

HOW THE ELEPHANT GOT HIS TRUNK

A one-act comedy by
Cary Nothnagel

Freely adapted from Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

All roles below could be played by a male or female with minor adjustments to the script.

NARRATOR 1 is the main narrator but must share the stage with his partner (this role could easily be combined with Narrator 2 if cast is small).

NARRATOR 2 is the partner to Narrator 1 (adds the color or detail to the story).

NARRATOR 3 forces his way into the narration role—often interrupting the other 2.

BABY E (ELTON), a young curious elephant who asks too many questions.

MAMA E (ELLEN), the baby elephant's frustrated mother.

PAPA E, the baby's father.

SISTER E, the baby's sister who picks on him quite a bit.

AUNTIE OSTRICH, the baby's aunt who is paranoid about her backside.

AUNTIE GIRAFFE, another aunt concerned about her skin condition.

AUNTIE HIPPO (Henrietta), yet another aunt who is self-conscious about her weight.

BABOON, the wise sage.

AUNTIE CAMEL, another aunt.

AUNTIE RHINO, another aunt—she is concerned about her wrinkles.

TIGER, an impatient and easily offended friend of the elephant family.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1, the leader of the 2 big-headed Kolo-

Kolo Birds by a feather.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2, the other equally big-headed Kolo-Kolo Bird.

WASTE 1, a member of the jungle (or zoo) waste management team – hates cleaning up after elephants.

WASTE 2, the other member of the waste management team (these roles could be combined).

PYTHON, incredibly intelligent with a big vocabulary and an obvious lisp.

CROCODILE, the villain or hero depending upon how you look at it.

SETTING NOTE

The action of the story could be placed in a jungle or a zoo or wherever you would like.

SOME CASTING AND STAGING THOUGHTS

All of the characters can be any gender and lines can be changed easily to accommodate a gender change from the original script.

This script was originally created to allow each child at a theatre camp to have a role. Many of these characters could be played by the same actor (with just a simple costume change) if you should happen to have a small cast.

I originally placed this piece in the jungle with very simple and sparse scenery. Feel free to make it as fun and colorful as you like – perhaps get the kids to assist in the costume making and scenery creation.

I believe the general rule is simplicity—the animals do not have to look too realistic.

As for the "trunk scene," I used dryer duct tubing but there are numerous and more creative solutions for that moment. If you have a budget, perhaps a costumer or someone comfortable with sewing could come up with a great plan for the "expanding nose."

(As the lights come up, NARRATORS 1 and 2 enter with NARRATOR 3 sneaking in behind them.)

NARRATOR 1: In the high and far-off times, the elephant had no trunk.

NARRATOR 2: He had only a bulgy nose, as big as a boot, that he could wiggle about from side to side—

NARRATOR 3: *(Peeks out and stage whispers:)* But he couldn't pick things up with it!

NARRATOR 2: *(Quickly:)* But he couldn't pick—

(Realizes it has already been said and looks accusingly at Narrator 1.)

NARRATOR 1: *(Shrugging "not me":)* Now, as we were saying, there was one elephant—

NARRATOR 3: *(Peeks out same as before:)* A baby!

NARRATOR 1: *(To Narrator 3:)* Are we telling this story or are you?

(Narrator 2 crosses arms as Narrator 3 peaks out and gestures "you are.")

Good.

(ELEPHANT FAMILY enters.)

NARRATOR 1: There was one elephant—

NARRATOR 3: A baby!—

(Narrators 1 and 2 spin around, Narrator 3 falls silent putting his finger over his/her lips.)

NARRATOR 1: Yes, a baby elephant, who was so full of curiosity...

(Narrator 3 about to burst.)

NARRATOR 2: That he asked ever so many questions –

(Narrator 3 can hold it in no longer.)

NARRATOR 3: *(Taking the stage:)* Filling all the land with his curiosity!

NARRATOR 2: I thought we agreed that WE would be telling this story!

(Both Narrators 1 and 2 stare at Narrator 3.)

NARRATOR 3: *(Pouting:)* Can't I help?

NARRATOR 1: *(Rolling his eyes but relenting:)* I guess so.

(Narrator 3 looks at Narrator 2 with "puppy dog" eyes.)

NARRATOR 2: Fine. *(To Narrator 1:)* How can you say NO to "the face"?

NARRATOR 3: *(Taking the stage again:)* One day –

NARRATOR 1: *(Pulling Narrator 3 to the side:)* I go first. One day, he approached his aunt, the Ostrich...

(OSTRICH enters from opposite side of the stage from the Elephant family.)

BABY E: *(Crossing to the Ostrich:)* Auntie Ostrich, why do your tail feathers grow like that?

