THE ELEPHANT CHILD 

 by Rudyard Kipling

 In the high and far off times 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 things up with it. But there was one Elephant, a new Elephant – an Elephant’s Child – who was full of curiosity – that means he asks ever so many questions. And he lived in Africa, and he filled all of Africa with his curiosity. He asked his tall aunt, the Ostrich, why her feathers grew just so, and his aunt spanked him with her claw. And he asked his tall uncle, the Giraffe, what made his skin so spotty, and his uncle spanked him with his hard hoof. And still he was filled with curiosity. He asked his wide aunt, the Hippopotamus, why her eyes were so red, and his aunt spanked him with her wide hoof. And he asked his hairy uncle, the Baboon, why melons tasted so good, and his hairy uncle spanked him with his hairy paw. And still he was full of curiosity! He asked questions about everything. Everything that he saw, and everything that he heard, or felt, or smelled, or touched. He asked questions about EVERYTHING! And still he was filled with insatiable curiosity.

 One fine morning the Elephant Child asked a new question that he had never asked before. He asked, “What does the Crocodile have for dinner?” Then everybody said, “Hush!” in loud voices and they all spanked him for a long time.

 By and by, he came upon a KoloKolo Bird, sitting in the bush. The Elephant Child said, “Everyone has spanked me for my insatiable curiosity and still I want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner!”

 The KoloKolo Bird said with a cry, “Go to the banks of the great grey, green, greasy, Limpopo River and find out.”

 That very next morning the Elephant Child took about 100 pounds of bananas, and about 100 pounds of sugar-cane, and 17 melons and said to his dear family, “Goodbye. I am going to the Limpopo River to find out what Crocodile eats for dinner.” They all spanked him once more for good luck, though he asked them very politely to stop.

 Then he went away, eating his melons and throwing the rind about on the ground because he could not pick it up.

 He went from town to town until at last he came to the banks of the great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo River all set about with trees just like the KoloKolo Bird had said.

 Now you must know and understand that up until that very week, that very day, and hour, and minute, that Elephant Child had never even seen a Crocodile. He did not know what one was like. It was all his insatiable curiosity that had sent him looking to find out what the Crocodile had for dinner.

 Now the first thing that he found was a Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake curled up around a rock.

 “Excuse me,” said the Elephant Child most politely. “Have you seen such a thing as a Crocodile in these parts?”

 “H a v e I s e e e e n a Crocodile?” said Snake in a voice full of scorn. “W h a t w i l l y o u a s k m e e e n e x t?”

 “Excuse me,” said Elephant Child, “but could you please tell me what he has for dinner?”

 Then the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake uncoiled himself very quickly from the rock, and spanked the poor Elephant Child with his scaly tail.

 And so he said goodbye to the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake and went on eating his melons and throwing the rind about on the ground because he could not pick it up, until he came upon a log of wood at the edge of the great, grey, green, greasy, Limpopo River all set about with trees.

 But it was not a log of wood, it was Crocodile. And the Crocodile winked one eye – just like this!

 “Excuse me,” said the Elephant Child most politely, “but do you happen to have seen a Crocodile around these parts?”

 Then the Crocodile winked the other eye, and lifted his tail out of the mud.

 “Come hither, Little One,” said the Crocodile. “Why do you ask such things? I am Crocodile,” and he wept crocodile-tears to show it was quite true.

 Then the Elephant Child grew breathless, and kneeled down on the river 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 hither, Little One, and I will whisper to you.”

 The Elephant Child put his head down close to Crocodile’s musky, tusky mouth and the Crocodile grabbed him by his little nose.

 “I think today I’ll eat an Elephant Child!”

 “Let go! You’re hurting me!” squealed Elephant Child.

 Then the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake slid down the river bank and said, “My young friend, you must now, immediately pull as hard as ever you can or he will jerk you into the stream.”

 Then the Elephant Child sat back and pulled, and pulled, and pulled and his little nose began to stretch.

 The Crocodile pulled and pulled and pulled.

 The Elephant Child’s nose kept on stretching and stretching as he pulled and pulled and pulled. He pulled and pulled and pulled some more. His nose grew longer and longer.

 The Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake wrapped himself around Elephant Child and pulled and pulled and pulled. Together they pulled some more. At last the Crocodile let go of the Elephant Child’s nose with a plop.

 The Elephant Child thanked the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake as he sat down and rubbed his poor sore nose. He wrapped his nose in cool banana leaves and put it into the cool water of the great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo River.

 “Why are you doing that?” asked the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake.

 “My nose is out of shape and I am waiting for it to shrink.”

 “Well you will have a very long wait,” said the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake. “Some people don’t know what is good for them.”

 You see the Crocodile had pulled that nose into a really truly trunk just like elephants have today.

 The Elephant Child sat and waited for three long days. 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 his new trunk.

 “Advantage number one!’ said the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake. “You couldn’t have done that with that little nose you had before. Try to eat a little now.”

 Before he thought what he was doing Elephant Child plucked up a large bundle of grass and stuffed it in his mouth.

 “Advantage number two!” said the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake. “You couldn’t have done that with that little nose you had before. Don’t you think it’s rather hot today?”

 “It is,” said the Elephant Child and he gathered up a swish of water from the river and sprayed it all over his head.

 “Advantage number three!” said the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake. “How would you like to be spanked again?”

 “I would not like that at all,” said Elephant Child.

 “Well how would you like to spank others?” asked the Bi-Colored-Python-Rock-Snake. “You will find that new nose of yours is very good for spanking others.”

 And so the Elephant Child went home with his new nose and showed his family that he knew a lot about spanking. When everyone asked him about his new nose he told them that the Crocodile had given it to him when he asked him what he ate for dinner.

 His whole family went to the great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo River to get new noses from Crocodile -- and elephants have had trunks ever since!