

2022 lunedì giugno 27 - lundi - juni 28 → 30

Kate DiCamillo

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR
KATE DiCAMILLO

The Magician's
Elephant



ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA

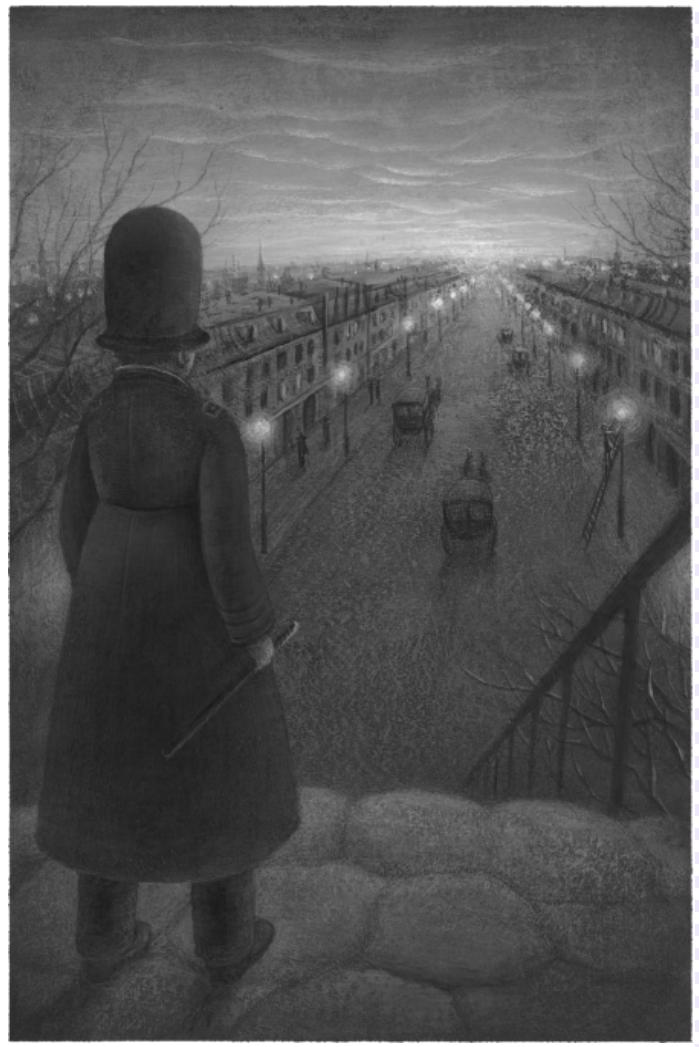


born in 1964
published in 2009

- The captain of the police of the city of BALTESE was a man who believed most firmly in the letter of the law.
 - However, despite repeated and increasingly flustered consultations of the police handbook, he could not find one word, one syllable, one letter that pertained to the correct method of dealing with a beast that has appeared out of nowhere, destroying the roof of an opera house and crippling a noblewoman.
 - And so, with great reluctance,
 - the captain of police solicited the opinions of his subordinates about what should be done with the elephant.
 - “Sir!” said one of the young lieutenants.
 - “She appeared.
 - Perhaps, if we are patient, she will disappear.”
 - “Does the elephant appear as if she would disappear?” said the captain of police.
 - “Sir?” said the young lieutenant.
 - “I am afraid I don’t understand the question, sir.”
 - “I am quite aware of your lack of understanding,” said the captain. “Your lack of understanding is as apparent as the elephant and is even more unlikely to disappear.”
 - “Yes, sir,” said the lieutenant.
 - He furrowed his brow.
 - He thought for a moment.
 - “Thank you, sir. I’m sure.”
 - This exchange was followed by a long and painful silence. The gathered policemen shuffled their feet.
 - “It is simple,” said another policeman, finally.
 - “The elephant is a criminal.
 - Therefore, she must be tried as a criminal and punished as a criminal.”
 - “But why is the elephant a criminal?” said a small policeman with a very large mustache.

