

2022 lunedì giugno 27 - lundi - juni 27 → 29

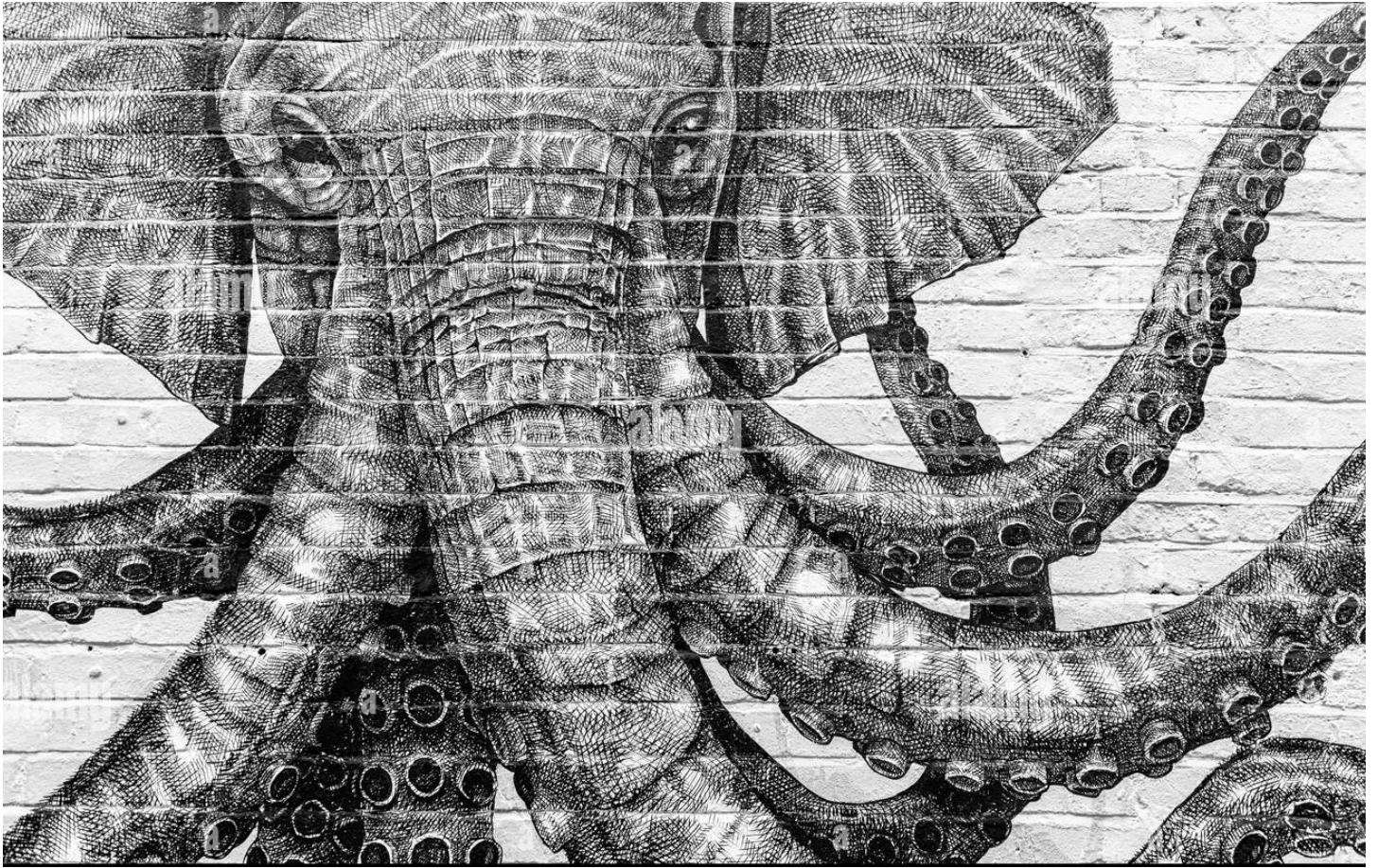
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The Magician's
Elephant



ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA



born in 1964
published in 2009

- The day after the night that the elephant arrived, **PETER** was again at the market square.
- The fortuneteller's tent was gone,
- and **PETER** had been entrusted with another **florit**.
- The old soldier had talked at great length and in excruciating detail about what **PETER** must purchase with the coin.
- Bread, for one,
- and it must be bread that was at least a day old, two days old preferably,
- but three-day-old bread, if he could find it, would be the best of all.
- "Actually, see if you cannot locate bread with mold growing on it," said **VILNA LUTZ**.
- "Old bread is a most excellent preparation for being a soldier. Soldiers must become accustomed to rock-hard bread that is difficult to chew. It makes for strong teeth. And strong teeth make for a strong heart and therefore a brave soldier. Yes, yes, I believe it to be true. I know it to be true."
- How hard bread and strong teeth and a strong heart were connected was a mystery to **PETER**, but
- as **VILNA LUTZ** spoke to him that morning, it became

increasingly obvious that the old soldier was once again in the grips of a fever and that not much sense would be gotten from him.

