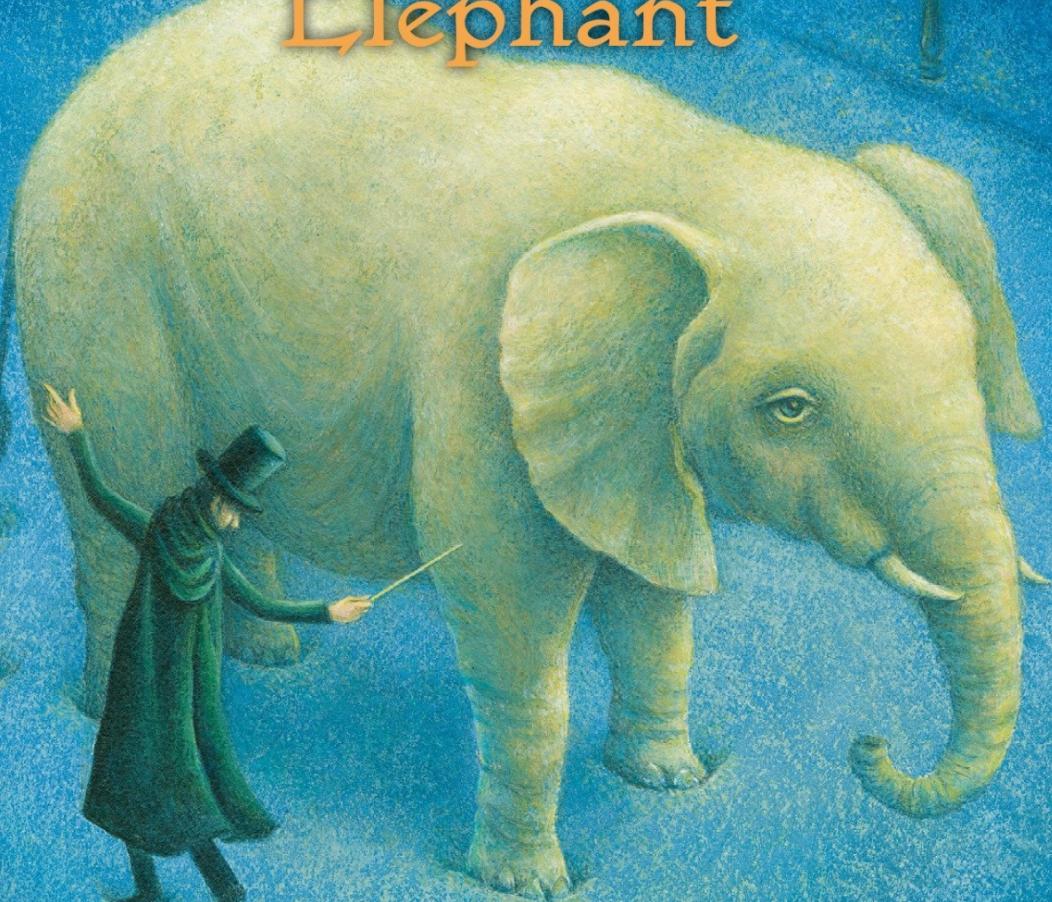


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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
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The Magician's
Elephant



ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA



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published in 2009

- The city of **BALTESE** felt as if it were under siege — not by a foreign army, but by the weather.
 - No one could recall a winter so thoroughly, uniformly gray.
 - Where was the sun?
- Would it never shine again?
 - And if the sun was not going to shine, then could it not at least snow? Something, anything!
- And truly, in the grip of a winter so foul and dark,
 - was it fair to keep a creature as strange and lovely and promising as the elephant locked away from the great majority of the city's people?
- It was not fair.
 - It was not fair at all.
- More than a few of the ordinary citizens of **BALTESE** took it upon themselves to knock at the elephant door.
 - When no one answered the knock, they went as far as to try to open the door themselves, but it was locked tight, bolted firm.
- *You stay out there*, the door seemed to say.
 - *And what is inside here will stay inside here.*
- And this, in a world so cold and gray, seemed terribly unfair.