- “Why is the elephant a criminal?” said the captain of police.
 - “Yes,” said the small policeman, whose name was LEO MATIENNE,
 - “why? If the magician threw a rock at a window, would you then blame the rock for the window breaking?”
 - “What kind of magician throws rocks?”
 - said the captain of police.
 - “What kind of sorry excuse for magic is that, the throwing of rocks?”
 - “You misunderstand me, sir,” said LEO MATIENNE.
 - I meant only to say that the elephant did not ask to come crashing through the roof of the opera house.
 - Would any sensible elephant wish for such a thing?
 - And if she did not wish for it,
 - then how can she be guilty of it?”
 - “I ask you for possible solutions,” said the captain of police. He put his hands on top of his head.
 - “Yes,” said LEO MATIENNE.
 - “I ask what action should be taken,” said the captain. He pulled at his hair with both his hands.
 - “Yes,” said LEO MATIENNE again.
 - “And you talk to me about sensible elephants and what they wish for?” shouted the captain.
 - “I think it is pertinent, sir,” said LEO MATIENNE.
 - “He thinks it is pertinent,” said the captain.
 - “He thinks it is pertinent.”
 - He pulled at his hair. His face became very red.
 - “Sir,” said another policeman,
 - “what if we found the elephant a home, sir?”
 - “Yes,” said the captain of police.
 - He turned around and faced the policeman who had just spoken.
 - “Why did I not think of it? Let us dispatch the elephant immediately to the Home for Wayward Elephants Who Engage in Objectionable Pursuits Against Their Will. It is right down the street, is it not?”
 - “Is it?” said the policeman.
 - “Truly? I had not known.
 - There are so many worthy charitable institutions in this enlightened age; why,

- it's become nearly impossible to keep track of them all."
 - The **captain** pulled very hard at his hair.
 - "Leave me," he said softly. "All of you. I will solve this without your help."
 - One by one, the **policemen** left the police station.
 - The small **policeman** was the last to go.
 - He lifted his hat to the **captain**.
 - "I wish you a good evening, sir," he said,
 - "and I beg that you consider the idea that
 - the elephant is guilty of nothing except being an elephant."
 - "Leave me," said the **captain** of police, "please."
 - "Good evening, sir," said **LEO MATIENNE** again.
 - "Good evening."
 - The small **policeman** walked home in the gloom of early evening.
 - As he walked, he whistled a sad song and considered the fate of the elephant.
 - To his mind, the **captain** was asking the wrong questions.
 - The questions that mattered, the questions that needed to be asked, were these:
 - Where did the elephant come from?
 - And what did it mean that she had come to the city of **BALTESE**?
 - What if she was just the first in a series of elephants?
 - What if, one by one, all the **mammals** and **reptiles** of **AFRICA** were to be summoned to the stages of opera houses all across **EUROPE**?
 - What if, next, **crocodiles** and **giraffes** and **rhinoceroses** came crashing through roofs?
- LEO MATIENNE** had the soul of a poet, and because of this, he liked very much to consider questions that had no answers.
- He liked to ask "What if?" and "Why not?" and "Could it possibly be?"
- LEO** came to the top of the hill and paused. Below him, the **lamplighter** was lighting the lamps that lined the wide avenue. **LEO MATIENNE** stood and watched as, one by one, the globes sprang to life.
- What if the elephant had come bearing a message of great importance?
- What if everything was to be irrevocably, undeniably changed by the elephant's arrival?



- **LEO** stood at the top of the hill and waited for a long while,
 - until the avenue below him was well and fully lit, and then he continued walking down the hill and onto the lighted path, toward his home.
- He whistled as he walked.
 - *What if?*
 - *Why not?*
 - *Could it be?*
- sang the glowing, wondering heart of **LEO MATIENNE**.
 - *What if?*
 - *Why not?*
 - *Could it be?*

- **PETER** stood at the window of the attic room of the **APARTMENTS POLONAISE**.

- He heard **LEO MATIENNE** before he saw him;
- always, because of the whistling, **PETER** heard **LEO** before he saw him.

- He waited until the policeman appeared, and then he threw open the window and stuck his head out.
- He shouted, “**LEO MATIENNE**, is it true that there is an elephant and that she came through the roof and that she is now with the police?”

- **LEO** stopped. He looked up.
- “**PETER**,” he said. He smiled.

- “**PETER AUGUSTUS DUCHENE**, fellow resident of the **APARTMENTS POLONAISE**,
- little cuckoo bird of the attic world.
- There is, indeed, an elephant.
- It is true. And it is true, also,
- that she is in the custody of the police.
- The elephant is imprisoned.”

- “Where?” said **PETER**.

- “I cannot say,”
- said **LEO MATIENNE**.

- “I cannot say because I am afraid that I do not know.
- They are keeping it the strictest possible secret,
- you see, what with elephants being such dangerous and provoking criminals.”