- "You must ask the fishmonger for two fish and no more," **VILNA LUTZ** said.
- Sweat shone on his forehead. His beard was damp.
- "Ask him for the smallest ones. Ask him for the fish that others would turn away. Why, you must ask him for those fish that the other fish are embarrassed to even refer to as fish! Come back with the smallest fish, but do not — do not, I repeat — come back to me empty-handed with the lies of fortunetellers upon your lips!"
- I correct myself! I correct myself! To say 'the lies of fortunetellers' is a redundancy. What comes from the mouths of fortunetellers is by definition a lie, and you, Private **DUCHENE**, you must, you *must*, find the smallest possible fish."

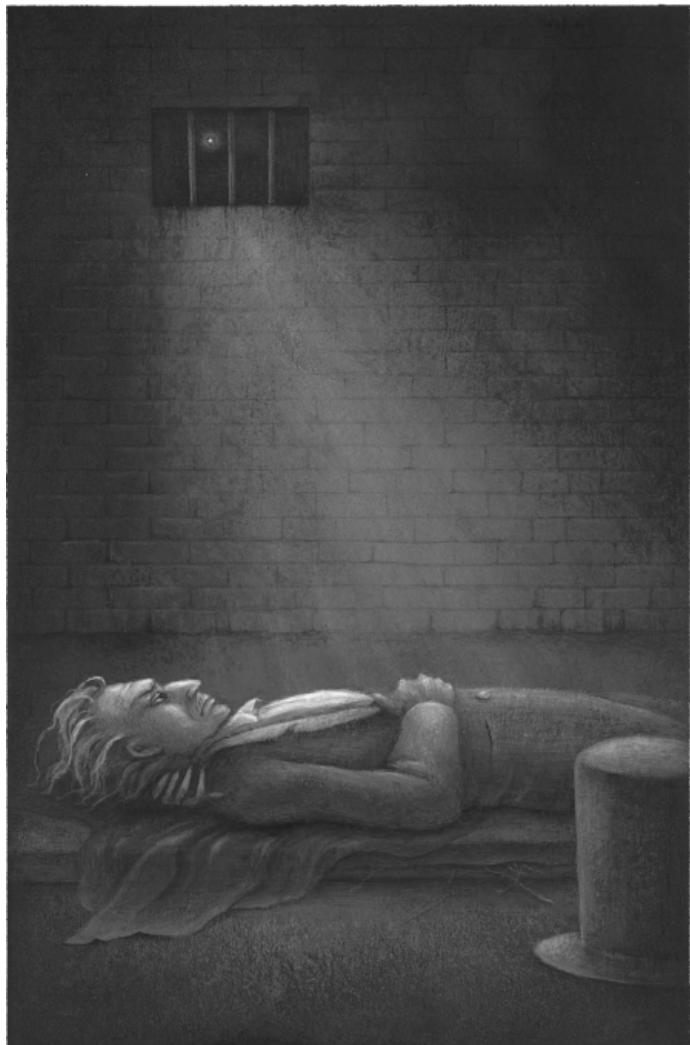
- So **PETER** stood in the market square, in line at the **fishmonger**'s, thinking of the fortuneteller and his sister and elephants and fevers and exceptionally small fish.
- He also thought of lies and who told them and who did not and what it meant to be a soldier, honorable and true.
- And because of all the thoughts in his head, he was listening with only half an ear to the story that the **fishmonger** was telling to the woman ahead of him in line.
- "Well, he wasn't much of a magician, and none of them was expecting much, you see — that's the thing. Nothing was expected." The **fishmonger** wiped his hands on his apron. "He hadn't promised them nothing special, and they wasn't expecting it neither."
 - "Who expects something special nowadays anyways?" said the woman.
 - "Not me. I've worn myself out expecting something special."

She pointed at a large fish.

 - "Give me one of them mackerels, why don't you?"
- "**Mackerel** it is," said the **fishmonger**, slinging the creature onto the scale.
- It was a very large fish. **VILNA LUTZ** would not have approved. **PETER** surveyed the **fishmonger**'s selection.
- His stomach growled. He was hungry, and he was worried. He could not see anything alarmingly small enough to please the old soldier.
 - "And also give me catfish," said the woman.
 - "Three of them."
 - "I want 'em with the whiskers longish, don't I?"
 - "Tastier that way."
- The **fishmonger** put three catfish on the scale.
 - "In any case," he continued, "they was all sitting there, the nobility, the ladies and the princes and the princesses, all together in the **opera house**, expecting nothing much. And what did they get?"
 - "I don't even pretend to know," said the woman.
 - "What fancy people get is most surely a mystery to me."