- Longing is not always a reciprocal thing;
 - while the citizens of **BALTESE** may have longed for the elephant,
 - she did not at all long for them, and
- finding herself in the ballroom of the **countess was**, for her, a terrible turn of events.
 - The glitter of the chandeliers, the **thrum** of the orchestra, the loud laughter, the smells of roasted meat and cigar smoke and face powder all provoked in her an agony of disbelief.
 - She tried to will it away.
 - She closed her eyes and kept them closed for as long as she was able, but it made no difference, for whenever she opened them again, it was all as it had been.
- Nothing had changed.
 - **The elephant felt a terrible pain in her chest.**
 - **It was hard for her to breathe; the world seemed too small.**

• The **countess QUINTET**,

- after considerable and extremely careful consultation with her worried advisers, decided that the people of the city (that is, those people who were not invited to her balls and dinners and **soirees**) could, for their **edification** and entertainment (and as a way to appreciate the **countess's** finely tuned sense of social justice),

- view the elephant for free, absolutely for free, on the first **Saturday** of the month.

- The **countess** had posters and leaflets printed up and distributed throughout the city, and

- **LEO MATIENNE**, walking home from the police station, stopped to read how he, too, thanks to the **largesse** of the **countess**, could see the amazing wonder that was her elephant.

- “Ah, thank you very much, **Countess**,” said **LEO** to the poster. “This is wonderful news, wonderful news indeed.”

- A beggar stood in the doorway,

- a black dog at his side, and

- as soon as **LEO MATIENNE** spoke the words,

- the beggar took them and turned them into a song.

- “This is wonderful news,” sang the beggar, “wonderful news, indeed.”

- **LEO MATIENNE** smiled. “Yes,” he said,

- “wonderful news. I know a young boy who wants quite desperately to see the elephant. He has asked me to assist him, and I have been trying to imagine a way that it could all happen, and now here is the answer before me. He will be so glad of it.”

- “A boy who wants very much to see the elephant,” sang the beggar,

- “and he will be glad.” He stretched out his hand as he sang.

- **LEO MATIENNE** put a coin in the beggar’s hand and bowed before him and

- then continued on his walk home, moving more quickly now, whistling the song the beggar had sung and thinking,

- *What if the **countess QUINTET** becomes weary of the novelty of owning an elephant?*

- *What then?*

- *What if the elephant remembers that she is a creature of the wild and acts accordingly?*

- *What then?*

- When **LEO** came at last to the **APARTMENTS POLONAISE**, he heard the creak of the attic window being opened.

- He looked up and saw **PETER**’s hopeful face staring down at him.

- “Please,” said **PETER**,

- “**LEO MATIENNE**, have you figured out a way for the **countess** to receive me?”

- “**PETER!**” he said. “Little cuckoo bird of the attic world. You are just the person I want to see. But wait; where is your hat?”

- “My hat?” said **PETER**.

- “Yes, I have brought you some excellent news, and it seems to me that you would want to have your hat upon your head in order to hear it properly.”

- “One moment,” said **PETER**.

- He disappeared from the window and came back again,

- his hat firmly upon his head.

- “And now, then, you are officially attired and ready to receive the happy news of which I, **LEO MATIENNE**, am the proud bearer.”

- **LEO** cleared his throat. “I am pleased to let you know that the magician’s elephant will be on display for the edification and illumination of the masses.”

- “But what does that mean?” said **PETER**.

- “It means that you may see the elephant on the **first Saturday of the month**; that is, you may see her this **Saturday**, **PETER**, this **Saturday**.”

- “Oh,” said **PETER**, “I will see her. I will find her!” His face suddenly became bright, so bright that **LEO MATIENNE**, even though he knew it was foolish, turned and checked to see if the sun had somehow performed the impossible and come out from behind a cloud to shine directly on **PETER**’s small face.

