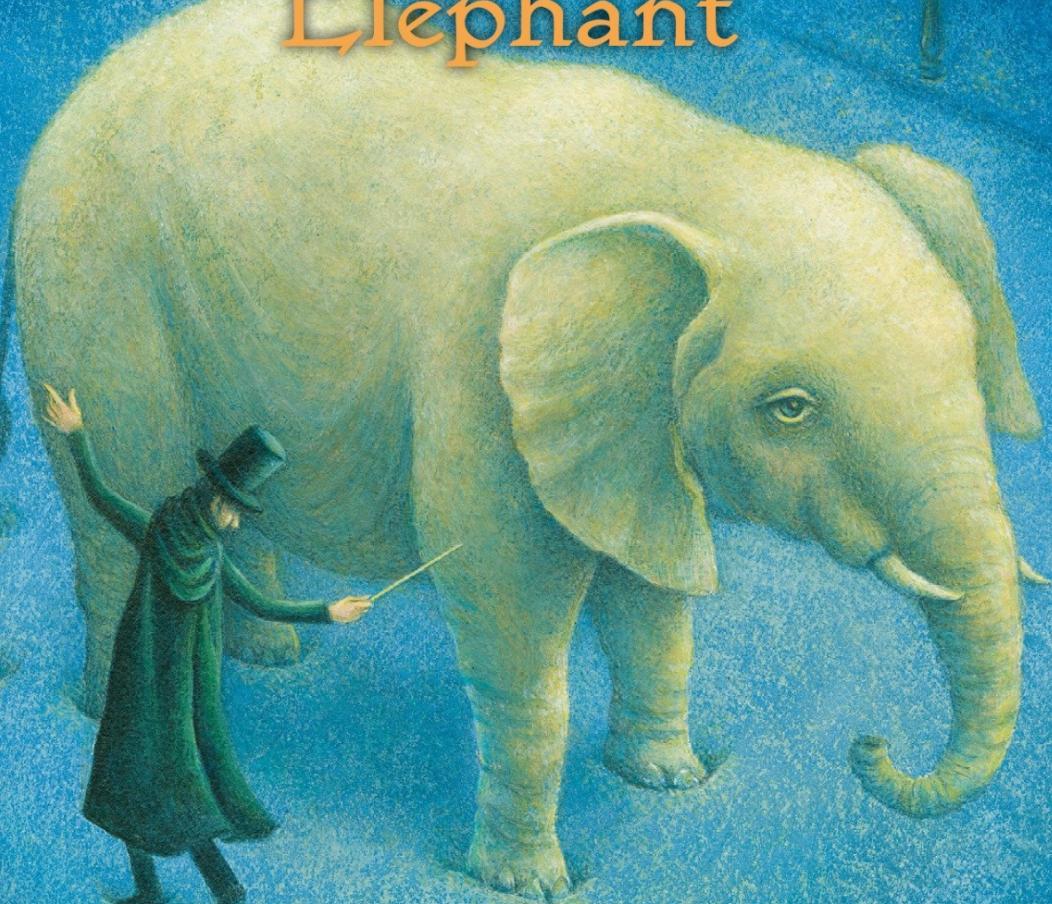


2022 martedì giugno 28 - mardi - juni 28 → juli 01

Kate DiCamillo

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR  
**KATE DiCAMILLO**

The Magician's  
Elephant



ILLUSTRATED BY YOKO TANAKA

## Chapter Nine



born in 1964  
published in 2009

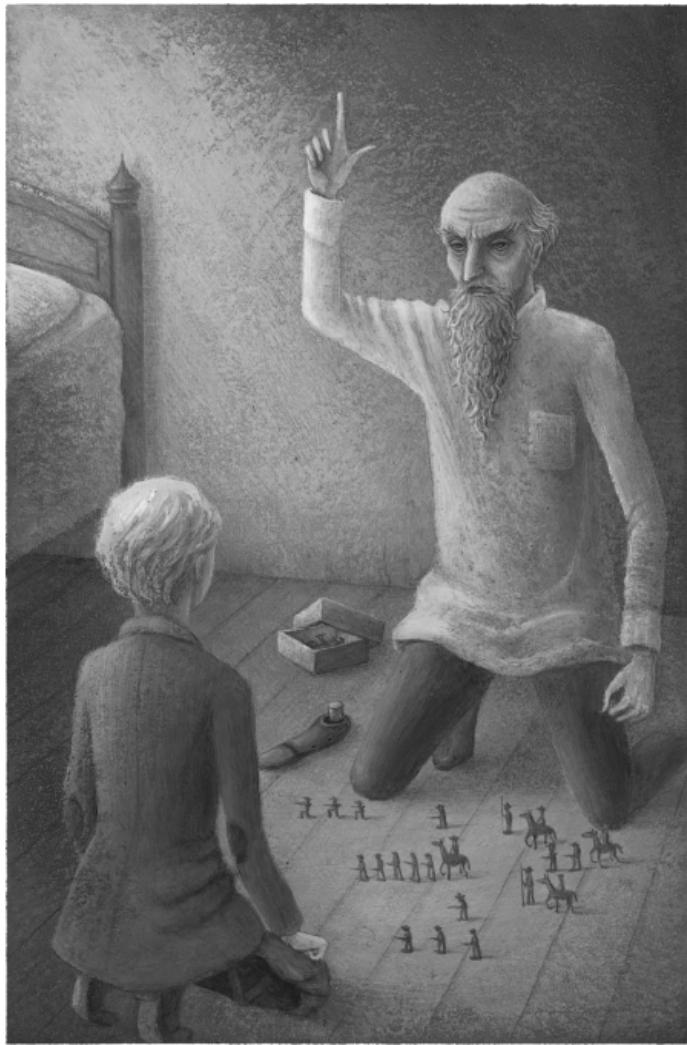
- **VILNA LUTZ**'s fever receded, and his words began again to make a dull and unremarkable and decidedly military sense.
- He had risen from his bed and trimmed his beard to a fine point and was seated on the floor.
- He was placing a collection of lead soldiers in the pattern of a famous battle.
- "As you can see, **Private DUCHENE**, this was a particularly brilliant strategy on the part of **General VON FLICKENHAMMENGER**, and he executed it with a great deal of grace and bravery, bringing these soldiers from here to here, thereby performing a **flanking** maneuver that was entirely unexpected and exceedingly elegant and devastating. One cannot help but admire the genius of it. Do you admire it, **Private DUCHENE**?"
- "Yes, sir," said **PETER**, "I admire it."
- "You must, then, give me your undivided attention," said **VILNA**

