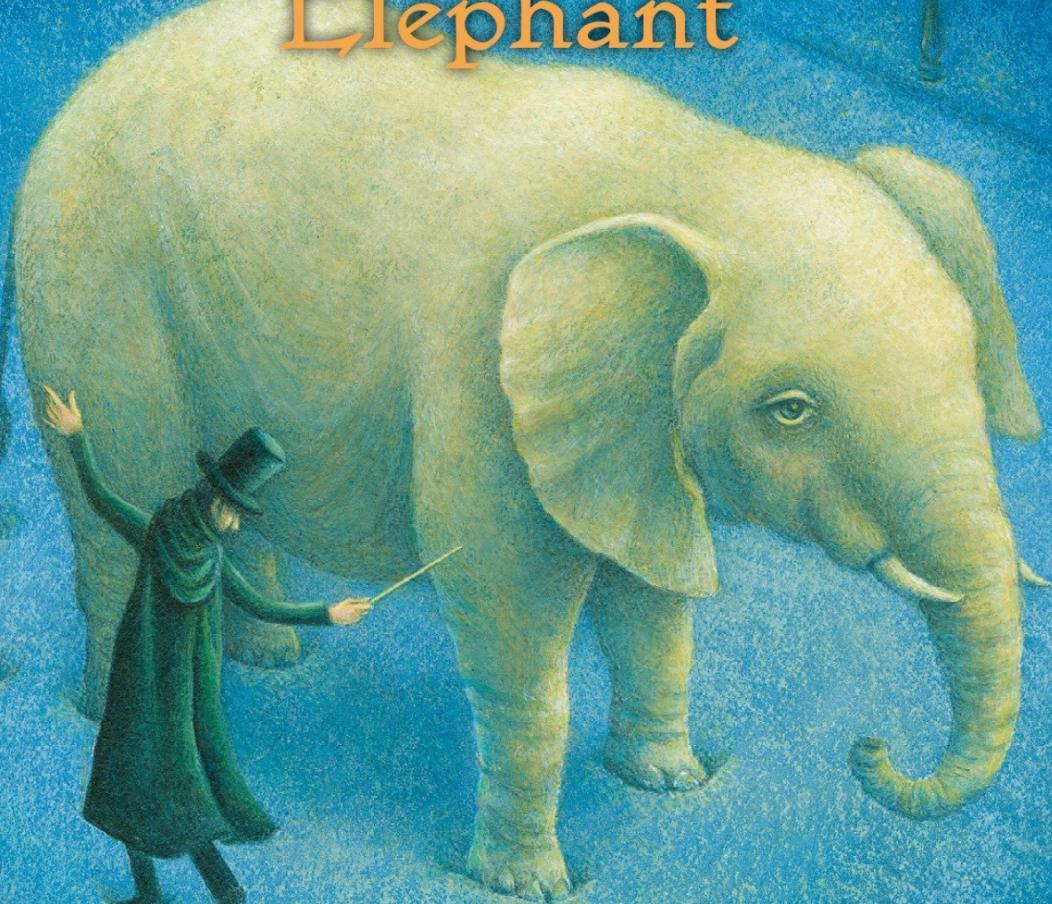


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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
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The Magician's
Elephant



ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA

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Chapter Twelve



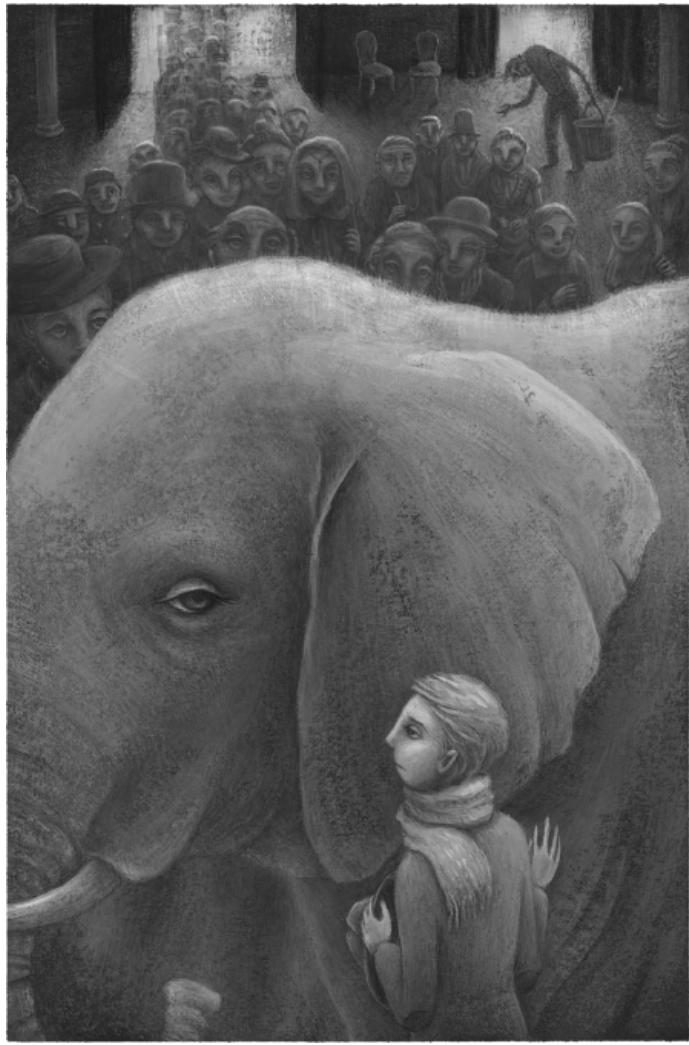
- The **countess QUINTET** had discovered that it was a somewhat messy affair to have an elephant in one's ballroom,
- and so, for matters of delicacy and cleanliness, she engaged the services of a small, extremely **unobtrusive** man whose job it was to stand behind the elephant, ever at the ready with a bucket and a shovel.
- The little man's back was bent and twisted, and because of this, it was almost impossible for him to lift his face and look directly at anyone or anything.
- He viewed everything sideways.
- His name was **BARTOK WHYNN**, and before he came to stand perpetually and forever at the rear of the elephant, he had been a stonecutter who labored high atop the city's largest and most magnificent cathedral, working at coaxing **gargoyles** from stone.
- **BARTOK WHYNN**'s **gargoyles** were well and truly frightening, each different from the others and each more horrifying than the one that had preceded it.

- On a day in late summer, the summer before the winter the elephant arrived in **BALTESE**.
- **BARTOK WHYNN** was engaged in the task of bringing to life the most gruesome **gargoyle** he had yet conceived when he lost his footing and fell.
- Because he was so high atop the cathedral, it took him quite a long time to reach the ground.
- The stonecutter had time to think.
- What he thought was,
- *I am going to die.*
- This thought was followed by another thought:
- *But I know something. I know something.*
- *What is it I know?*
- It came to him then.
- *Ah, yes, I know what I know. Life is funny. That is what I know.*
- And falling through the air, he actually laughed aloud.
- The people on the street below heard him.
- They exclaimed over it among themselves:
- *"Imagine a man falling to his death and laughing all the while!"*

- **BARTOK WHYNN** hit the ground,
- and his broken, bleeding, and unconscious body was **borne** by his fellow stonecutters through the streets and home to his wife, who equivocated between sending for the funeral director and sending for the doctor.
- She settled, finally, upon the doctor.
- "His back is broken and he cannot survive,"
- the doctor told **BARTOK WHYNN**'s wife.
- "It is not possible for any man to survive such a fall. That he has lived this long is some miracle that we cannot understand and should only be grateful for. Surely it has some meaning beyond our understanding."
- **BARTOK WHYNN**, who had, up to this point, been unconscious,
- made a small sound and took hold of the doctor's great coat and gestured for him to come close.
- "Wait only," said the doctor.
- "Attend, madam. Now he will deliver the words, the important words, the great message that he has been spared in order to speak. You may give those words to me, sir.
- Give them to me."
- And with a flourish, the doctor flung his coat to the side and bent over **BARTOK**'s broken body and offered him his ear.
- "Heeeeeeeeeeee,"
- whispered **BARTOK WHYNN** into the doctor's ear,
- "heee, heee."

- “What does he say?” said the wife.
 - The doctor stood up. His face was very pale.
 - “Your husband says nothing,” he said.
 - “Nothing?” said the wife.
 - **BARTOK** tugged again at the doctor’s coat.
 - Again, the doctor bent and offered his ear, but this time with markedly less enthusiasm.
 - “Heeeeeeeeeee,” laughed **BARTOK WHYNN** into the doctor’s ear,
“heeeee, heee.”
 - The doctor stood up. He straightened his coat.
 - “He said nothing?” said the wife.
She wrung her hands.
 - “Madam,” said the doctor,
“he laughs. He has lost his mind. His life is to follow. I tell you he will not, he cannot, live.”
 - But the stonemason’s broken back healed in its strange and crooked way, and he lived.
- Before the fall,**
- BARTOK WHYNN** was a **dour** man who measured five feet nine inches and who laughed, at most, once a fortnight.
- After the fall,**
- he measured four feet eleven inches,
 - and he laughed darkly, knowingly, daily, hourly, at everything and nothing at all.
 - The whole of existence struck him as cause for hilarity.
- He went back to work high atop the cathedral.
- He held the chisel in his hand. He stood before the stone.
 - But he could not stop laughing long enough to coax anything from it.
 - He laughed and laughed, his hands shook, the stone remained untouched, the **gargoyles** did not appear, and **BARTOK WHYNN** was dismissed from his job.
 - That is how he came, in the end, to stand behind the elephant with a bucket and a shovel.
 - His new position in life did not at all, in any way, diminish his **propensity** for hilarity.
 - If anything, if possible, he laughed more. He laughed harder.
 - **BARTOK WHYNN** laughed.

