, Elephant?*

It was one to make all Africa shake.

*Yes, yes. But what was it?*

One to make all Africa shake.

*But what was it?*

It was “What does the crocodile have for dinner?”

*That is a really good question.*

I told you it was.

*Did nobody have an answer?*

No.

*I suppose this story is going to get somewhere, eventually, is it Elephant?*

Mmmm?

*You were supposed to be telling me how Elephant got his trunk.*

Well, that’s what I am doing, Rhino.

*Are you?*

If you will just be quiet and listen.

*So far all we have is an elephant with a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot.*

And a really good question, Rhino.

*But what happened next?*

Well, in the end the elephant’s child went to ask Kolo Kolo bird.

*Kolo Kolo bird?*

Kolo Kolo bird was sitting in a wait-a-bit thorn bush.

*As he always does.*

The elephant’s child asked Kolo Kolo bird his question.

*Yes?*

“What”, he said, “does the crocodile have for dinner?”

*And what did Kolo Kolo bird say?*

He told him to go and ask the crocodile himself.

*He did what?*

He told the elephant’s child to go to the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about with fever trees, and ask the crocodile himself.

*Not very good advice!*

No.

*I’ve been to the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about with fever trees. There are crocodiles there.*

Yes. There are.

*They are very large.*

Yes.

*And very dangerous.*

Yes.

*I wouldn’t want to ask them anything at all.*

No.

*Too dangerous.*

But the elephant’s child was very keen to ask his question.

*I suppose he was.*

Anyway, he set off, all across Africa, until he came to the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about by fever trees.

*And what did he find there?*

Well, he saw what he thought was a log. But it moved.

*It would do.*

It opened one eye and it moved.

*Of course it did.*

Mmmm…

*It was a crocodile.*

But the elephant’s child got down close and asked his question.

*Silly boy!*

“What”, he said, “does the crocodile have for dinner?”

*And what did the crocodile say?*

He said “Come closer, little one!”

*And I suppose he did?*

Yes.

*Silly boy!*

And he asked again.

*Silly boy!*

“What”, he said, “does the crocodile have for dinner?”

*I can’t bear to listen. What did the crocodile say?*

He said “Today, I think, he will begin with elephant’s child” and he grabbed him!

*I bet he did!*

He grabbed him by the nose and he pulled and pulled.

*What did the elephant’s child do?*

Well, he pulled and pulled.

*Good boy!*

But so did the crocodile, of course.

*It’s what crocodiles do.*

It began to look as if he really was going to be the crocodile’s dinner.

*I think he is going to be the crocodile’s dinner.*

But then a bi-coloured python rock snake came by.

*A bi-coloured python rock snake! They’re enormous.*

Yes. And really strong.

*So what did the bi-coloured python rock snake do?*

He wound himself round the elephant’s child’s legs and pulled and pulled.

*And?*

The elephant’s child pulled and pulled.

*And?*

The crocodile pulled and pulled.

*And then?*

Suddenly, the elephant’s child was free.

*Not many people escape crocodile.*

No.

*Lucky!*

But his mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot had been pulled and pulled.

*Well, yes. Pulled and pulled and pulled.*

It had been pulled right out of shape.

*Really?*

It was now a long trunk. Just like mine.

*A nice, long trunk like yours!*

Yes.

*He must have been well pleased about that.*

Well, no. Not at first.

*No?*

At first he moped about his nose.

*Really?*

Moped about it being all out of shape.

*Too soon to see he had a trunk, I suppose.*

It hurt, too, after all that pulling and pulling and pulling.

*I suppose it must have done.*

But then a fly landed on his back and suddenly “whack!” he’d hit it with his trunk.

*Whack!*

“You couldn’t have done that with a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot!” said the bi-coloured python rock snake.

*No! That’s true!*

Then he wanted a banana, so he just reached up and picked one with his trunk.

*Handy!*

“You couldn’t have done that with a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot!” said the bi-coloured python rock snake.

*True again!*

Then he wanted some grass to eat, so he plucked some with his trunk.

*Just like you do.*

It was muddy, so he banged it against his knees to shake the mud off.

*Like you do.*

“You couldn’t have done that with a mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot!” said the bi-coloured python rock snake.

*This trunk is really useful, isn’t it?*

Then he told the bi-coloured python rock snake all about his family, back home.

*What did he say?*

How they would all spank him when he came home.

*Well yes, but now he has a trunk!*

Yes.

*A trunk is really good for spanking people with.*

Mmmm…

*Or so I should think.*

It is, Rhino.

*I don’t have one myself, of course.*

No.

*A rhino with a trunk would be silly.*

Yes.

*But an elephant with a trunk will be really good at spanking, I suppose.*

That’s more or less what the bi-coloured python rock snake told him.

*Good advice, I think.*

He told him to go home, with his new trunk, and all would be well.

*So the elephant’s child went home.*

Yes. With his new trunk.

*And everyone there wanted to spank him.*

Yes.

*But now he has a trunk!*

He told them he got it from the crocodile, on the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about with fever trees.

*Which he had, in a way.*

They told him it was very ugly.

*Really? Told him it was ugly?*

“Yes” he said. “It is. But it’s really useful.”

*It is!*

And he spanked his uncles and aunts, until they were very warm and very astonished.

*But I bet they stopped spanking him.*

They did. And nobody ever spanked anybody ever again.

*So that’s how the elephant got his trunk?*

Yes.

*He got it from the crocodile.*

Yes.

*On the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about with fever trees!*

Yes.

*He got it by asking a really good question!*

Yes. He did.

*And going to find the answer.*

All the way across Africa.

*To the banks of the great, grey-green, greasy Limpopo river, all set about with fever trees.*

He went all that way to ask the question “What does the crocodile have for dinner?”

*He did.*

And the crocodile pulled his mere, smear nose no bigger than a boot.

*He did.*

Until it was a trunk as long as mine.

*And as beautiful, Elephant.*

And that is why every elephant you will ever see has a trunk just like mine.

*That was a really good story, Elephant.*

Glad you liked it.

*When you first began, I was worried you would never finish.*

Really?

*But it was a really good story in the end.*

Thank you, Rhino.

*What will you tell me about tomorrow?*