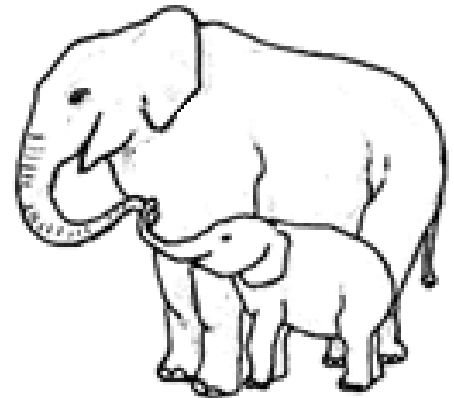


Never, never, never ride and elephant

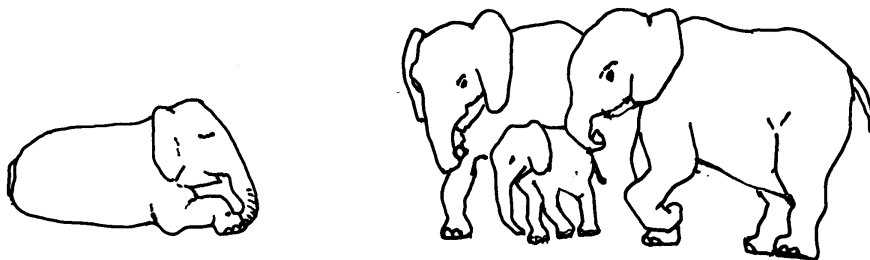
It was a special day in the jungle. A new baby elephant had been born. Her name was Li Li. The aunties of the herd gathered around baby Li Li and her mother, trumpeting and swishing their tails with great joy.

Li Li was soon on her feet and drank milk from her mother. The herd, consisting of mother, father, grandmother, aunties and uncles, young calves and teenagers and cousins, was not on the move today. They were resting for a time, allowing baby Li Li to gain her strength before moving on.

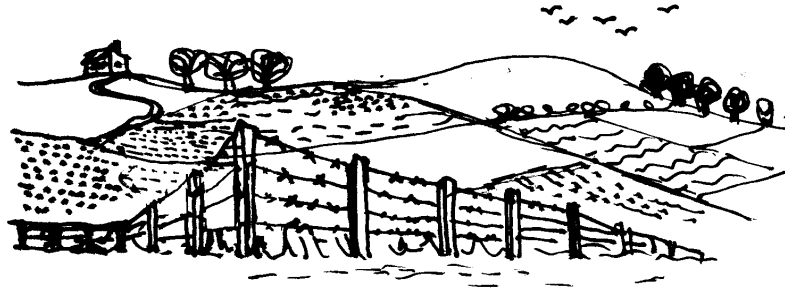


But soon, Grandmother, the oldest female in the herd said it was time to move. Elephants have to keep on the move, using their long trunks to feed on leaves, grass, tree bark, roots, and small stems. An Asian elephant can eat about 130 kg (300 pounds) of food a day. That's about 60 times more than a human adult would eat in a day!

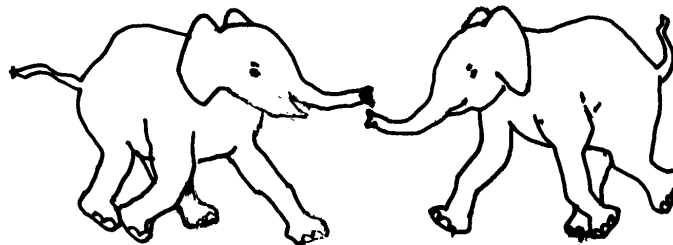
As the herd moved along, Li Li's short legs grew tired. The aunties, who were keeping a close eye on the new baby, along with mother, would instruct the herd to stop for rest from time to time, especially in the hottest part of the day. In the cool of the evening the herd would have their last meal for the day, and then find a place to sleep for the night.



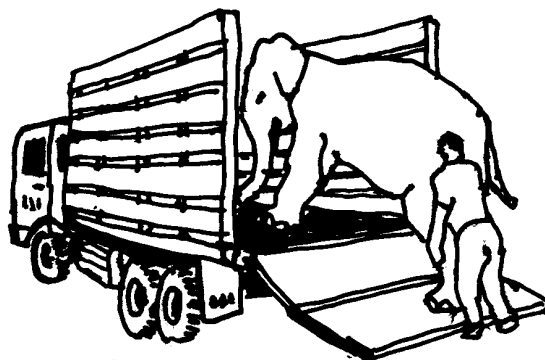
The next morning at sunrise they were on the move again, looking for breakfast. It was important for the herd to stick to the rainforest territory and not venture on to farmers' land. Although the idea of eating corn, rice and sugar cane from the farmers' fields was a great temptation, Grandmother knew the danger that came with wandering on to the land that belonged to humans. Some elephants had been shot by farmers, and some had been killed by the very high-voltage electric fences that farmers placed around their properties. Yes, humans were dangerous!



