

An Elephant on an Island

By Ashley Barboza

There are many stories about lone tuskers who live lone lives. But this is the story of a lonely elephant; an elephant on an island.

No one knew how the elephant got there, for the island was in the middle of the sea. Now, he was not the only one on the island. There were people, birds, cows, goats, cats, rats and even some frogs. But he knew he was the only one of his kind.

The people only noticed him when he had grown sufficiently big. Although he was the biggest of all the living beings on the island, he felt very small. Everyone else seemed bigger to him.

The first person to see the elephant was Muthalib Ali. Then he was only as tall as Ali's waist. Ali had only seen elephants in pictures and so was delighted to see a real one. He claimed the elephant for himself and since then it was Ali who took care of the elephant. But gradually the elephant became the island's property.

To the people on the island, he was a private secret. He was the source of their joy and pride. During their festivals he was their main attraction; decorated with jewellery and colour. At other times he did the work they could not do; move heavy logs and stones for building structures.

He didn't mind doing the work. After all what else could he do here? The island wasn't big enough to excite his curiosity. Besides, they took good care of him. They gave him food and water. Occasionally they even gave him a bath.

But did they know how he really felt? How could he tell them? If he did, would they care? He yearned to know where he had come from. He yearned to leave the island; to know what was out there. Were there others of his kind? Did anyone outside the island know about him?

On some mornings when he had no work to do, he would stand on the shore and try to look beyond the lagoon and the waves to see if he could spot another land. Perhaps there was another island with another one like him.

In the nights he would stand on the shore and gaze at the stars in wonder. Every time he saw a light on the ocean he would try to discern whether it was coming from a ship or another island.

He often saw people from the island sail away on small boats to reach the huge ships that floated far away in the sea. He knew the ships took the people afar. But he was not sure if it was to another land. He wished he could get on one of those ships, but there were no boats big enough to carry him. Even if there were, would anyone take him? Would the people of the island let him leave?

With each passing year the elephant grew bigger and with each passing year he felt even lonelier. Everywhere he looked he saw people, animal and birds with companions. He too longed for companionship.

As the elephant got weary the people on the island got worried. They improved his food, but he didn't eat. They gave him a bath every day, but it didn't revive his spirit. The local physicians tried all kinds of remedies but nothing worked. When all hope was lost the people on the island turned to prayer.

All the people on the island congregated at the mosque except for a young boy named Nezar ul Haq. He went instead to visit the elephant. Nezar was unable to speak since he was a child. But he didn't need to speak to communicate. All he needed to do was look into their eyes.

With just one look into the elephant's tiny eyes he learnt everything that he wanted to say. He ran to the mosque where the people had congregated and conveyed the message to Muthalib Ali in writing. Muthalib Ali read out the message to the congregation.

The whole congregation fell silent. They had never thought that the elephant had felt lonely on the island. In fact, they had never thought of what he felt. They felt ashamed of themselves. They didn't want to let the elephant go but they understood that if they didn't, he would die.

So the whole island gathered to build a boat big enough to carry the elephant to the ship. Even the other animals helped. One of the businessmen from the island arranged for a ship to carry the elephant to the mainland. Another arranged for someone who owned many elephants on the mainland, to adopt the elephant from the island.

Finally the day arrived when the elephant was to sail to the mainland. The elephant was cheerful and healthy again. The whole island gathered to bid the elephant goodbye. Many cried.

The elephant was excited as he sailed on the ship. He couldn't wait to see the mainland. He wondered of the possibility of meeting more of his kind. He thought of the days he had stood on the shores of the island. He felt happy.

When he woke up the next day, he had already reached his destination. But the mainland was nothing like he had imagined. There were very few trees here and instead there were many buildings taller than the trees. He wondered if others of his kind had helped build them.

After a while his new owner came to get him. His name was Naseeb and he was nothing like Muthalib Ali. He was not excited to see the elephant like his previous owner. He had an assistant named Thouseef who carried a long cane with a hook on one end.

The elephant didn't know what this was, but soon found out. Thouseef goaded the elephant to walk as his owner sat on top of him. No one had ever sat on the elephant when he was on the island. He wondered what he had done for his new owners to treat him this way.

The elephant walked for hours but Naseeb and Thouseef didn't give him food or drink. He began to get weary. He found comfort in the thought of meeting his kind. Finally, after a very long journey he reached what he thought was his new home. And there he saw the sight he had longed for all his life; hundreds of his own kind at one place.

At that moment he was the happiest on earth. But his joy only lasted for a moment because he soon realized that all the elephants had chains on their legs. None of these elephants were happy. They had wounds on their ears and feet. This was not his new home; this was a market. And all these elephants were for sale.

The elephant was soon bought by a man named Raveendran. Raveendran was as cruel as Naseeb. Raveendran only bought the elephant to boast his wealth. Despite all his wealth, he was stingy and didn't feed the elephant well. He was chained and tortured.

His only friend was a boy named Bilal who always checked to see if the elephant was doing well. He often snuck in food and drink for the elephant. But despite this the elephant grew weak with each passing day.

One night the elephant thought of Muthalib Ali and the others on the island. He longed to go back to the island. That night he dreamt he was back on the island. He ran and ran along the island shore as he slept in peace never to wake up again.