

Introduction

You can listen to a recording of this story at:

<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/stories/elephants-bananas-and-aunty-ethel>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- a pre-reading vocabulary activity;
- the story that you can listen to;
- a comprehension activity based on the story;
- a pronunciation activity.

Before you read.

In the table are some important words from the story. Choose one word to go into each of the sentences below.

crazy	escape	filmscripts	get up	realised
seems	strange	stress	turns into	wake up

1. At first I thought this exercise was easy, but then, after doing it, I(1)..... that it wasn't as easy as I thought!
2. I(2)..... at around six thirty, but stay in bed for ten minutes after that.
3. I usually(3)..... around 7.30, but later at weekends.
4. I write(4)..... - then I send them to movie producers and hope that they can find the actors, the director and the money!
5. It's very difficult to understand what dreams mean because many of them are so(5)..... and unusual.
6. People who work too much and don't relax enough can suffer from(6).....
7. She's a person who(7)..... really friendly at first, but when you know her well you realise that she's not nice at all!
8. She's absolutely(8)..... about horror movies!
9. The prisoners climbed over the wall of the jail to(9).....
10. When ice melts it(10)..... water.

Read the story

Elephants, Bananas and Auntie Ethel

by Chris Rose

So, I was walking along the street, on my way to work, as usual, but for some reason I was in a hurry. I wasn't really sure why I was in a hurry. And then I realised that I was holding a banana in my hand. I didn't know why I was holding a banana in my hand, but I knew that the banana was really important for some reason. The banana had something to do with the reason that I was late, and in a hurry. It was a really important banana, only I didn't know why the banana was so important. Then I met my Auntie Ethel on the street corner. It was strange, because I hadn't seen Auntie Ethel for about twenty years. "Hello! I said to her. "I haven't seen you for about twenty years!" I was really surprised to see her, but she didn't seem surprised to see me. "Be careful with that banana!" she said. And I laughed, because I knew that it was a really important banana, and yes, I had to be careful with it. Auntie Ethel decided to walk to work with me, which was a problem because I was late and in a hurry, and she walked really, really slowly. Then, when we went round the corner, there was an elephant blocking the street. It depends where you live, I guess, but in Manchester it's pretty strange to see an elephant blocking the street. The strange thing was, though, that I wasn't really that surprised. "Oh no!" I was thinking, "Another elephant blocking the street...what a pain! Especially this morning when I'm late and in a hurry, and with Auntie Ethel, and this really important banana..." Then I started to get really worried, and then...I woke up.

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness for that" I thought. How strange dreams are...I wonder why I was dreaming about elephants and bananas and Auntie Ethel. The radio was already on. The radio comes on automatically at 7 o'clock, to wake me up. I looked at the clock. It was already ten past seven. I had to get up quickly. I went into the shower, and I could hear the news on the radio. I couldn't hear it very well, but there was a story on the news about an elephant who had escaped from a local circus. The elephant was causing a lot of trouble walking around the town. I thought this was an incredible coincidence, but then I realised that I had probably heard the news story on the radio when I was half-asleep. That was why I was dreaming about an elephant. I quickly got dressed and went into the kitchen to get some coffee before I went to work. I work for a film company. We get ideas for films and filmscripts, then we try to produce the films. I thought a film about an elephant in Manchester would be great. There was a note on the kitchen table. It was from my wife. "Don't forget to buy bananas on your way home from work today!!!" it said. It was a good job she had written the note, because I had completely forgotten about the fact that she has to eat a lot of bananas because of the crazy diet she's on at the moment. I tried to remember to buy bananas on my way home from work, and rushed out of the house. As I was walking down the road my mobile rang. It was my mum. "Hello mum!" I said. "What are you ringing at this time for?" "I've got some sad news, I'm afraid, love" she said. "Do you remember your Auntie Ethel?" "Just about" I said, "But I haven't seen Auntie Ethel for about twenty years..." "Yes, well she was very old...and I'm afraid she died last night. She'd been very ill...I told you a couple of weeks ago..." "That's sad" I said. So there I was, walking down the street, late for work, thinking about Auntie Ethel and bananas and elephants, and of course I realised that it was all exactly the same as my dream. And as I



started to think more about this, I realised I was walking more and more slowly, and I looked down and saw that the street was turning into hot, wet, sticky toffee, and it was sticking to my shoes, and the quicker I tried to walk, the slower I went. I looked at my watch and saw that my watch was going backwards. “That’s ok” I was thinking. “If my watch is going backwards, then it means that it’s early, and not late, so I’m not late for work at all...” and then I woke up. Again.