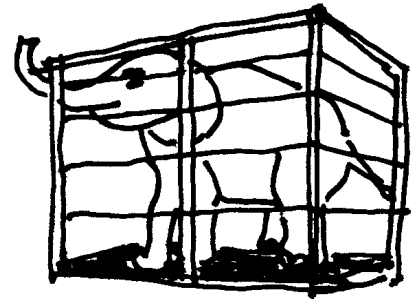
Li Li loved the times when the herd stopped for rest or for a drink at a river. After a short nap, she would play with her brothers and sisters and cousins, chasing each other, or using their trunks to squirt water at each other.



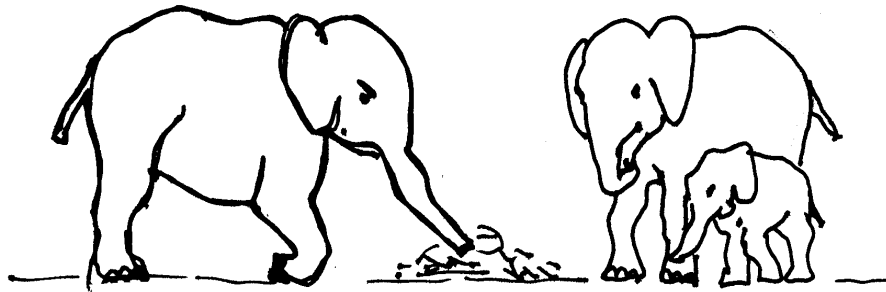
But one day, while the herd was resting by the river, and the little elephants were playing together, the elephants were taken by surprise. A truck drove up and several men jumped out. They threw a heavy rope around Li Li and pulled her to the back of the truck. It all happened so quickly. The young elephants shrieked in alarm. The adult elephants moved into action. Li Li's mother, followed by one of the aunties, charged towards the men. Immediately there was the sound of two gunshots. Li Li's mother and auntie lay dead. The men quickly pushed Li Li up the sloping ramp into the truck and drove off. The herd grieved over the loss of three of their members. With drooping ears and sad eyes, the elephant herd made crying sounds, which echoed throughout the jungle.



Li Li was now in a new strange world, She had never seen a truck before and now she was being jerked around in the back of one, trying not to fall over. Finally the truck stopped. Li Li was led out of the truck by the rope, and brought into an enclosure with other elephants. How strange it felt. Where were the leafy trees of the forest? Where was her mother and the rest of her family?

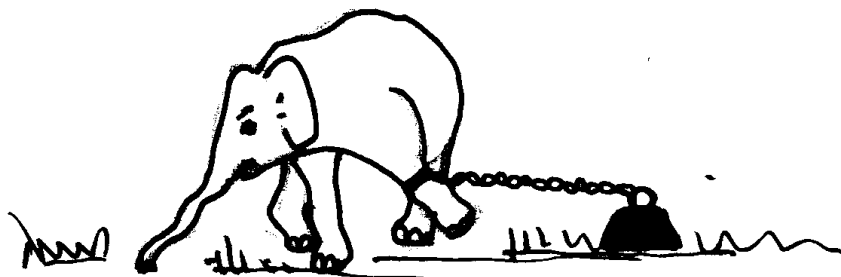


Li Li was hungry. She longed to drink milk from her mother. Later that day a man brought some food for the elephants to share. Now Li Li would only have hay to eat, and there was never enough. Tomorrow she would start her special training.



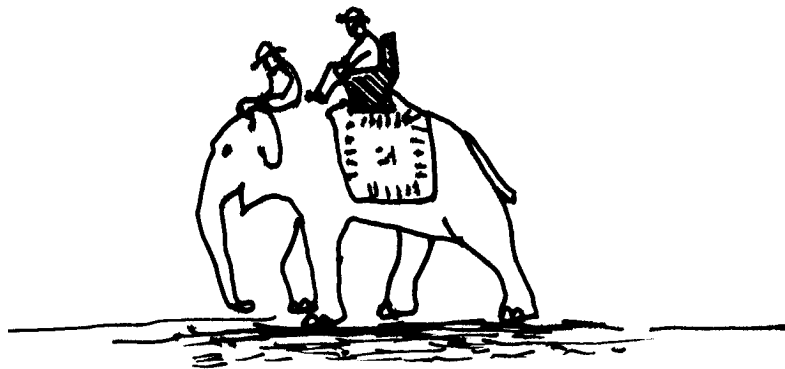
Li Li, like the other elephants in the enclosure, were being trained to work at tourist parks. They would give rides to people and perform tricks. Tourists would pay to come and see the elephants. To do this work, elephants have to be extremely calm. They cannot do as they please. They have to do exactly as their keeper tells them to do.

