

# AN ELEPHANT CALLED MIRA

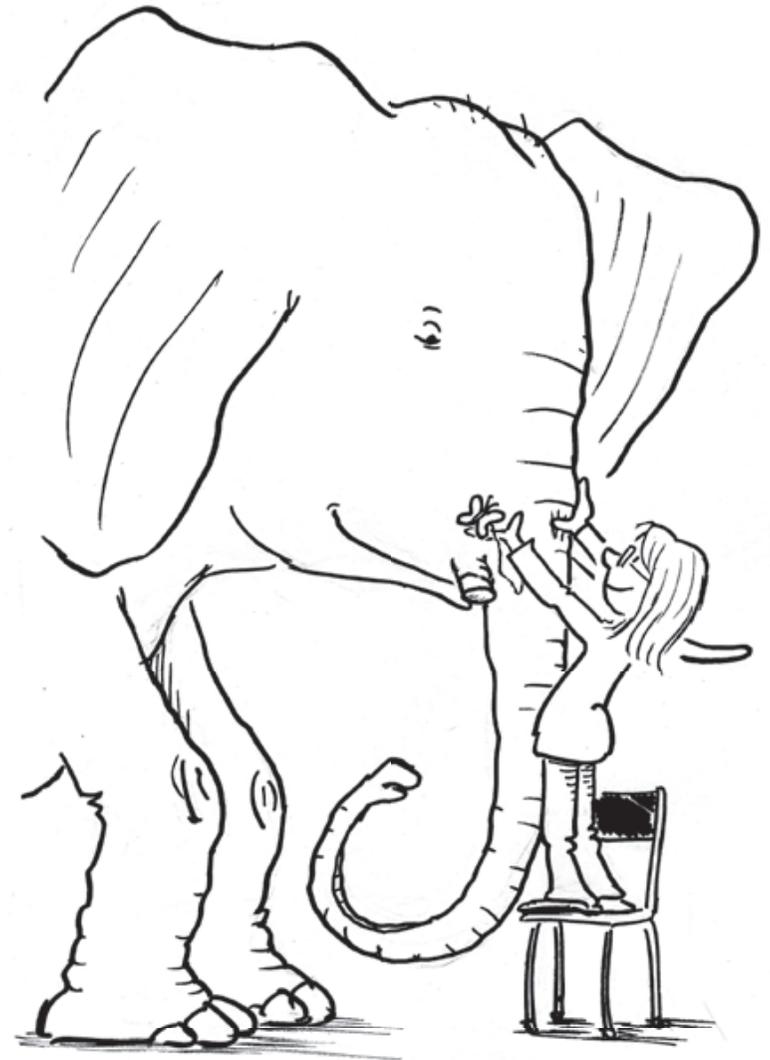
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Marian Hailey-Moss and Marc Chalvin

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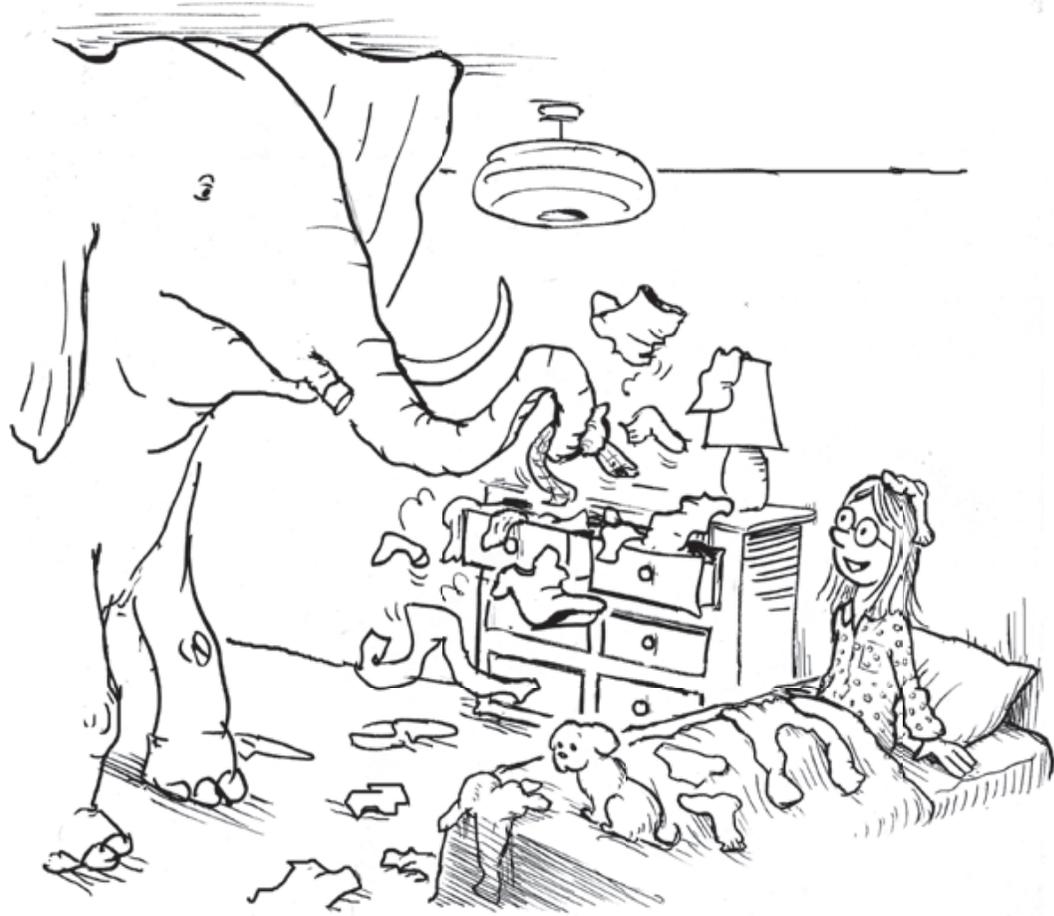
ISBN: 1506013937

