

Charms

The Reading Spot

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I collect elephants. I have been collecting them for as long as I can remember. They are my charm animals. Made of jade, alabaster, teak, ebony or you know what. I don't have superstitions related to them. I just like them and that is that.

I have recently found out that if you place them with their trunk towards the window, you will be lucky when it comes to money. Since then I have oriented them all along the path of prosperity. I am still waiting for the results. Meanwhile, I bought a tweed one, a toy which seems to be made out of a Scottish kilt. It stands next to my laptop. We get along pretty well.

From an imagistic point of view, they put me in a state of calm and safety. It may be because I remember them from my childhood. They are a landmark. For some time I thought it was just an eccentricity of mine. Well, it's not.

Rudyard Kipling was one of those who have literally speculated the effect of peace that the image of the elephant has on most people. From the regiment-flock which crosses Mowgli's jungle to Dumbo, a character whom we rather associate with Disney than with its rightful author.

One of the most beautiful stories is *Povestea puiului de elefant, Elephant's Child*. It's a children's story from the old times when the elephants had no trunk. They didn't and that's that. During those times, the baby elephant, curious as the day is long, had a question to put to each of his relatives, from

aunt-ostrich to uncle-giraffe. He asked why they hide their head in the sand, where they got their spots from and other things like these, until he asked the fatidic question: what does the crocodile eat for dinner? After long arguments with the family who was outraged by this dangerous curiosity, the baby elephant left on his own to the strand of the river Limpopo to find out for himself the answer to this great question. There he came face to face with the source of the mystery, the feared Crocodile who sprung out of the waters and grabbed in his teeth the nose of the baby elephant, who would have died without doubt if the Baboon and the Python, the Hippo and the Giraffe hadn't come to his rescue, pulling him to the strand until the nose of the baby lengthened, turned into a trunk and he was saved just like that from a catastrophe.

I like this story a lot. It's a children's story. It somehow reiterates the African belief in the memory of the elephant, in its almost human nature, which determines it to protect the loved one despite its age, hybris, riots and curiosities.

When the baby elephant gets in trouble, it has a whole jungle by its side. It has a family who doesn't let it be the crocodile's dinner. It's true that it walks the carpet and they gibe at it. But, in the end, they give it a trunk to remind it that, when its front tusks come out, all the arguments will be put behind them. No matter how many mistakes the elephant would make, no matter how many crocodiles he would have to face, there is always a home on the Limpopo River where it can come back anytime. There is love. There is hope.

And this rule is valid for all elephants. May they be made of alabaster, ebony, or tweed.

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