



# Addressing the Elephant in My Garage

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At three thirty pm on a Friday afternoon, my brother brought an elephant home. Father was taking his usual nap after returning from the mosque, muttering that my brother had gone "off somewhere" instead of accompanying him home. My mother was reading a book, and I was watching *The Office* when our security guard Jamal rang the doorbell.

When I opened the door, Jamal looked torn between bewilderment and worry. "Apu," he said, "Your brother has gone crazy." He then proceeded to inform me that my brother had brought home an elephant. I wasn't sure I'd heard him correctly at first, but as it turns out, it was indeed the case. Suja had brought an elephant and was insisting that it be kept in the garage. This required parental intervention, even though I wasn't particularly excited about interrupting my parents' Friday afternoon routine with this strange piece of news. Worrying that my usually pragmatic brother had gone off the rails, I cautiously informed my parents of the circumstances. They, like me, thought they had

misheard at first. I could tell my father was thinking he was still dreaming, but then we heard an elephant trumpet from downstairs. That woke him up alright. Putting aside her book and glasses, my mother marched out of the room without a word. My father hastily followed, adjusting his *lungi*. Even my grandfather poked his head out of his room. "Did I just hear an elephant or am I developing dementia?" he asked as I made eye contact. I confirmed that there really was an elephant in the garage, and made to follow my parents downstairs. My grandfather followed suit.

A crowd had already gathered. My brother was explaining how he came across a man who was looking to give away his elephant for free because he couldn't afford to take care of him anymore. My mother spoke for the first time since she heard the news, and asked my brother what possessed him to bring the elephant home.

Now, the elephant certainly looked like he could use some affection. Appearing well trained and quite polite, he was standing behind my brother and waving his trunk lazily. And man, what sad eyes. I

wanted to give it a hug, but I was also scared of being trampled, so I stood at a safe distance.

My brother explained that this elephant had nowhere to go, and he hadn't the heart to let him be dumped at the zoo. Everyone knew how the local zoo authorities treated animals. "Besides," he added, "this guy is used to being on the streets. I think I should ride him to school. I don't think traffic will be a problem anymore. I'm sick of leaving the house at 6 am to get to classes that don't start until 8:30."

Something absurd had definitely possessed all of us, for I soon realized everyone present was agreeing that it was a brilliant idea.

"Ah I remember back in the good old days of Murshidabad, I would sometimes get rides on my grandfather's elephant to school," reminisced my grandfather, "We had named him Royal, but I don't know what happened to him when we ran away from the riots. I still hope he got stolen by someone who took care of him. You know, Royal really liked it when you petted him on the side, like this," and with that he began to pet the elephant. We all

held our breaths, but the big guy seemed to be loving it. "Royal loved playing with water," my grandfather smiled, grasping at the memories of a life that had crumbled away with the empire it was part of.

Perhaps I was the only one who noticed the odd familiarity with which our guest accepted my grandfather's affections, because the crowd had moved on from listening to the monologues of an old man in order to discuss more pressing matters.

Suja was right, traffic was unbearable in this city. What was so wrong with him wanting to ride an elephant to school? Yes, there was enough space in our garage, and wasn't the building looking for another caretaker anyway? We could just find someone who had experience taking care of animals. It was decided that the elephant could be kept and taken care of.

We named him Kalachaan.

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