ISBN 13: 9781506013930



*Illustrations by Marc Chalvin*

*for the elephants*



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Emma was right in the middle of a dream when she heard rustling sounds and heavy sighing. She sat up in bed to see a fully grown elephant in her bedroom. The elephant was sifting through her chest of drawers and none too carefully. Underwear and T-shirts were being flung this way and that. A plaid scarf flew through the air and draped itself over Emma's dog, Rufus, who had been blissfully snoring by Emma's bed. Rufus awoke with a start and jumped up onto the bed to safety. When a pair of blue and yellow socks hit Emma on the forehead, it was time to speak up.

"Hello! Is there something I can help you with?"



\* \* \*

“Oh, sorry,” said the elephant, her trunk still rummaging in the chest of drawers. “I didn’t mean to wake you. I’m looking for one of my tusks.”

“Scuse me?”

“My tusk,” repeated the elephant.

As she turned toward Emma, the young girl saw that the elephant had one large healthy tusk. The other was only a stub where a tusk had been.

“My long incisor tooth,” the elephant continued. “You humans call them ivory. I had two of them and was told that one of them might be here. I found my left one in Beijing. It had been carved into a statue of the Bodhisattva Quan Yin. It was on the desk in the private study of a teacher there. Once he returned it to me, it resumed its original shape. The other one is reported to be here in the New York bedroom of an eleven-year-old girl named Emma O’Connor.”

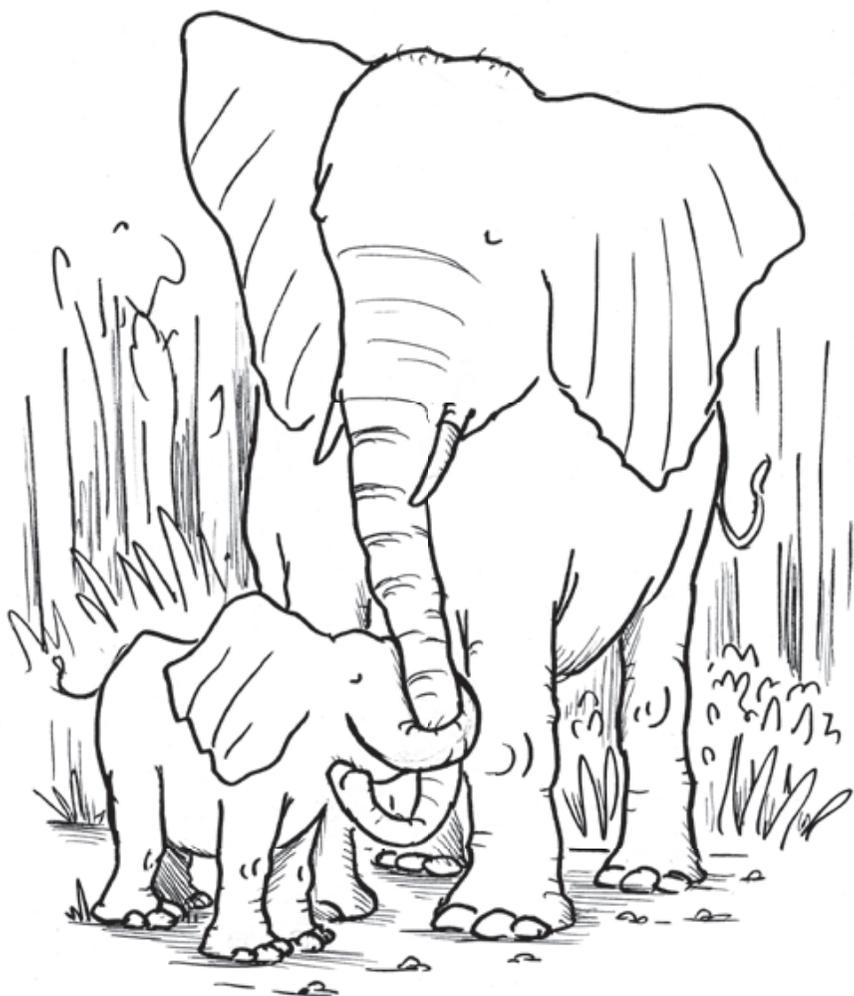
“That’s me,” said Emma.