OSTRICH: *(Taking immediate offense:)* How dare you, little one! It is not polite to ask a lady about her backside. One day, your curiosity will get you into trouble

(She pops him with her tail feathers and exits.)

SISTER E: *(Having witnessed the whole exchange:)* Nice going, stupid. You should mind your own business.

(Sticks her tongue out at him.)

NARRATOR 2: *(As Baby E, with head down, rejoins his family:)* Hurt, but not deterred, the baby elephant went back to grazing...

NARRATOR 3: When along came another of his aunts, the Giraffe.

(GIRAFFE enters.)

GIRAFFE: *(To Baby E:)* Well, hello there, little one.

BABY E: *(Bowing to his aunt respectfully:)* Hello, Auntie Giraffe. May I ask you a question?

(Elephant family raise their heads from grazing and collectively shake their heads "no.")

What makes your skin so spotty?

(All gasp and Giraffe is shocked.)

MAMA E: *(Approaching, to Giraffe:)* I'm so sorry—he is just inquisitive. He meant no harm—

GIRAFFE: *(Upset:)* You know I've been seeing a dermatologist and how self-conscious I am about my skin condition!

(She exits crying and wailing.)

MAMA E: *(To Baby E:)* Well, I hope you're happy. When are you going to learn to keep your mouth shut?

(She gently pops Baby E.)

No dessert for a week!

BABY E: A whole week? Dad?

PAPA E: You heard your mother.

(Sister E makes fun of him behind Dad's back as Mama nudges him back towards the family.)

NARRATOR 1: He was very sad about the dessert—

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NARRATOR 2: And about embarrassing his aunt, the Giraffe—

NARRATOR 3: But he just couldn't help asking questions.

(AUNTIE HIPPO enters.)

NARRATOR 1: When his "broad" aunt, the Hippopotamus, came by—

NARRATOR 3: I think people are using the word AMPLE now. BROAD might be offensive.

NARRATOR 1: Ample? Fine. When his *(To Narrator 3:)* AMPLE aunt, the Hippopotamus, came by he tried very hard not to ask her a question.

NARRATOR 2: He tried holding his breath, but when he let it out...

BABY E: *(Exploding on outward breath:)* Why are you so FAT?!

HIPPO: *(Furious and shocked as all characters gasp—including those backstage:)* What?!

NARRATOR 1: *(To Hippo—trying to cover for the youngster:)* He said "Why are your eyes so red?"

NARRATOR 2: *(To Narrator 1:)* Nice cover.

NARRATOR 1: Thanks.

HIPPO: *(Calming down:)* Oh, well...

BABY E: That's not what I said, I said—

NARRATOR 3: *(Covering Baby E's mouth:)* He's very sorry if he offended you.

HIPPO: Well, I hope so. You try keeping your eyes open under water for long periods of time and see if your eyes don't get red. The nerve!

MAMA E: *(To Hippo:)* I'm so sorry, Henrietta –

HIPPO: You had better teach your boy some manners, Ellen, or one day someone else will!

(She exits in a huff.)

MAMA E: *(Looking sternly at her son:)* You see what your curiosity is getting you? No dessert, two weeks!

BABY E: Two weeks?!

MAMA E: And you can go to bed early too! Now keep your little mouth shut.

PAPA E: You listen to your mother, Elton.

(He gently pops his son and exits.)

SISTER E: Yeah, what he said.

(Pops Baby E in the same manner as Papa as she exits with the family. Baby E is afraid to hit her back for fear of getting caught by his parents.)

NARRATOR 1: The baby elephant was very upset –

BABY E: My name is Elton.

NARRATOR 1: Sorry. Elton was very upset and was determined not to ask any more questions.

NARRATOR 2: Until the ancient and wise Baboon came by...

(BABOON enters with a mat and cane. He sets down the mat, lays down the cane, sits and begins to meditate.)

BABOON: Hummmmmmm...hummmmmmmmm...

NARRATOR 1: Knowing the Baboon to be wise, the baby elephant – Elton – struggled not to ask a question.

NARRATOR 3: *(Giving Baby E a melon:)* Here, that will keep you busy.

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NARRATOR 1: What did you do that for?

NARRATOR 3: I'm trying to help him out. I thought that if he had some food...

NARRATOR 2: Haven't you ever heard of "food for thought"?

(Narrator 3 starts to laugh but notices Narrator 2 is not laughing and quickly stops.)

BABY E: *(Enjoying his melon and with a mouthful of food:)* Say, Uncle Baboon, why do melons taste so good?

BABOON: *(Opens one eye only and then slowly closes it and goes back to chanting:)* Hmph! *(Pause.)* Hummm...

