

Now the King of that country owned a White Elephant. It was the custom that whenever the King wanted to punish one of his courtiers, he would send him the White Elephant as a present, and the expense of looking after the animal would ruin the poor man; because the White Elephant had to sleep between silk sheets (enormous ones), and eat mango-flavoured Turkish Delight (tons of it), and have his tusks covered in gold leaf every morning. When the courtier had no money left at all, the White Elephant would be returned to the King, ready for his next victim.

Wherever the White Elephant went, his

personal servant had to go too. The servant's name was Chulak, and he was the same age as Lila. In fact, they were friends.

Every afternoon Chulak would take the White Elephant out for his exercise, because the Elephant would go with no-one else, and there was a reason for this: Chulak was the only person, besides Lila, who knew that the Elephant could talk.

One day Lila went to visit Chulak and the White Elephant. She arrived at the Elephant House in time to hear the Elephant Master losing his temper.

'You horrible little boy!' he roared. 'You've done it again, haven't you?'

'Done what?' said Chulak innocently.

'Look!' said the Elephant Master, pointing with a quivering finger at the White Elephant's snowy flanks.

Written all over his side in charcoal and paint were dozens of slogans:

EAT AT THE GOLDEN LANTERN
BANGKOK WANDERERS FOR THE CUP
STAR OF INDIA TANDOORI HOUSE

And right at the very top of the White
Elephant's back, in great big letters:

CHANG LOVES LOTUS BLOSSOM
TRUE XXX



'Hello, Lila,' said the Elephant. 'Look what this obnoxious brat has reduced me to! A walking billboard!'

'Stop fussing,' said Chulak. 'Look, we've got eighteen rupees already – and ten annas from the Tandoori House – and Chang gave me a whole rupee for letting him write that on the top. We're nearly there, Hamlet!'

'The *shame!*' said Hamlet, shaking his great head.

'You mean you charge people money to write on him?' said Lila.

'Course!' said Chulak. 'It's dead lucky to write your name on a White Elephant. When we've got enough, we're going to run away. Trouble is, he's in love with a lady elephant at the Zoo. You ought to see him blush when we go past – like a ton of strawberry ice cream!'

'She's called Frangipani,' said Hamlet