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“Hello, Emma,” said the elephant. “Imagine meeting you here.”

“I can’t imagine anywhere else,” said Emma. “This is my bedroom.”

“Oh yes, of course,” said the elephant as she looked around the room. “I would prefer the walls to be green. Mindful of nature, you know—trees, grass, flower stems, leaves...”



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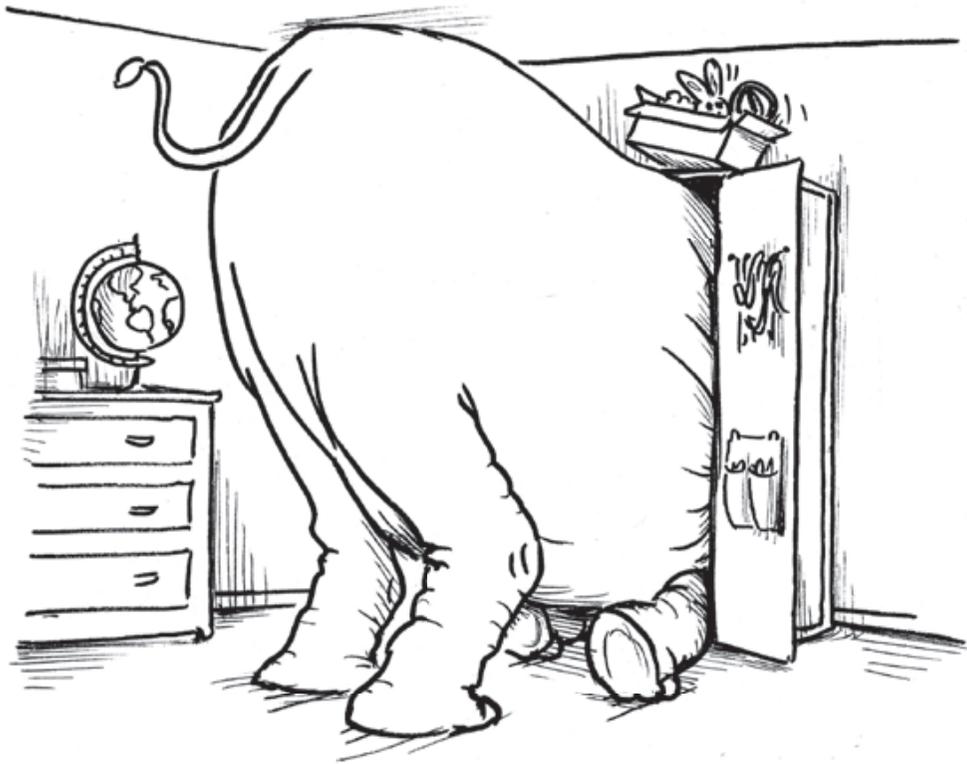
“If you’ll pardon me,” said Emma, “this is an apartment for humans, not for elephants.”

The elephant stated that she was well aware of that, but she was desperate. Once she found her right tusk, she would be her old elephant-self again. She would be able to go back in time; she would have another chance.

“Another chance for what?” asked Emma.

“For life,” she responded, pausing in her search to fix her warm elephant eyes on Emma. “This time, I would escape the poachers. I could be with my baby.

You see,” said the elephant with wistful longing, “my baby was meant to grow up with me by her side. I was supposed to be there to teach her and protect her and love her. Maybe the second time we could get it right.”



\* \* \*

*No one, not even an elephant, can go back and redo the past*, thought Emma. Yet the elephant's heart was clearly hurting and she believed what she was saying. Maybe all that she had gone through had done something to her mind. After all, she must have been attacked by poachers—greedy outlaws who were willing to break the law and kill innocent elephants for their tusks for profit. In sympathy for the elephant, Emma decided not to question her further. But she wasn't sure what to say or do next.

The elephant had moved from the chest of drawers to continue her search in the closet.

Emma remembered the butterfly pendant that her parents had recently given her for her eleventh birthday. She kept it carefully hidden in a drawer now. Thabo, her friend from Africa, whose father owned a wildlife sanctuary, told her that ivory, comes at the expense of the elephants' lives. Of course! Now Emma understood. That must be what the elephant was looking for.