Li Li was suddenly awakened from deep sleep, with a slap of a stick on her back. "What's going on?" she thought. She stood up and shook herself. On the other end of the stick was her trainer for the day. Using the stick to direct her, Li Li found herself in another enclosure, with several other young elephants. She was tied to a wooden structure, now a prisoner, unable to move freely. The cruel stick continued to strike her on the back She cried out in pain, wishing her elephant family was there to help her. Finally the thrashing stopped and Li Li was put in heavy chains around her feet, making it very difficult, and very painful to walk.



How hungry she was. She had missed breakfast. Later in the day she was taken back to her own enclosure and was finally allowed to eat some hay along with the other elephants., But there was never enough. Li Li was hungry most of the time.

At this point you may ask, “Why does the trainer treat the young elephants so cruelly?” Here is the answer. Humans know that an elephant is a very strong and powerful animal. An elephant would have the power to crush or kill a human. In order to operate the elephant tourist business, with elephants giving rides and being in such close contact with people, the trainers believe that they must break the elephant’s spirit, making it do whatever it is told to do without fighting back. The elephant is taught to fear humans.



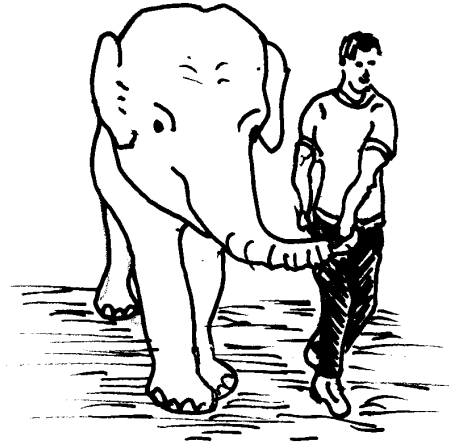
Whoever thought up this idea did not understand elephants. If treated with love and respect, an elephant will interact with a human being without undergoing this treatment.

Now back to the story of Li Li. After a few months of this terrible treatment known as ‘crushing’, it was time for Li Li to start work. As families came to the tourist parks to see the elephants, she would now be given colourful blankets and a saddle, and children would ride on her back. She would walk with her heavy load for hours without a rest. For a little elephant this was a lot of work, and she became very tired.

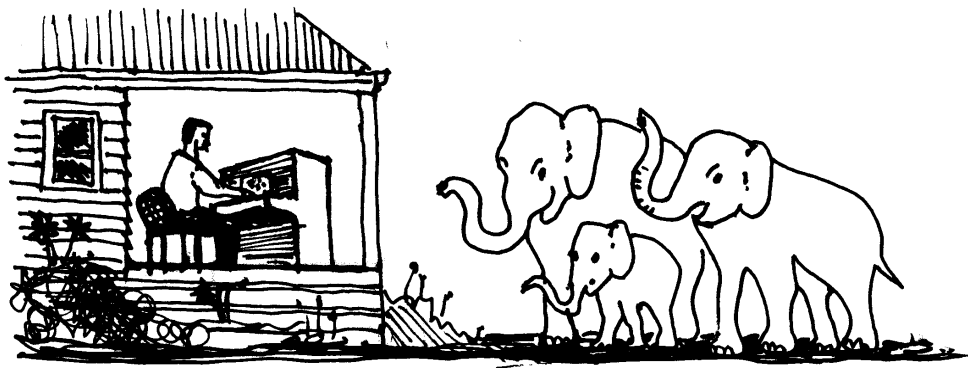
With the bad treatment, Li Li became very weak. One morning she could not get up. Her master struck her on the back with his stick, but still she could not get up. Soon the master gave up and moved on to find an elephant to take Li Li’s place.

Many young elephants like Li Li suffer dreadfully, and many die. But Li Li was soon to find out that not all human beings are so cruel.

The next day, a truck drove up. Li Li could hear her master talking to the visitors. Some money was handed over and a man named Paul, with his rescue team, gently helped Li Li to stand up. Their voices were soft and kind. They gave Li Li some bananas to eat and led her to the truck, up the ramp and into the back of the truck. After a bumpy ride, Li Li arrived at the Elephant World Animal Sanctuary, a place where she would now be cared for and treated kindly.



Paul Barton had been a music teacher in England. He decided to travel to Thailand to do some teaching. While there he met his wife, and made Thailand his home. Paul saw how elephants were treated, and wanted to do something to help. He then discovered Elephant World Animal Sanctuary and decided to work for them. Paul and his team rescue elephants from tourist parks and other places where elephants are mistreated. They are given a good home with lots of love and kindness. Paul wondered if elephants would like music. He decided to play the piano for his elephants. They came to hear him and joined in with their trumpeting sounds. Now Paul plays the piano every day for his elephants.



About this story

Many young elephants in Thailand suffer such cruel treatment. If you know anyone traveling to Thailand, tell them to never ride an elephant. The only hope is for people stop supporting the industry so that it goes out of business. The story of Paul Barton is true, and he has a wonderful relationship with the rescued elephants through his music.