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FACT FILE

FACT OR FICTION

Where do the facts stop and the author's ideas begin?

Tuesday, January 15, 1878

PRICE 10 CENTS

Mark Twain loved detective stories. In *The Stolen White Elephant* he seems to be making fun of• detectives, and especially Inspector Blunt, but this short story is very similar to the most famous detective stories of all time – the Sherlock Holmes stories. If Twain's book is a parody•, it's not a parody of the famous detective, but of the genre• of 'true crime•' stories, which was very popular at the time.

The story was first published in *Punch, Brothers, Punch!*, a collection of stories by Twain. The collection includes a mixture of various types of texts – from letters, notes and jokes, to stories like this one that the author has 'heard' from another person. In short, it is a mixture of **fiction** and **non-fiction**. The story about the elephant was inspired by• a fact that happened in 1878, when some grave robbers• stole the body of a rich man from a graveyard in New York. It clearly shows Twain's love of adding elements• of fiction to a factual story.

Twain didn't believe in one definition of literature, and many of his short pieces move between fiction and fact. He believed that facts could be stranger than fiction, and he loved mixing things up. He wanted to entertain his audience rather than follow the rules of a particular 'genre'. That is why in much of his writing it is difficult to tell the difference between fact and fiction. Plus, Twain mixed different types of content in his work, creating a multimodal•-style narrative•. Mark Twain is, without doubt, an exceptionally modern author.

WEB Search online and use a dictionary to translate the title into your language.

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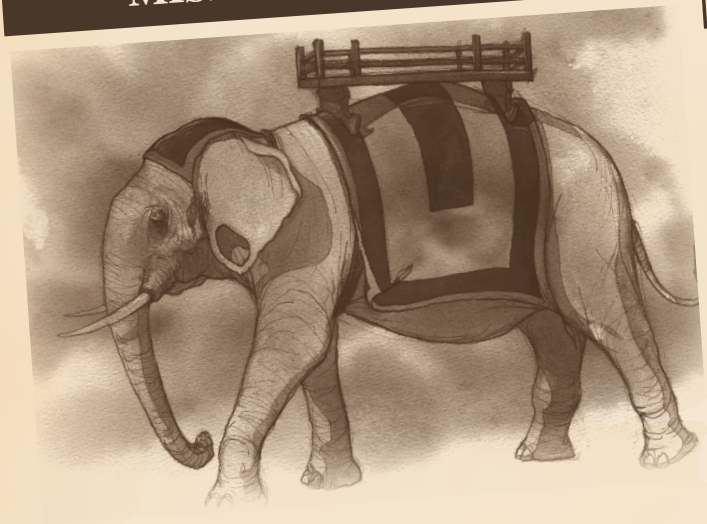
MISSING ELEPHANT



THINK

Twain wrote in 1897:

"Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn't"

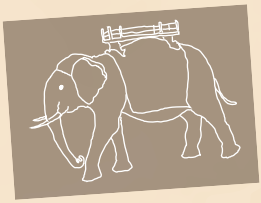
What did he mean? Discuss in pairs.

OVER TO YOU!

Read the definitions, then in pairs discuss the statement below. Do you agree or disagree?

fact: something that truly exists or happened
fiction: written stories that describe invented people and events

"There is no such thing as a totally factual book. The author is always influenced by their own ideas or opinions."



- **crime:** illegal activity
- **elements:** parts
- **genre:** type of art or writing
- **grave robbers:** people who take dead bodies from the ground
- **was inspired by:** the idea came from
- **making fun of:** joking about
- **multimodal:** with different text types (written, art, screen, etc.)
- **narrative:** (here) story
- **parody:** thing that copies another in a funny way