\* \* \*

“Excuse me,” said Emma, hoping to distract the elephant from pulling all of her clothes off their hangers. “What is your name?”

“Pardon me?” said the elephant, backing out of the closet.

“What is your name, please?” said Emma.

“Oh...my name is Mira,” said the elephant. “It’s short for Miracle.”

“That’s a beautiful name,” said Emma.

“Thank you,” said Mira. “It gets confused with Mirage.”

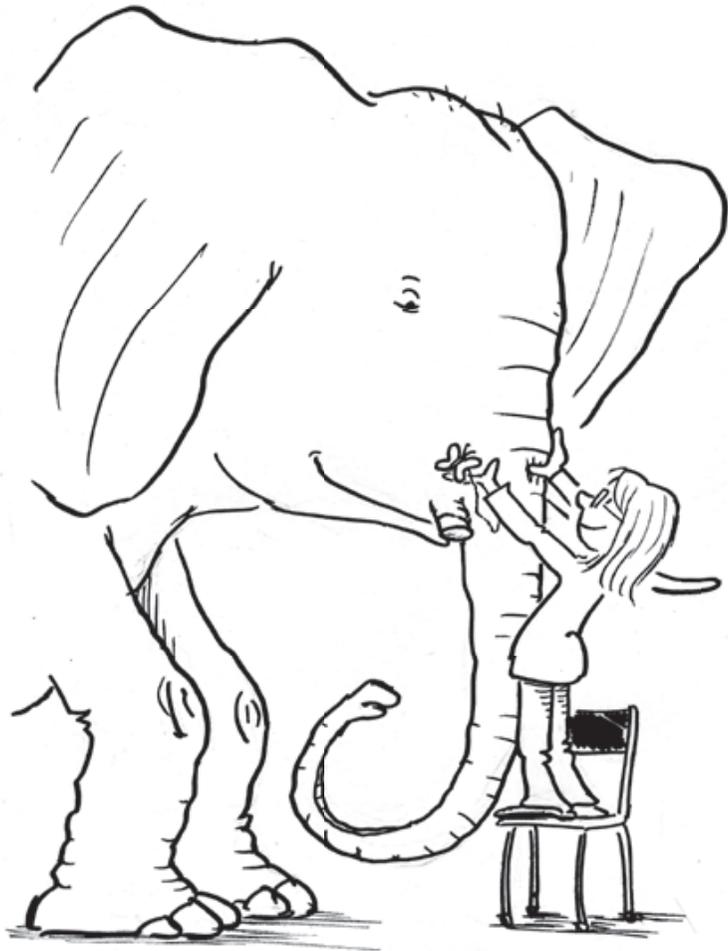
“Mirage?”

“Yes,” said Mira. “It means *illusion*.”

“Nice to meet you, Mira,” said Emma. “What does illusion mean, if you don’t mind me asking?”

The elephant thought a moment and said, “An illusion is something pretending to be something else. It’s like a mask over a face. A disguise. You don’t know what you’re truly seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, or tasting. It makes you believe you have the treat when actually you’ve been tricked.”

And with that, Mira continued rifling through the clothes in Emma’s closet.