BABY E: *(Moving closer and speaking louder—again with another mouthful of food:)* Uncle, how come melons taste so good?

BABOON: *(Breaking out of his concentration and looking only at the audience:)* Can you not see I am trying to focus? Shoo! *(He closes his eyes and tries again:)* Humm...

(With all Narrators gesturing for him to stop, Baby E taps Baboon on the shoulder. His eyes immediately pop open and he stares in shock at the audience.)

BABY E: Excuse me, I hate to interrupt—

BABOON: *(Turns to look at Baby E:)* Then don't!

(He then picks up his mat and cane and starts to exit.)

BABY E: But you didn't—

(Baboon crosses back to Baby E, pops him on the head with his cane.)

BABOON: SHH!

(Exits.)

BABY E: Ouch. *(He rubs his head and thinks for a moment:)* Fine.

OK. I won't ask any more questions.

NARRATORS: Whaaaaat?

(Elephant family re-enters.)

ELEPHANTS: Whaaaaat?

(Ostrich and Giraffe re-enter.)

OSTRICH: Whaaaaat?

GIRAFFE: Whaaaaat?

(Hippo re-enters.)

HIPPO: Whaaaaat?

BABY E: That's right. No more questions.

(CAMEL and RHINO enter.)

CAMEL: What's going on?

OSTRICH: "Mr. Nosey" here has agreed to ask no more personal questions.

RHINO: Really?

BABY E: *(Smiling at the audience:)* Really. *(To Rhino:)* I won't ask you, "Hey, how did your horn get so pointy?" or "Hey, how did your skin get so wrinkly?"

(Winks at audience.)

RHINO: Hey, wait a minute, didn't you just ask me —

BABY E: And *(To Camel:)* I won't ask you, "Hey, where did your hump come from?"

CAMEL: Now you hold on a second —

BABY E: See, no more.

(TIGER enters.)

Like I won't even ask him (*Gesturing to Tiger:*) where his stripes came from.

(Other animals are catching on to his trick.)

TIGER: (*Gets in Baby E's face:*) Excuse me?

BABY E: Or why he has bad breath—

(Tiger grabs Baby E.)

TIGER: That's enough!

CAMEL: Yeah, you tricked us. And my hump—my lovely lady lump—is none of your business!

(Exits.)

RHINO: My wrinkles? Are they that noticeable?

(Others gather to comfort her, Mama E attempts to apologize for her son.)

OSTRICH: I knew it was too good to be true.

(Exits.)

HIPPO: (*As she and Giraffe take Rhino offstage:*) Don't worry—he'll get his one day.

(All glare at Baby E and at his mother, who is still attempting to apologize.)

RHINO: (*Exiting:*) But I have been using moisturizer...

MAMA E: I'm so sorry...

(She stares down her son as two KOLO-KOLO BIRDS enter and watch.)

TIGER: (*To Mama E:*) You better teach him some manners, or (*Flashes claws and cracks knuckles:*) I'll teach him myself.

(Exits.)

MAMA E: I will. I'm awfully sorry. He'll get better...

(Turns and gives her son that "I'm so disappointed in you" look:)

You see what you've done? Do you even feel sorry?

BABY E: *(With guilt:)* Yes, Mama, Papa, I do.

MAMA E: *(Surprised:)* You do?

PAPA E: *(Equally surprised:)* You do? *(Clears throat to sound less surprised:)* I mean, you do.

BABY E: Yes. I'm sorry that I *(Pause.)* didn't get to ask one more question.

MAMA E: *(While Papa E hits himself in the forehead:)* What?! And what question might that be?

BABY E: What does the crocodile have for dinner?

MAMA E: *(Exasperated, to Papa E:)* You deal with him—he's your son.

(Exits.)

PAPA E: Son, you don't need to know that.

BABY E: But why?

PAPA E: In life, some questions are better left unanswered. Leave it alone, son. Now, I think you owe your mother an apology—

SISTER E: And everyone else too!

(Papa E glares at her, and she looks back apologetically as they exit. Once Papa E is gone...)

Good job!

(She exits leaving Baby E alone on stage.)

NARRATOR 1: The baby elephant—Elton—sat awhile thinking about all that had happened.

NARRATOR 2: He really wanted to know the answer to his question.

NARRATOR 3: That is when the Kolo-Kolo birds began to whistle.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: We don't whistle.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: We hum.

NARRATOR 1: Pardon me?

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Not in our contract.

(Narrator 2 pulls out contract and all Narrators read over it, find the "no whistle clause" and then fold and discard the contract.)

See?

NARRATOR 1: The Kolo-Kolo birds begin to...hum.

(Kolo Birds hum.)