The Stolen White Elephant

Captain Burns

The detectives

The elephant

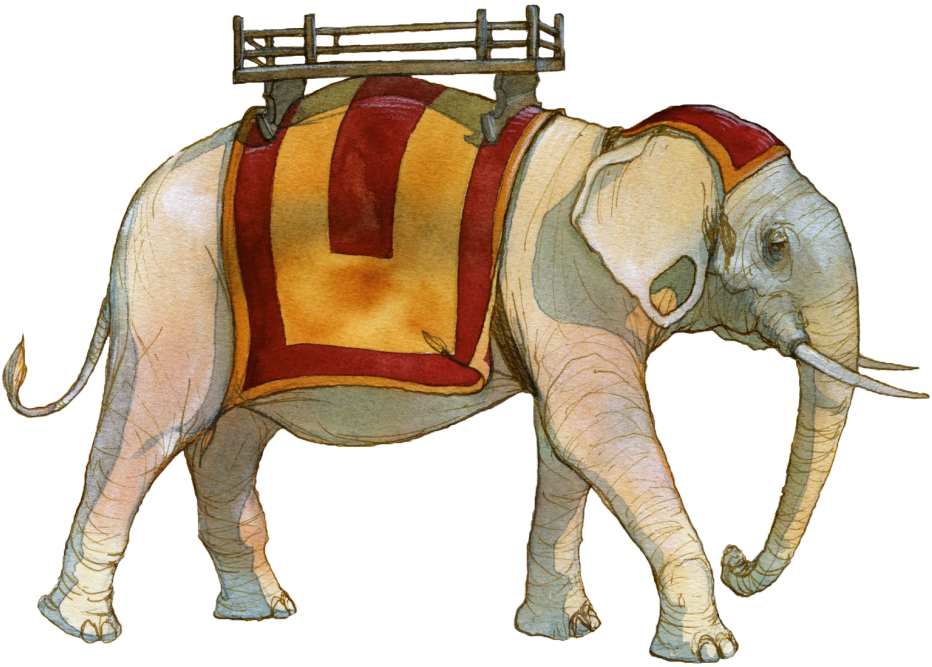
BEFORE READING

1 **The title of the story is *The Stolen White Elephant*. What kind of story do you think it is? Why? Ask and answer with a partner.**

- **a** ☐ horror
- **b** ☐ detective
- **c** ☐ love
- **d** ☐ adventure
- **e** ☐ science fiction

2 **Think about the title. What is unusual about a stolen white elephant?**

3 **Look at the picture and imagine you are the white elephant. Describe yourself. Choose a name, say where you come from. Guess what you do in the story.**



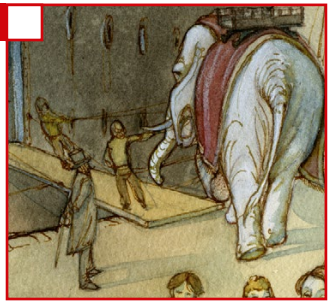
4 Listen and complete the descriptions of two important characters in the story.

1 I am the chief of the New York ..... force, the celebrated Inspector Blunt. No ..... is too difficult for me and no ..... is too insignificant.

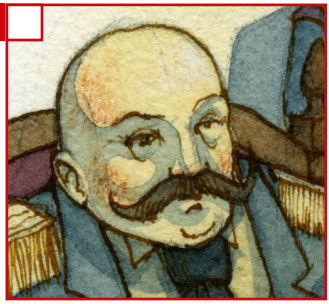
2 I ..... with my servants and the ..... and helpers of the elephant, in a ..... from Siam. It is my job to give the elephant to the Queen of England.

5 Match the pictures to the descriptions in Exercise 1.

A ☐



B ☐



6 These jobs are all in the story. Match the words to their definitions.

a ☐ journalist
b ☐ inspector
c ☐ detective
d ☐ harbour police officer
e ☐ farmer

1 An important police officer who has many other police officers working for him/her.
2 Someone who grows plants or keeps animals to feed people.
3 A police officer who looks for clues to solve a crime.
4 A police officer who works at the port in a city.
5 Someone who writes stories for newspapers.

I

I heard the following curious story from a railway acquaintance. He was a gentleman of more than seventy years of age, and his good face and sincere manner put the stamp of truth on everything he said.

"You know, in Siam the royal white elephant is very important. It is sacred to kings, and only kings can have a white elephant. And white elephants are more important than the king.

Very well… five years ago…

After a misunderstanding between the countries, the King of Siam decides to send the Queen of England a present. This present must be a royal one. And what present can be as royal as a white elephant? It is my job to deliver the present to Her Majesty the Queen. I travel with my servants, and the officers and helpers of the elephant, in a ship. Soon we arrive in New York harbour, and I find a place for my royal elephant to stay in Jersey City. The elephant is not well and we must stay in New York until the doctors say he is better and can travel again.

GLOSSARY

- **acquaintance**: person one knows, but not very well
- **harbour**: port
- **manner**: way of behaving
- **Siam**: now called Thailand
- **stamp**: official mark

All goes well for two weeks – then my problems begin. I get a phone call in the middle of the night: the white elephant is stolen! For some moments I feel helpless•. Then I become calmer. There is only one thing I can do. I hurry to New York City, and ask the first policeman that I meet to bring me to the headquarters• of the police force. I am fortunate•. The chief of the force, the celebrated• Inspector Blunt, is there. I tell him everything. He does not seem at all surprised. He asks me to sit down and says, calmly, 'Let me think for a moment, please.'