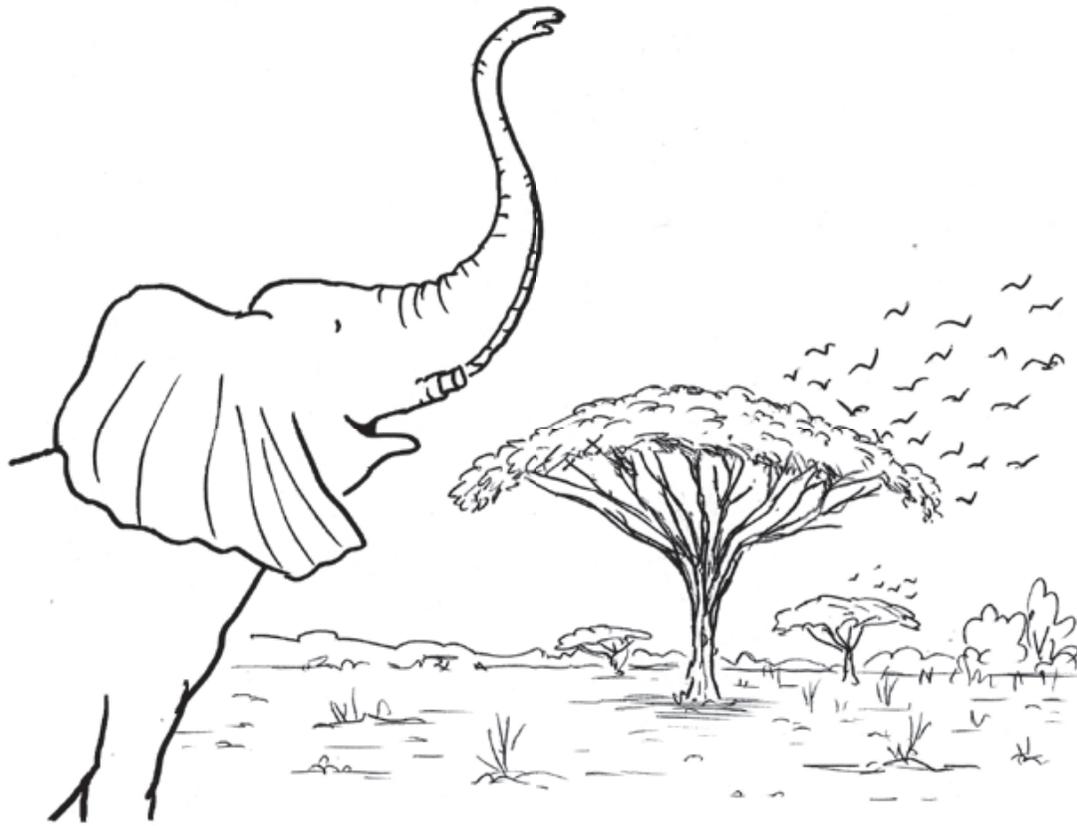


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Emma wondered if that “illusion” was going on right here and now. Was she speaking with a real elephant? Perhaps it didn’t matter. What mattered was to tell Mira, a real elephant or not, about the butterfly pendant.

Emma told Rufus to stay put on the bed while she went to her dressing table. She opened the side drawer where she kept a few pieces of jewelry. She took out a small red velvet case. Then she put it gently on her dressing table, opened it, and lifted the pendant from the box. As she held it in the palm of her hand, it seemed to possess a heavenly glow.

“Mira,” said Emma, “could this be what you’re looking for? I keep it hidden in a drawer. I was told it caused an elephant to lose its life. I don’t want people to buy ivory because they think it’s pretty.”



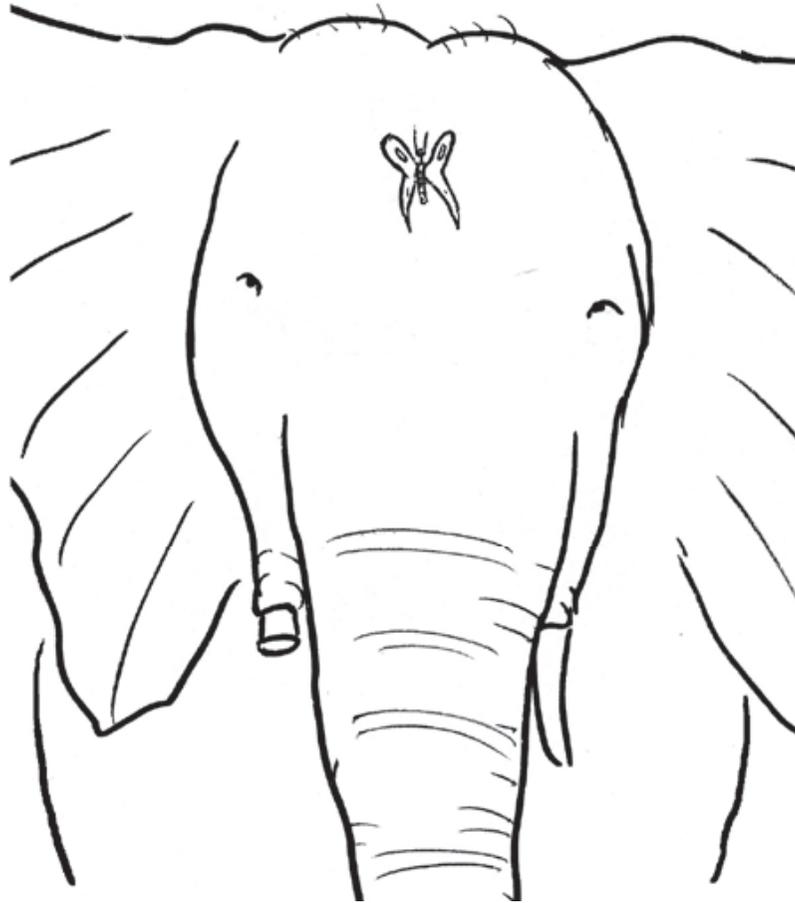
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Mira turned and looked deeply into Emma's eyes. She slowly stepped closer to Emma and said, "I hope it will be and I'm afraid it won't be what I've been searching for. I know that if it's mine, it will bring back a whirlwind of emotions of that fateful day, when a sudden blow from a menacing sword ended my life with my baby girl."