NARRATOR 2: The baby elephant—

(Narrator 1 whispers name correction to Narrator 2.)

I mean Elton notices the birds and starts to ask them a question, then hesitates.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Whatsa matter, kid?

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: Afraid to ask?

BABY E: Every time I ask a question bad things happen or I get in trouble.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Well, it "JUST SO" happens

(Both birds chuckle at joke.)

that we overheard your question and know the answer.

BABY E: Really?

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: But...if you don't really want to know —

BABY E: I do, I do! What does the crocodile have for dinner?

(Birds exchange a look.)

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Go to the banks of the great grey-green greasy river all set about with fever trees...

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: *(To audience:)* Sounds like a great vacation spot, doesn't it?

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: *(Frowning at other bird:)* And ask the crocodile for yourself.

BABY E: *(Taking off across the stage:)* Thank you, thank you, Kolo-Kolo Birds!

(Exits.)

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Yeah, yeah, don't mention it.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: Hey, how come he didn't ask us about our beaks, or why our feathers are so bright?

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: Short end of the stick, story of our lives. I guess we're just not important enough —

NARRATOR 3: Excuse me. There's no scene between the Kolo-Kolo Birds in the script.

NARRATOR 2: Says here, *(Looking through the script:)* "after being thanked, the Kolo-Kolo Birds exit."

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 1: *(On exit:)* Fine. Whatever.

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: So typical...

(Exit.)

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NARRATOR 1: The next morning, Elton,

(Baby E enters smiling.)

the baby elephant,

(Baby E frowns.)

informed his family

(Family enters, worried.)

that he was off to discover what the crocodile had for dinner.

NARRATOR 2 : They were worried but felt he needed to find out on his own

(Family says goodbye, even Sister E. During the next several lines, Narrators assist Baby E with his supplies—actually just Narrator 3.)

He gathered 100 pounds of bananas—

NARRATOR 3: *(Voice strained from lifting the bananas:)* The little short red kind.

NARRATOR 2: pounds of sugar—

NARRATOR 3: *(Again with more strain:)* The long purple kind.

NARRATOR 2: And 17 melons. *(Pauses and waits to be interrupted by Narrator 3. Finally:)* He ate—

NARRATOR 3: The greeny crackly kind.

(Smiles at Narrator 2.)

NARRATOR 1: He ate the melons along the way, leaving the rinds—

NARRATOR 3: Since he couldn't pick them up.

(Baby E crosses the stage, leaving trash behind. WASTE MANAGEMENT TEAM enters with brooms/shovels and dust

pans, crossing the stage behind the elephant.)

WASTE 1: *(To audience:)* Pathetic. *(Scooping up trash:)* Just pathetic.

WASTE 2: Elephants are truly the worst. The worst.

(Both exit.)

NARRATOR 1: Finally –

NARRATOR 3: And 120 pounds of food later...

NARRATOR 1: He arrived at the banks of the grey-green greasy river –

KOLO-KOLO BIRD 2: *(Pops out:)* Great vacation getaway!

(Exit.)

NARRATOR 2: Get lost!

BABY E: Huh?

NARRATOR 2: *(To Baby E:)* Not you.

NARRATOR 1: Now the baby elephant

(Baby E looks at him.)

whose name was Elton had never seen a crocodile.

NARRATOR 2: And, therefore, did not know what one looked like.

(Enter PYTHON.)

NARRATOR 3: He spotted a python coiled around a rock taking a nap.

BABY E: *(To the snake:)* Have you seen a crocodile around here?

PYTHON: Have I sssseen a crocodile? *(Laughs:)* What will you assssk me next? What doessss he eat for dinner?

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BABY E: Well, actually...

PYTHON: (*Shaking his head:*) Ssssad...

(*Baby E starts to walk away when the snake notices the rinds.*)

Hey, aren't you going to pick up your trashhhhh?

BABY E: (*Shrugging:*) Can't.

(*Exits as Waste Management enters again.*)

PYTHON: Ssssad...

(*Python exits shaking his head.*)

WASTE 1: I couldn't agree more

(*Cleaning up the mess and exiting while CROCODILE enters secretly.*)

NARRATOR 1: Discouraged, Elton trotted along until he stepped on what he thought was a log.

(*Crocodile winks one eye to the audience.*)

BABY E: Oh! Excuse me. I didn't mean to step on you.

CROCODILE: Quite all right. You should be more careful and watch where you are going.

BABY E: I just have a lot on my mind.

CROCODILE: Maybe I can help.

BABY E: Well, I am on a mission to find the crocodile.

CROCODILE: Hmm... (*Smiles at the audience:*) and why do you need to find him?

BABY E: I need to ask him a question.

CROCODILE: Come here, little one.

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