The police headquarters

In pairs, imagine the interview between the narrator and Inspector Blunt.

What do you think Inspector Blunt is going to say?

Then he sits down at his office table and leans his head on his hand. Some people are working at the other end of the room. For the next six or seven minutes the only sound I can hear is the sound of their pens. The inspector sits quietly, thinking. Finally he raises his head, and I can see from his face that he has a plan.

Do you know?

The word *'blunt'* can mean different things.
Read these sentences. Match each sentence to the correct definition of *'blunt'*.

a ☐ These scissors are blunt, they don't cut well.
b ☐ His blunt manner often causes him problems.

1 not sharp
2 when one says what one thinks without trying to be polite

GLOSSARY

- **celebrated:** famous
- **fortunate**: lucky
- **headquarters**: most important office
- **helpless**: when there is nothing you can do

He says – and his voice is low and impressive•:

'This is no ordinary case•. We must move carefully. And we must keep it secret. Speak to no one about this, not even to reporters. I will talk to them; I will tell them what I want them to know.' He touches a bell and a boy appears.

'Alaric, tell the reporters to stay at the headquarters for the present.'

The boy leaves.

He takes a pen and some paper. 'Now, name of the elephant?'

'Hassan Ben Ali Ben Selim Abdallah Moist Alhammal Jamsetjejeebhoy Dhuleep Sultan Ebu Bhudpoor.'

'Very well. Given name?'

'Jumbo.'

'Very well. Place of birth?'

'The capital city of Siam.'

'Parents living?'

'No – dead.'

'Had they got any other children?'

'No. He is an only child.'

'Very well. Now please describe the elephant, and leave out• no details, however insignificant•. In my job there are no insignificant details; they do not exist.'