Emma held the pendant steady as Mira took a deep breath and bravely dared to look. There it sat in Emma's open palm: a small piece of ivory carved into a butterfly. "Yes! That's it!" said Mira. For a moment Emma saw the room erupt into yellow, red, and orange flames, as if she herself was the elephant on that hellish day in Africa. Then, Mira said, "It's so small, Emma. Where's the rest?" And before Emma could answer, Mira cried out, "Teeny tiny pendants and trinkets! *It was all for itsy-bitsy nothings that I lost my baby!*"

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She flung her trunk up into the air and let out a heart-rending, trumpeting cry. The sound filled the apartment building; it reverberated through New York; it echoed across the Atlantic, all the way to Kenya in Africa; and it shook the very acacia tree where Mira had last stood with her baby, sending the birds nesting there into the sky upon hearing this terrible sound of woe.



\* \* \*

The force and agony of Mira's cry startled Emma. She reached out to comfort Mira, and in so doing, she didn't notice that the butterfly pendant she held came alive, fluttered tiny wings, and flew to the mirror that rested on the dressing table, leaving the chain behind in Emma's hand.

"Oh, dear Mira! Please don't cry," Emma wailed as she hugged the elephant and gently patted her cheek and forehead. Emma told her that even if it had been her whole tusk, she wouldn't be able to go back and relive the sad events of the past. It would be against the laws of nature.

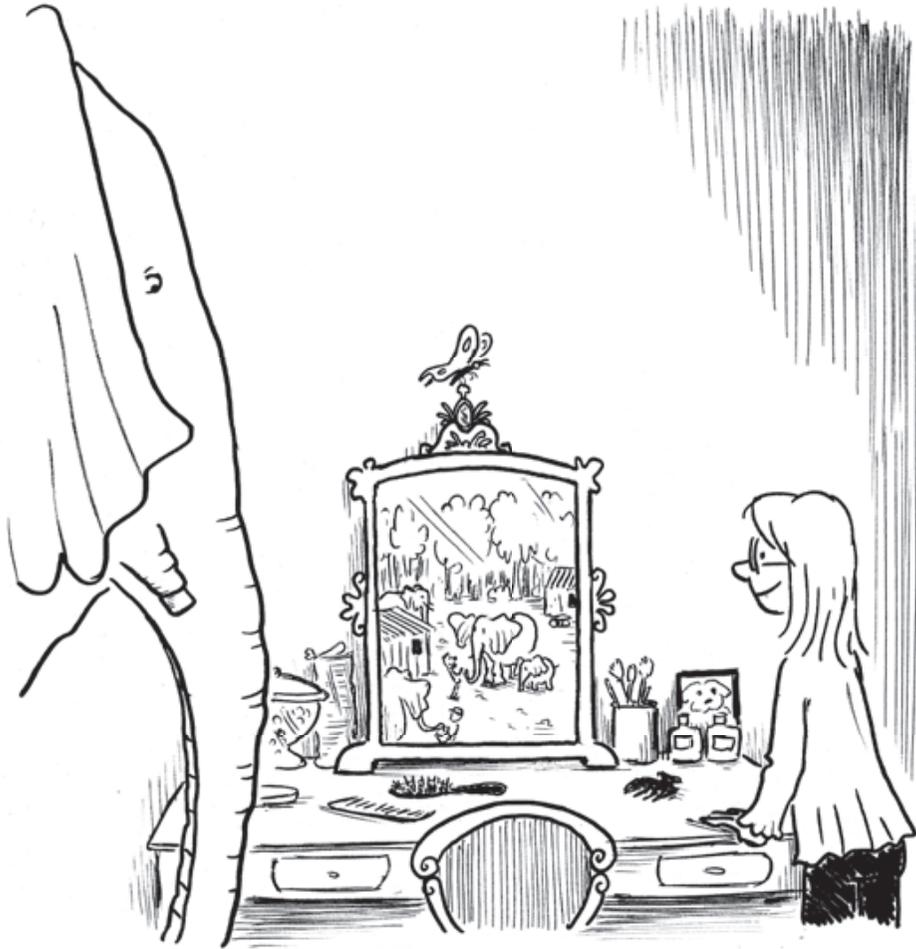
A single tear dropped from Mira's cheek. Emma looked up and noticed something. "Oh, Mira, there's a real butterfly on your forehead."

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Mercifully, Mira became distracted from her grief. She and Emma watched the butterfly flitter back and forth from Mira to the mirror on the dressing table.

“She is telling us something,” reasoned Emma. “Come—let’s go over to the mirror.”

When Emma and Mira reached the dressing table, the butterfly flew to the top of the mirror and stayed in solemn position, opening and closing her wings.