Now this was strange. This was very, very strange. I got up and pinched myself to make sure I was really awake this time. “Ouch!” The pinch hurt. This meant I really was awake, and not dreaming this time. It was early. I wasn’t late. The radio alarm clock hadn’t come on yet. It was only half past six. My wife was still at home.

“Have you got enough bananas?” I asked her. She looked at me as if I was crazy.

“What do you mean ‘bananas’?” she asked.

“I thought you had to eat lots of bananas for your special diet...”

“I have no idea what you’re on about!” she said.

“Why, do you think I need to go on a diet? Do you mean that I’m fat?”

“No, no, no...not at all...by the way...have you heard anything about an elephant?”

“An elephant?”

“Yes, an elephant which has escaped from a circus...”

“We live in Manchester. There aren’t any circuses in Manchester. And there certainly aren’t any elephants. Listen, are you suffering from stress or something? You’re working too hard on that new film you’re trying to produce, aren’t you? Perhaps you should just stay at home today, take it easy...”

“Perhaps you’re right” I said. “I’ll just phone my mum..”

“Why do you need to phone your mum at half past six in the morning?”

“Oh...nothing important...” I said.

“Well, I’m off to work. See you later, and take it easy today, ok?”

“OK!”

I phoned my mum.

“Hello mum!”

“Hello love. What are you calling this early for?”

“Do you remember Auntie Ethel?”

“Of course I do...but I haven’t seen her for about twenty years or so...”

“How is she?”

“I’ve got no idea. Why on earth are you worried about your Auntie Ethel who you haven’t seen for twenty years?”

“Oh nothing...bye!”

I made a cup of tea and went back to bed.

Perhaps my wife was right. Perhaps I should just relax and take it easy today. I phoned up my boss.

“Listen” I said. “I’m not feeling too good today...perhaps too much stress with the production schedule of the new film project...”

“That’s a shame” said my boss. “We’ve just got a really exciting new idea for a film...I wanted to talk to you about it today. It’s a kind of action movie. It’s a great story. You have to hear this – an elephant escapes from a circus in a big city, and it has eaten some strange, radioactive bananas, so it’s going completely crazy. They eventually manage to stop the elephant by covering all the streets with sticky toffee, so that it can’t walk!”

“I see” I said. “And where does my Auntie Ethel come into it?”

“Auntie who?”

I hung up the phone, and hoped that I would wake up. Soon.

After reading

Exercise 2

Do you understand the meaning of the following every day expressions used in the story?

1. When would you **take it easy**?
 - a. when you get something free
 - b. when you relax and don't worry about things
 - c. when you don't find school work difficult

2. When would you think that something is **pretty strange**?
 - a. when you think something isn't strange
 - b. when you think something is a bit strange
 - c. when you think something is very strange

3. When would you describe something or somebody as a **pain**?
 - a. when it is something or somebody you find boring or irritating
 - b. when somebody or something is like a piece of bread
 - c. when you really like something

4. When would you **breathe a sigh of relief**?
 - a. when you go to sleep
 - b. when you are very sad
 - c. when you are happy that something you are worried about doesn't happen

5. When would you **thank goodness** for something?
 - a. when you are relieved
 - b. when you are angry
 - c. when you want to say thank you to your mother

6. When would you ask **why on earth** something happened?
 - a. when you already know why it happened
 - b. when you are surprised about it
 - c. when you want to pretend you don't know

Exercise 3

The words in the first table belong to two different categories: those with a vowel sound like the English word "her", and those with a vowel sound like the English word "or". Do you know which is which?

door	four	fur	girl	poor
pour	purr	sir	sore	third
thought	walk	work		

Vowel sounds like "her"	Vowel sounds like "or"

Answers

Exercise 1: 1. realised; 2. wake up; 3. get up; 4. filmscripts; 5. strange; 6. stress; 7. seems; 8. crazy; 9. escape; 10. turns into

Exercise 2: 1. b; 2. b; 3. a; 4. c; 5. a; 6. b

Exercise 3:

Vowel sounds like "her"	Vowel sounds like "or"
work fur girl purr sir third	walk four door poor pour sore thought

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