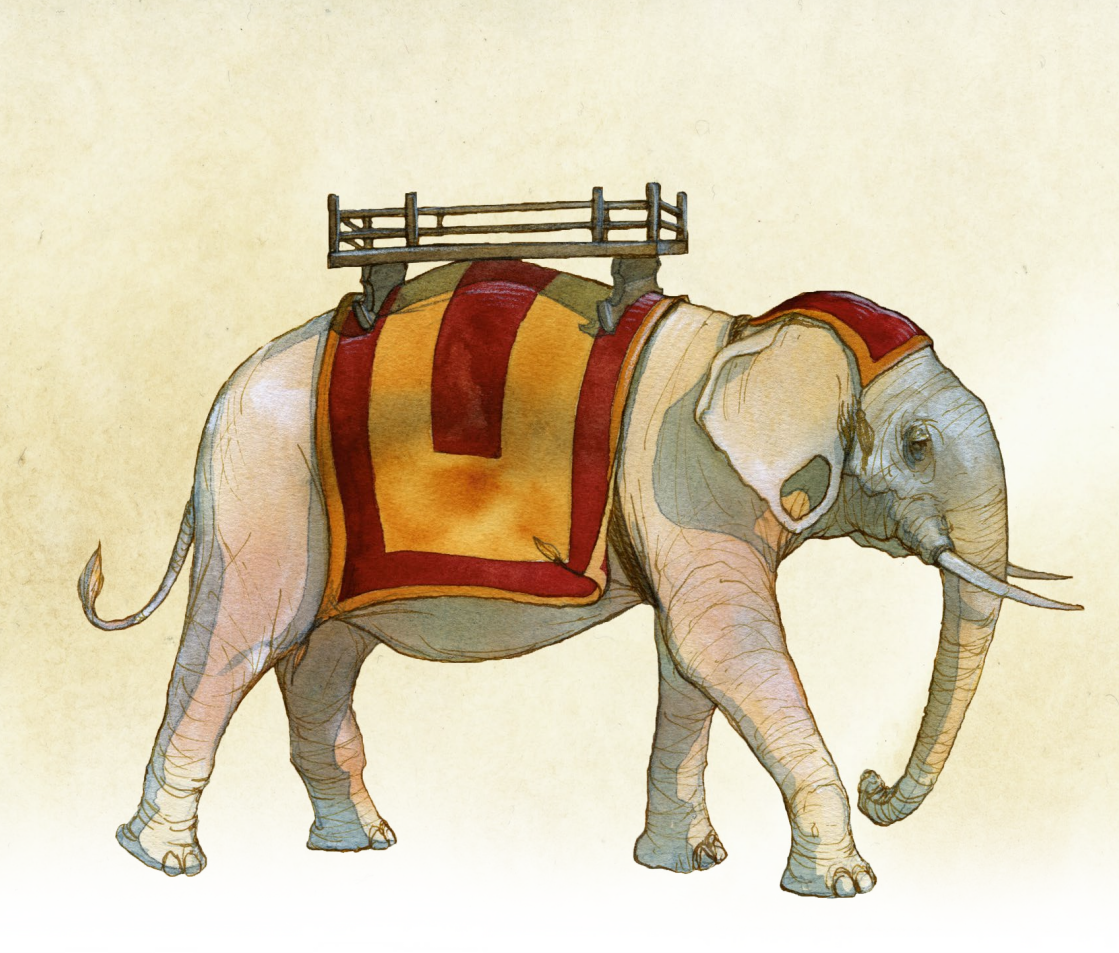
GLOSSARY

- **case**: strange event, or crime
- **impressive**: that makes you admire it; important
- **insignificant**: not important
- **leave out:** omit; not include

I describe and he writes. When I finish, he says, 'Now listen. Correct me, if I make any mistakes.'

He reads:

'Height, 19 feet; length from forehead to tail, 26 feet; length of trunk, 16 feet; length of tail, 6 feet; total length, including trunk and tail, 48 feet; length of tusks•, 9 feet; footprint resembles the mark left when one puts a barrel• in the snow; the colour of the elephant, a dull• white; has a hole the size of a plate in each ear for the insertion of jewellery, and has the habit of squirting• water at spectators and of maltreating• people with his trunk; limps slightly with his right hind leg, and has a small mark in his left armpit; wearing, when stolen, a castle with seats for fifteen people, and a gold blanket the size of a carpet.'



There are no mistakes. The inspector touches the bell, gives the description to Alaric, and says:

'Print fifty thousand copies of this and send them to every detective office and pet shop in the country.' Alaric leaves. 'Next, I must have a photograph of the animal.'

GLOSSARY

- **barrel**: cylindrical wooden container
- **dull**: not bright
- **maltreating**: treating badly
- **squirting**: spraying
- **tusks**: long curving teeth on an elephant

I give him one. He examines it carefully, and touches his bell.

'Alaric, make fifty thousand copies of this photograph and send them with the description.'

Alaric leaves to do his job. The inspector says:

'We must offer a reward•, of course. How much?'

'How much do you suggest?'

'To begin with, well, twenty-five thousand dollars. It is a difficult case; there are a thousand possibilities. These thieves have friends everywhere.'

GLOSSARY

• **reward**: prize (usually money) for finding or doing something

‘Do you know who the thieves are?’

‘Don’t worry about that. I may, and I may not. We generally• have an idea of the thief by the way he works. We are not dealing with• an ordinary thief. This thief is not a novice•. Twenty-five thousand may not be enough, but I think we can start with that.’

So we decide to start with twenty-five thousand.

New York, 1878

The average yearly wage• was $62.
A rented room cost $4 per month.
Find out online what $25,000 is worth• now.

- **dealing with**: (here) looking for
- **generally**: usually
- **novice**: beginner
- **wage:** money one earns for work
- **worth:** (here) the same as

Then he says:

'Now, what does this elephant eat, and how much?'

'Well, he eats anything. He can eat a man, he can eat a Bible – and he can eat anything between a man and a Bible.'

'Good, very good, but too general. I need details. How many men can he eat in one day?'

'He can eat five ordinary men.'

'Very good; five men in one day. What nationalities does he prefer?'

'He is indifferent to• nationalities. He prefers people he knows, but he can also eat strangers.'

GLOSSARY

• **indifferent to**: does not care about

'Very good. Now, how many Bibles can he eat at a meal?'

'He can eat a whole Bible.'

'Do you mean an ordinary Bible, or an illustrated one?'

'I do not think he prefers illustrations to words.'

'No, you do not understand. An ordinary Bible weighs about two and a half pounds, and an illustrated Bible weighs ten or twelve pounds. How many 'Doré' Bibles• can he eat?'

'He eats what is there.'

'Very well; he likes men and Bibles; so far, so good. What else does he eat? I want details.'