\* \* \*

As Mira and Emma looked into the mirror, their reflections faded, and were replaced by a scene at a wildlife sanctuary in Africa. Emma's friend Thabo was standing with a keeper of the elephants there. They were watching Butterfly playing with another orphaned youngster named Taggy.

A large grown elephant named Baku lovingly looked on. Thabo and the keeper were happy that Butterfly had begun to interact with the other orphans her age. The foster mother, Baku, had accepted Butterfly as her own. She was protective of her, just like a mother was supposed to be. Baku, with her loving care, gave Butterfly the security that a mother elephant would provide so that the baby could have the confidence to learn about the world around her. Baku would show Butterfly the fine art of bathing in the mud, playing nice with the other youngsters, finding a place within the herd, and the many amazing things elephants can do with their

sensitive and versatile trunks. When an elephant is fully grown, it can pick up tiny pieces of wood the size of toothpicks, as well as collect grass and branches and trees with its trunk.

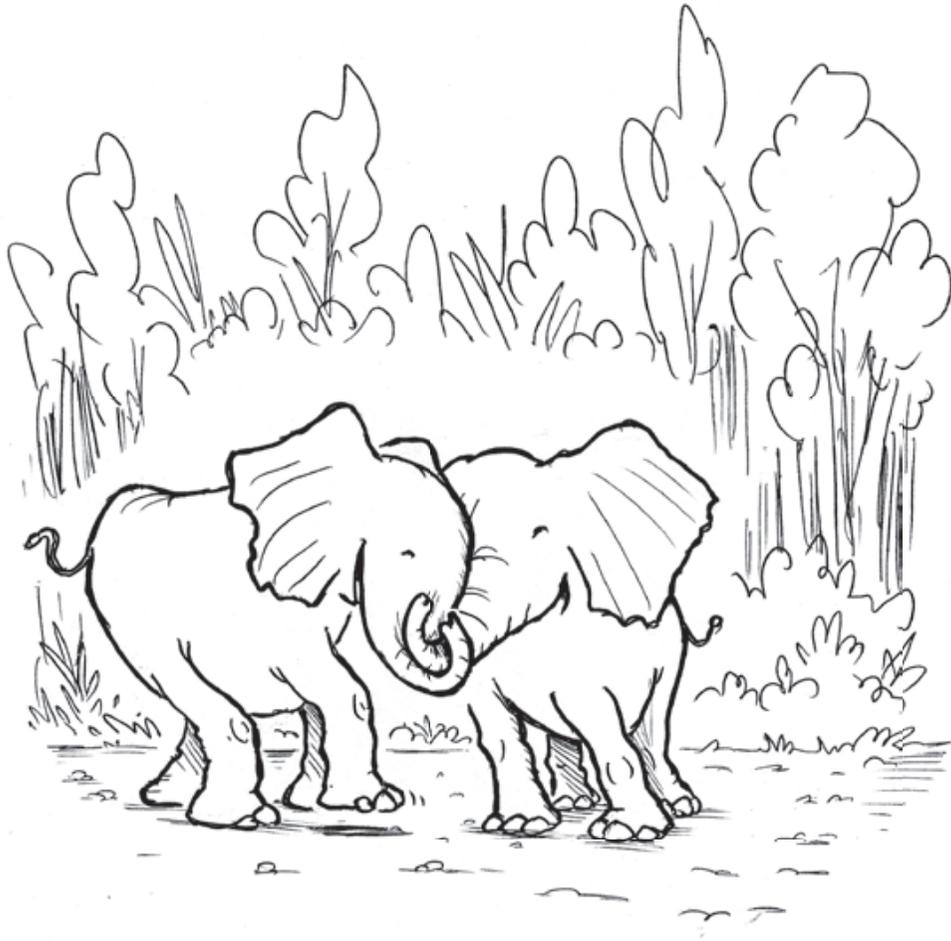
“There’s my baby! There’s my baby!” Mira exclaimed.

“Which one, Mira?” Emma asked.

“The one on the right.”

“Are you sure?”

“I would know my baby anywhere,” said Mira, ecstatic. “She has a birthmark by her left front leg.”



\* \* \*

“That’s the orphan, Butterfly,” said Emma, marveling at this unusual turn of events. “She’s just recently been rescued.”

“Butterfly?”

“Yes,” said Emma. “She was named that because of her large ears. When she nurses from her bottle, her ears flutter like a butterfly’s wings.”

Emma tapped on the mirror. “Hello! Hello, Thabo!” But there was no response.

“I guess they can’t hear us,” said Emma, disappointed.

Mira raised her trunk and gave an elephant call to Butterfly, but again there was no response.

“Oh how I’d love to be with her,” said Mira her eyes shining with love and longing. “She looks happy. Is she happy do you think?”

Emma told her that the keepers never leave the babies alone. They are always watched over and cared for. She

noticed that Mira's tense body eased and every wrinkle of her skin seemed to ripple with relief.