- And so when **PETER**, late in the day, in the perpetual, unvarying gloom of the **BALTESIAN** winter afternoon,
finally stepped through the elephant door and into the brightly lit ballroom of the **countess QUINTET**, what he heard was laughter.
- The elephant, at first, was not visible to him.
- There were so many people gathered around her that she was obscured entirely. But then, as **PETER** got closer and closer still, she was finally, and at last, revealed.
- She was both larger and smaller than he had expected her to be.
- And the sight of her, her head hung low, her eyes closed, made his heart feel tight in his chest.
- “Move along — ha, ha, hee!” shouted a small man with a shovel.
- “Wheeeee! You must move along so that everyone, *everyone*, may view the elephant.”
- **PETER** took his hat from his head.
- He held it over his heart.
- He inched close enough to put his hand on the rough, solid flank of the elephant.
- She was moving, swaying from side to side. The warmth of her astonished him.
- **PETER** shoved at the people surrounding him and managed to get his face up next to hers so that he could say what he had come to say, ask what he had come to ask.
- “Please,” he said, “you know where my sister is. Can you tell me?”
- And then he felt terrible for saying anything at all. She seemed so tired and sad. Was she asleep?
- “Move along, move along — ha, ha, hee!”
shouted the little man.
- “Please,” whispered **PETER** to the elephant,
“could you — I need you to — could you — would it be possible for you to open your eyes? Could you look at me?”
- The elephant stopped swaying. She held very still.
- And then, after a long moment, she opened her eyes and looked directly at him. She delivered to him a single, great, **despairing** glance.



- And PETER forgot about ADELE and his mother and the fortuneteller
 - and the old soldier and his father and battlefields and lies and promises and predictions.
- He forgot about everything except for the terrible truth of what he saw, what he understood in the elephant's eyes.
- She was heartbroken.
- She must go home.
- The elephant must go home or she would surely die.

- As for the elephant,
 - when she opened her eyes and saw the boy, she felt a small shock go through her.
- He was looking at her as if he knew her.
- He was looking at her as if he understood.
- For the first time since she had come through the roof of the opera house, the elephant felt something akin to hope.
- "Don't worry," PETER whispered to her.
 - "I will make sure that you get home."
- She stared at him.
- "I promise," said PETER.
- "Next!" shouted the little man with the shovel.
- "You must, you simply must, move along. Ha, ha, hee! There are others waiting to see the — ha, ha, hee! — elephant, too."
- PETER stepped away.
 - He turned. He walked without looking back, out of the ballroom of the countess QUINTET, through the elephant door, and into the dark world.
- He had made a promise to the elephant, but what kind of promise was it?
- It was the worst kind of promise; it was yet another promise that he could not keep.
- How could he, PETER, make sure that an elephant got home?
 - He did not even know where the elephant's home was.
 - Was it AFRICA? INDIA?
- Where were those places, and how could he get an elephant there?
- He might just as well have promised the elephant that he would secure for her an enormous set of wings.
- *It is horrible, what I have done,*
thought PETER.
- *It is terrible. I should never have promised.*
- *Nor should I have asked the fortuneteller my question.*
- *I should not have, no. I should have left things as they were.*
And what the magician did was a terrible thing, too.
- *He should never have brought the elephant here. I am glad that he is in prison.*
- *They should never, ever let him out.*
- *He is a terrible man to do such a thing.*

- And then **PETER** was struck by a thought so wondrous that he stopped walking.
 - He put his hat on his head. He took it off.
 - He put it back on again.
- *The magician.*
- If the world held magic powerful enough to make the elephant appear, then there must exist, too, magic in equal measure, magic powerful enough to undo what had been done.
- There must be magic that could send the elephant home.
- “The magician,” said **PETER** out loud, and then he said,
 - “**LEO MATIENNE!**”
- He put his hat on his head. He began to run.