• **Doré Bible**: famous Bible illustrated by the French artist Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

‘He will leave Bibles to eat bricks, he will leave bricks to eat bottles, he will leave bottles to eat clothes, he will leave clothes to eat cats, he will leave cats to eat fish, he will leave fish to eat ham, he will leave ham to eat sugar, he will leave sugar to eat pie, he will leave pie to eat potatoes, he will leave potatoes to eat bread, he will leave bread to eat hay, he will leave hay to eat fruit, he will leave fruit to eat rice, for there is a lot of rice in Siam.’

‘Very good. And he drinks?’

‘Everything that is liquid. Milk, water, whisky, syrup•, oil, acid. He will drink anything that is liquid.’

‘Very good. These things are unusual. They may help us trace• him.’

The elephant's food

a ☐ He eats only men and Bibles.
b ☐ He eats anything.
c ☐ He doesn't eat vegetables.

GLOSSARY

- **syrup**: liquid sugar
- **trace**: find

He touches the bell.

‘Alaric, call Captain Burns.’

Burns appears. Inspector Blunt explains everything to him, detail by detail. Then he says:

‘Captain Burns, tell Detectives Jones, Davis, Halsey, Bates and Hackett to look for the elephant.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Tell Detectives Moses, Dakin, Murphy, Rogers, Tupper, Higgins and Bartholomew to look for the thieves.’

‘Yes, sir.’

'Choose thirty men, and another thirty to help. Tell them to guard the place where the elephant was staying. Tell them to guard it night and day, and allow no one to go in – except reporters – without written permission• from me.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Send detectives in plain clothes• to all the railway stations and ports. Send them to all roads leaving Jersey City, and tell them to search all suspicious• people.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Give all these men photographs and descriptions of the elephant, and tell them to search all trains and ships.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Tell me at once if you find any clues•.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Order the harbour police to guard the port.'

'Yes, sir.'

GLOSSARY

- **clues**: things that help one solve a problem or a mystery
- **plain clothes**: not uniform
- **suspicious**: that look as if they have done something wrong
- **written permission**: letter or note to allow someone to do something

‘Send detectives in plain clothes on all the railways, north as far as Canada, west as far as Ohio, south as far as Washington.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Place experts in all the telegraph offices to listen to all messages.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Make sure everyone keeps it secret.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Report to• me at the usual hour.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Inspector Blunt is silent and thoughtful for a moment. Then he turns to me and says:

‘We will find the elephant.’

I shake his hand and sincerely• thank him. I like and admire the man. I go home feeling happier about the situation.

GLOSSARY

- **report to**: say what you discover
- **sincerely:** honestly

The missing elephant

Imagine you are Inspector Blunt. What do you do?

AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

account acquaintance barrel clue
novice plain rear unpaid

a An ..... is someone you know, but not very well.

b The elephant's footprint resembles the mark left when one puts a ..... in the snow.

c The inspector sent detectives in ..... clothes to all the railway stations.

d There was a large hole in the ..... wall of the elephant's room.

e The elephant broke into the gas office and took some ..... bills.

2 Make three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1.

3 Complete the sentences with the correct form of *make* or *do*.

a Cartoons appear in newspapers and magazines, ... fun of the police.

b The inspector knows how to ..... his job.

c 'I have to raise the reward to one hundred thousand dollars. I will be penniless, but I ..... it.'

d 'We must always show the public what we are ..... .'

e A dense fog ..... it impossible to continue the search.

f 'Alaric, ... fifty thousand copies of this photograph!'

g 'You've earned the reward! And more than that, you've ..... the police force famous!'

h The inspector always ..... his best to solve a crime.

AFTER READING CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH EXAMS

K A2 Key English Test Reading and Writing Part 4

1 For each of the following sentences, choose the correct answer (A, B or C).

1 This is the first time that I have ..... a telegraph office in three weeks.
2 We hear no more news ..... shortly after 2 p.m.
3 Before I can say ....., another telegram arrives.
4 The detectives send their reports ..... hour.
5 The inspector ..... me to double the reward.
6 Two weeks after the elephant's ....., I raise the reward.
7 We generally have an idea of the thief ..... the way he works.
8 The elephant has to stay in New York until the doctors ..... he is better.
9 Captain Burns appears. Inspector Blunt explains ..... to him, detail by detail.
10 We must be ..... with the newspapers.
11 Let them laugh; ..... laughs best who laughs last.

1	A seen	B see	C saw
2	A by	B until	C about
3	A everything	B anything	C nothing
4	A any	B all	C every
5	A advises	B advices	C advice
6	A disappear	B disappearance	C disappeared
7	A by	B on	C with
8	A said	B will	C say
9	A anything	B everything	C something
10	A friend	B friends	C friendly
11	A he	B who	C one