“I see that my baby is doing well.” Mira said wistfully. “She looks healthy and is doing things that elephants are supposed to do. She is learning elephant ways. I would do anything to be with her.” Mira stroked the mirror gently with her trunk and gave a heavy sigh. “Her life is good. I must try to let her go. I no longer need to find my other tusk. The past is gone forever.”



\* \* \*

Emma told Mira that in the protected environment of the sanctuary, Butterfly would learn more elephant ways. “When she is ready,” Emma explained, “she will be introduced back into the wild. The wild is where nature intended the elephants to live.

“Of course, you know that best, Mira,” said Emma.

“Yes,” said Mira. “Once she returns to the wild, it’s up to you humans, Emma. My baby Butterfly’s fate and the future of all elephants lie in your hands. Humans have a choice. If they choose illusion, they will think the treasure is in the ivory. We elephants can do nothing but weep. If humans choose the truth—that *life* is the real treasure—we will rejoice. That is the Elephant Dream. And so we must have faith in your wisdom.

“I promise you Mira,” said Emma. “I will do all I can to tell people how precious elephants are and that they must be safe and free.”

“Thank you, Emma O’Connor!”

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And with that grateful good-bye, Mira vanished.

Emma's head was reeling.

The clock said 3:00 a.m. Exhausted, Emma collapsed back onto her bed, with Rufus at her feet snoring, and slept dreamlessly the rest of the night.

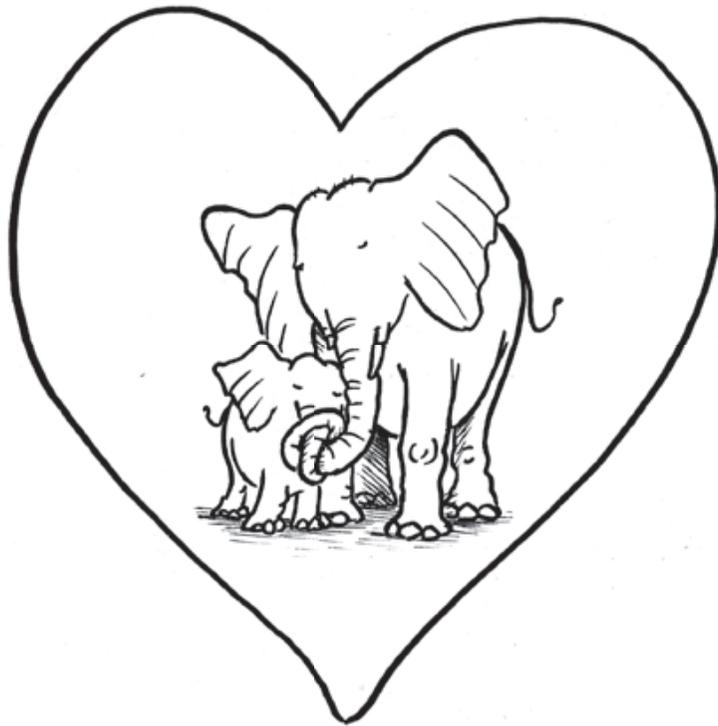


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And so it was that the next morning, Emma O'Connor couldn't tell if Mira, the mother of Butterfly, had been a dream, a ghost, or a living, breathing elephant. Emma couldn't explain the clothes strewn over the room and the red velvet case on her dressing table. The lid was open, and still nestled inside was the ivory butterfly pendant.

Maybe Emma could have been sleepwalking...but then again, maybe not. Emma would never know.

Emma's experience had delivered a clear message—*if people don't buy ivory, the killing of our elephants will stop*. Her encounter with Mira, her friendship with Thabo, and even the bit of research she had done on her own taught her that people have just begun to learn the secrets the elephants hold and their place in the animal kingdom. She felt it her duty to try to do what she could to keep them safe from harm.



\* \* \*

That morning after breakfast and after walking Rufus, Emma O'Connor was on a new mission. She would tell all her friends and ask those friends to tell all their friends and the friends of those friends—until all the world heard the news—that there might be an elephant in their room.

And please, listen to what it has to say: that *the miracle of life* is the most precious treasure on earth.

Friends of Mira

Peacefood Cafe, New York City.

and

Ainsley Paget Brown, Gretchen Burnett, Ingrid Hong,

Bill Kosmas, Gabriella Marx,

Lois Meredith, Jack Pettey, Chris Stover

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ARTIST

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**Marian Hailey-Moss** - is a vegan. The children's books she has authored are about people's relationship with animals. She lives in New York City.



**Marc Chalvin**, is a Parisian artist who fills his drawings and his animations with life, whimsy, and wisdom.

An elephant is killed every fifteen minutes.  
Say “no” to ivory.