



# The King's Elephant

Once upon a time there was a king, the king of Benares, a city in North India. He was very rich. He had many servants, a beautiful palace with beautiful gardens. He had many carriages and a stable full of horses. But his most precious possession was a magnificent elephant named Mahaghiri. She was as tall as two grown men stacked on top of each other, and the colour of her skin was like the colour of storm clouds. She had big floppy ears and small, bright eyes. She was also very smart.

Mahaghiri had an elephant enclosure specially built for her and she had her own servant, named Rajinder. The king often came to visit the elephant and brought her some treats. He also checked whether Rajinder was taking good care of the elephant. But the king needn't worry about that. Rajinder loved the elephant very much and trusted her completely. Every morning he took her to the river to bathe. Then he brought her freshly cut grass, leaves, and delicious fruits from the market for breakfast. He talked to her a lot and at night he played his flute when she went to sleep.

One morning Rajinder came to the elephant house as usual with fresh fruits. Suddenly, before he realized what was happening, Mahaghiri picked him up with her trunk and threw him out of the stall, breaking his arm. She started stamping on the ground and trumpeting very loudly. It took a lot of strong men to tie her up with ropes and chains, she was so restless.

When the king heard what had happened, he was completely confused. He first sent a doctor to Rajinder to help him with his arm. Then he summoned his prime minister.

"You should go and see Mahaghiri right away," he said. "She was always so kind and gentle, but this morning she threw her caretaker out of the stable. I do not understand. She must be sick or in pain. Go find out what's going on, it doesn't matter how much it costs."

The prime minister went to the elephant to see what was going on. Mahaghiri was still tied up and restless. He approached her gently. He looked first at her eyes, which were as clear as usual. Then he felt behind her ears; her temperature was normal. Then he listened to her heart, which was also beating normally. He examined the entire elephant to see if there were any injuries. But he couldn't find anything at all. "Strange," he thought, "I can't find any explanation for her bad behaviour."

Then suddenly he saw something shiny in the straw. It was a sharp, curved blade. It resembled a knife often used by robbers. Could there possibly be a connection?

That night, when everyone was asleep, the prime minister went back to the elephant house. There, in the stable next to Mahaghiri's, was a group of robbers. "Tonight we will rob the palace," said the chieftain. "We'll make a hole in the wall first and then we'll steal all the king's treasures." "But what about the guards?" asked one of the robbers. "If necessary, we will kill them, you are not afraid of that, are you? When are you going to be a real robber," said the chief.



From the shadows, the prime minister could see the elephant, its ears thrown back, listening for every hateful and violent word that was said. "Just as I expected," thought the prime minister. Then he quietly crept away, barricaded the door from the outside so that the robbers could not escape, and immediately went to the king.

"Your Majesty," he said, "I think I have found the cause of the elephant's bad behaviour. Because of the bad company, they had a bad influence on her. I have locked up the robbers." When the king heard what the prime minister said, he immediately sent his body guards who arrested the robbers.

"But how are we supposed to cure the elephant?" he asked. "Well, Your Majesty, if Mahaghiri has become dangerous because she was in the company of these bad robbers, maybe she can heal if she is in the company of good people." "What a wonderful idea," said the king, "let's invite the kindest and happiest people from all over the city to meet the elephant and spend some time with her in the stable."

The prime minister invited many friends and asked, "Would you like to help Mahaghiri get back to her old self?" "Of course," they said, "what do you want us to do?" "Just go to the elephant house every day and have a nice chat. Let her hear how kindly and carefully you talk to each other and how helpful you are."

So it happened, the friends of the prime minister gathered every day in the stable next to Mahaghiri. They talked to each other and enjoyed each other's company. Sometimes they brought cake and other goodies, which they shared with each other. Sometimes their children also came along and played together in the straw. And every day Mahaghiri stood listening and watching. And very gradually she became more and more calm.

"I think it's working," said the prime minister. "I think we'll be able to untie her soon." Everyone was a little nervous the day the ropes came off. The king sent everyone out when, very carefully, the brave Rajinder began to loosen the ropes around the elephant's ears and trunk. Then the ropes around her head and finally the chains around her big, big feet. Everyone held their breath, what if she was still wild?

Mahaghiri looked around, shuffled her feet. Then she slowly wrapped her trunk around Rajinder and lifted him high into the air... before gently placing him on her back. A great cheer went up. The king was delighted. "Let's have a picnic to celebrate."

What a great afternoon they all had together! Mahaghiri bathed in the river and let the children ride in circles on her back. It seemed like she was kinder, more careful, and more reliable than ever. But Rajinder never forgot what happened and always made sure to set a good example for Mahaghiri by always being kind and friendly himself.



## Investigate the story further:



### Drama

The aim is to help the children to improvise relevant sections of the story in order to explore their own feelings and those of the various characters.

### Elephants

- Move around the room as if you were Mahaghiri the elephant: walk in a slow and stately way; swing your trunk; use it to pick up and eat fruit and coconut cake etc.
- Find your 'stall' and stand still.
- Listen to the robbers talking. Show the effect this has on you.
- Rajinder comes to give you your breakfast. Throw him out of the stall. Show how difficult and violent you have become.
- The king's men come and bind you with strong ropes. You don't like it but you can't move.
- The good friends meet in your stall. Listen to them talking. Show how listening to them begins to change you. You become gentle and trustworthy again.
- Rajinder comes and removes the ropes. Stretch your legs and trunk. At last you can move again. How good it feels!
- Stretch out your trunk and gently put Rajinder on your back.
- Move around the room in a strong and graceful way. You are happy, so you give the children rides, bathe in the lake, eat coconut cake, etc....



### Discussion

#### Helpful speech

The robbers met in Mahaghiri's stall to plan all the horrid things they were going to do. Being in their company, and listening to them, had a bad effect on her.

- Why did Mahaghiri start behaving badly?
- What sort of things do you think she heard the robbers saying?
- Why did this have a bad effect on her?
- How did the king's minister help Mahaghiri?
- What sort of things do you think she heard the good friends saying to each other?
- Why did listening to the good friends help her?
- Are there any things that have a bad effect on you?
- What things have a good effect on you?
- If someone wanted to help you behave well, what would they say?

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