- "Close the window," called **VILNA LUTZ** from his bed. "It is winter, and it is cold."
- It was winter, true.
- And true, also, it was quite cold.

• But even in the summertime, **VILNA LUTZ**, when he was in the grips of his strange fever, would complain of the cold and demand that the window be shut.

- "Thank you," said **PETER** to **LEO MATIENNE**.
- He closed the window and turned and faced the old man.

• "What were you speaking of?" said **VILNA LUTZ**.

• "What manner of nonsense were you shouting from windows?"

- "An elephant, sir," said **PETER**.
- "It is true. **LEO MATIENNE** says that it is true.
- An elephant has arrived. An elephant is here."

- "Elephants," said **VILNA LUTZ**.
- "Pooh. Imaginary beasts, **denizens** of imaginary **bestiaries**, demons from who-knows-where."
- He fell back against the pillow,
- exhausted by his **diatribe**, and then jerked suddenly upright again.
- "Hark! Do I hear the crack of muskets, the boom of cannons?"

• "No, sir," said **PETER**. "You do not."

- "Demons, elephants, imaginary beasts."
- "Not imaginary," said **PETER**.
- "Real. This elephant is real.

- **LEO MATIENNE** is an officer of the law, and he says that it is so."
- "Pooh," said **VILNA LUTZ**. "I say 'pooh' to that **mustachioed** officer of the law and his imagined creature." He lay back against the pillow.
- He turned his head first to one side and then to the other. "I hear it," he said. "I hear the sounds of battle. The fight has begun."

- "So," said **PETER** softly to himself,
- "it must be true, mustn't it?
- There is an elephant now,
- so the fortuneteller was right, and my sister lives."

- "Your sister?" said **VILNA LUTZ**.

• "Your sister is dead. How often must I tell you? She never drew breath. She did not breathe. They are all dead. Look out over the field and you will see: they are all dead, your father among them. Look, look! Your father lies dead."

• "I see," said **PETER**.

- "Where is my foot?" said **VILNA LUTZ**. He cast a wild look around the room. "Where is it?"

• "On the nightstand."

- "On the nightstand, *sir*," corrected **VILNA LUTZ**.

• "On the nightstand, *sir*," said **PETER**.

- "There," said the old soldier. He picked up the foot.
- "There, there, old friend."
- He gave the wooden foot a loving pat and then let his head sink back on the pillow.
- He pulled the blankets up under his chin. "Soon," he said,
- "soon, I will put on the foot,
- **Private DUCHENE**, and we will practice maneuvers, you and I.
- We will make a great soldier out of you yet.

You will become a man like your father. You will become, like him, a soldier brave and true.

- **PETER** turned away from **VILNA LUTZ** and
- looked out the window at the darkening world.
- Downstairs, far below, a door slammed.
- And then another. He heard the muffled sound of laughter and knew that **LEO MATIENNE** was being welcomed home by his wife.
- What was it like, **PETER** wondered, to have someone who knew you would always return and who welcomed you with open arms?

- He remembered being in a garden at dusk. The sky was purple and the lamps had been lit, and PETER was small.
 - His father picked him up and tossed him high and then caught him, over and over again. PETER's mother was there, too; she was wearing a white dress that glowed bright in the purple dusk, and her stomach was large like a balloon.
- “Don’t drop him,” said PETER’s mother to his father. “Don’t you dare drop him.” She was laughing.

- “I will not,” said his father.
 - “I could not. For he is PETER AUGUSTUS DUCHENE,
 - and he will always return to me.”

- Again and again, PETER’s father threw him up in the air.
 - Again and again, PETER felt himself suspended in nothingness for a moment, just a moment, and then he was pulled back, returned to the sweetness of the earth and the warmth of his father’s waiting arms.

- “See?” said his father to his mother.
 - “Do you see how he always comes back to me?”

- It was full dark now in the attic room of the APARTMENTS POLONAISE.

- The old soldier tossed from side to side in the bed.
 - “Close the window,” he said. “It is winter, and it is cold.”

- The garden that held PETER’s father and mother seemed far away, so far that he could almost believe that the memory, the garden, had existed in another world entirely.
- But if the fortuneteller was to be believed (and she must be believed; she must), the elephant knew the way to that garden. She could lead him there.

- “Please,” said VILNA LUTZ, “the window must be closed. It is so cold; it is so very, very cold.”

crescendo,
it repeats saying the old VILNA LUTZ feels cold.