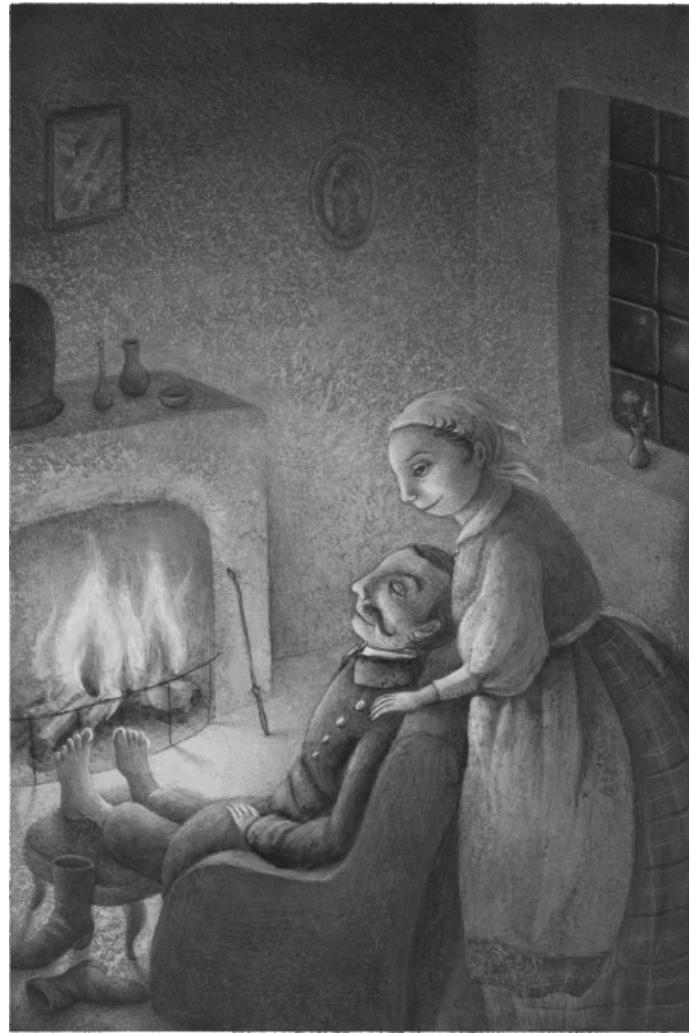
- There was, of course, no sun.

- “Close the window,” came the old soldier’s voice from inside the attic. “It is winter, and it is cold.”

- “Thank you,” said **PETER** to **LEO MATIENNE**. “Thank you.” And he pulled the window closed.

- In the apartment of LEO and GLORIA MATIENNE,
- LEO sat down in front of the fire and heaved a great sigh and took off his boots.
- "Phew," said his wife. "Hand me your socks immediately."
- LEO removed his socks. GLORIA MATIENNE took them from him and put them directly into a bucket filled with soapy water. "Without me," she said, "you would have no friends at all, because no one would be able to bear the smell of your feet."
 - "I do not want to surprise you," said LEO MATIENNE.
 - "but, as a matter of course,
 - I keep my boots on in public places and there is no need, then, for anyone to smell my socks or my feet."

- GLORIA came up behind LEO and put her hands on his shoulders. She bent and kissed the top of his head. "What are you thinking?" she said.



- "I am imagining PETER," said LEO MATIENNE,
- "and how happy he was to learn that he could see the elephant for himself.
- His face lit up in a way that I have never seen."
- "It is wrong about that boy," said GLORIA. She sighed.
- "He is kept a prisoner up there by that man, whatever he is called."
 - "He is called LUTZ," said LEO.
 - "His name is VILNA LUTZ."
- "All day it is nothing but drilling and marching and more marching. I hear them, you know. It is a terrible sound, terrible."
 - LEO MATIENNE shook his head.
 - "It is a terrible thing altogether."
- He is a gentle boy and not really cut out for soldiering,
 - I do not think.
 - There is a lot of love in him, a lot of love in his heart."
- "Most certainly there is," said GLORIA.
 - "And he is up there with no one and nothing to love.
 - It is a bad thing to have love and nowhere to put it."
 - LEO MATIENNE sighed.
 - He bent his head back and looked up into his wife's face and smiled.
 - "And we are all alone down here."
 - "Don't say it," said GLORIA MATIENNE.
 - "It is only that —" said LEO.
 - "No," said GLORIA. "No."
 - She put a finger to LEO's lips. "We have tried and failed. God does not intend for us to have children."
 - "Who are we to say what God intends?" said LEO MATIENNE.
 - He was silent for a long moment.
 - "What if?"
 - "Don't you dare," said GLORIA.
 - "My heart has been broken too many times, and it cannot bear to hear your foolish questions."
 - But LEO MATIENNE would not be silenced.
 - "What if?" he whispered to his wife.
 - "No," said GLORIA.
 - "Why not?"

• “No.”

• “Could it be?”

• “No,” said **GLORIA MATIENNE**, “it cannot be.”