- **PETER** shifted nervously from foot to foot. He wondered what would happen to him if he did not bring home a fish that was sufficiently small.
 - There was no predicting what **VILNA LUTZ** would say or do when he was in the grips of one of his terrible recurring fevers.
 - "Well, they wasn't expecting an elephant — that much is for true."
 - "An elephant!" said the woman.
 - "An elephant?" said **PETER**.
 - At the sound of the impossible word on the lips of another, he felt a shock travel from the tip of his feet to the top of his head.
 - He stepped backward.
 - "An elephant!" said the **fishmonger**.
 - "Come right through the ceiling of the **opera house**, landed on top of a noblewoman named **LAVAUGHN**."
 - "An elephant," whispered **PETER**.
 - "Ha," said the woman,
 - "ha, ha. It most surely couldn't have."
 - "It did," said the **fishmonger**.
 - "Broke her legs!"
 - "La, the humor of it, and don't my friend **MARCELLE** wash the linens of Madam **LAVAUGHN**?
 - "Ain't the world as small as it can be?"
 - "Just exactly," said the **fishmonger**.
 - "But, please," said **PETER**,
 - "an elephant. An elephant."
 - "Do you know what you say?"
 - "Yes," said the **fishmonger**,
 - "I say an elephant."
 - "And she came through the roof?"
 - "Didn't I just say that, too?"
 - "Where is this elephant now, please?" said **PETER**.
 - "The police have got her," said the **fishmonger**.
 - "The police!" said **PETER**.

- He put his hand up to his hat. He took the hat off and put it back on and took it off again.
- “Is the child having some sort of hat-related fit?”
said the woman to the **fishmonger**.
- “It’s just as the fortuneteller said,” said **PETER**.
• “An elephant.”
- “How’s that?” said the **fishmonger**. “Who said it?”
• “It doesn’t matter,” said **PETER**.
- “Nothing matters except that the elephant has come.
• And what that means.”
- “And what does it mean?” said the **fishmonger**.
• “I would surely like to know.”
• “That **she lives**,” said **PETER**.
• “That **she lives**.”
- “And ain’t that grand?” said the **fishmonger**. “We are always happy when people live, ain’t we?”
• “Sure, and why not?” said the woman.
• “But what I want to know is
what become of him who started it all?
• Where’s the magician?”
- “Imprisoned him,” said the **fishmonger**, “didn’t they? Put him in the most terrible cell of all and thrown away the key.”
- The prison cell to which the magician was confined was small and dark. But there was, in the cell, one window, very high up.
• At night, the magician lay atop his cloak on his mattress of straw and looked out the window into the darkness of the world.
• The sky was almost always thick with clouds, but sometimes, if the magician stared long enough, the clouds would **grudgingly** part and reveal one exceedingly bright star.



- “I intended only lilies,” the magician said to the star. “That was my intention: a bouquet of lilies.”

- This was not, strictly speaking, the truth.
- Yes, the magician had intended to conjure lilies.
- But standing on the stage of the **BLIFFENDORF OPERA HOUSE**, before an audience that was indifferent to whatever small diversion he might perform and was waiting only for him to exit and for the real magic
 - (the music of a virtuoso violinist)
 - to begin,
- the magician was struck suddenly, and quite forcibly, with the notion that he had wasted his life.
- So he performed that night the sleight of hand that would result in lilies,

but at the same time, he muttered the words of a spell that his magic teacher had entrusted to him long ago.
- The magician knew that the words were powerful and also, given the circumstances, somewhat ill-advised. But he wanted to perform something spectacular.
- And he had.
- That night at the **opera house**, before the whole world exploded into screams and sirens and accusations, the magician stood next to the enormous beast and **gloried** in the smell of her –
 - dried apples, moldy paper, dung.

He reached out and placed a hand, one hand, on her chest and felt, for a moment, the solemn beating of her heart.
- *This, he thought. I did this.*
- And when he was commanded, later that night, by every authority imaginable (the mayor, a duke, a princess, the captain of police) to send the elephant back, to make her go away, to,

in essence, *disappear* her,

the magician had dutifully spoken the spell,
- as well as the words themselves, backward, as the magician required, but nothing happened.

- The elephant remained absolutely, emphatically, undeniably **there**,

her very presence serving as some indisputable evidence of his powers.

- He had intended lilies;
 - yes, perhaps.
- But he had also wanted to perform true magic.
 - He had succeeded.

- And so, no matter what words he may have spoken to the star that occasionally appeared above him,

**the magician could summon no true regret
for what he had done.**

- The star, it should be noted, was not a star at all.
It was the planet **VENUS**.
- Records indicate that it shone particularly bright that year.