**LUTZ**. He picked up his wooden foot and beat it against the floor. "This is important. This is the work of your father I am speaking of. This is man's work."

- **PETER** looked down at the toy soldiers and thought about his father in a field full of mud, a **bayonet** wound in his side.
- He thought about his father bleeding. He thought about him dying.
- And then he remembered the dream of **ADELE**,
- the weight of her in his arms and the golden light that had been outside the door.
- He remembered his father holding him,
- catching him, in the garden.
- And for the first time, soldiering did not, in any way, seem like a man's work to **PETER**.
- Instead, it seemed like foolishness — a horrible, terrible, nightmarish foolishness.

- "So," said **VILNA LUTZ**. He cleared his throat.
- "As I was saying, as I was illuminating, as I was **elucidating**, yes, these men, these brave, brave soldiers, under the direct orders of the brilliant **General VON FLICKENHAMMENGER**, came around from behind.
- They outflanked the enemy. And that, ultimately, is how the battle was won. Does that make sense?"
- **PETER** looked down at the soldiers arranged carefully and just so. He looked up at **VILNA LUTZ**'s face and then down again at the soldiers.
  - "No," he said at last.
- "No?"
- "No. It does not make sense."
- "Well, then, tell me what you see when you look upon it, if you do not see the sense of it."
  - "I look upon it and wish that it could be undone."
- "Undone?" said **VILNA LUTZ**.
  - "Yes. Undone. No wars. No soldiers."
- **VILNA LUTZ** stared at **PETER** with his mouth agape and the point of his beard trembling.
- **PETER**, looking back at him, felt something unbearably hot rise up in his throat; he knew that now the words would finally come.

- "**She lives**," he said.
- "That is what the fortuneteller told me."
- **She lives**, and an elephant will lead me to her.
- And because an elephant has come out of nowhere, out of nothing, I believe her. Not you. I do not, I cannot, any longer believe you."
- "What is this you are talking about? Who lives?"
- "My sister," said **PETER**.
  - "Your sister? Am I mistaken?"
  - Were we speaking of the domestic sphere?
  - No. We were not.
  - We were speaking of battles, you and I.
  - We were speaking of the brilliance of generals and the bravery of foot soldiers."
  - **VILNA LUTZ** beat his wooden foot against the floorboards.
    - "Battles and bravery and strategy,
    - that is what we were speaking of."
  - "Where is she? What happened to her?"
  - The old soldier grimaced.
  - He put down the foot and pointed his index finger heavenward. "I told you. I have told you many times.
    - She is with your mama, in heaven."
  - "I heard her cry," said **PETER**. "I held her."
  - "Bah," said **VILNA LUTZ**. His finger, still pointing heavenward, trembled.
    - "She did not cry. She could not cry.
    - Stillborn. She was stillborn.
    - The breath never reached her lungs.
    - She never drew breath."
  - "She cried. I remember. I know it to be true."



- “And what of it? What if she did cry?  
That she cried does not mean that she lived —  
not at all, not at all.  
If every babe who cried were still alive, well,  
then, the world would be a very crowded place, indeed.”
- “Where is she?” said PETER.
- VILNA LUTZ let out a small sob.
- “Where?” said PETER again.
- “I do not know,” said the old soldier.  
“The midwife took her away.  
She said that she was too small,  
that she could not possibly put something so delicate into  
the hands of one such as me.”
- “You said she died.  
Time and again, you told me that she was dead. You lied.”
- “Do not call it a lie. Call it scientific conjecture.  
Babes without their mothers often will not live.  
And she was so small.”
- “You lied to me.”
- “No, no, Private DUCHENE. I lied *for* you, to protect you.  
What could you have done if you had known?  
It would only have hurt your heart to know. I cared for you  
— you, who would and could become a soldier like your  
father, a man I admired. I did not take your sister, because  
the midwife would not let me;  
she was so small, so impossibly small. What do I know of  
infants and their needs? I know of soldiering, not  
mothering.”

- **PETER** got up from the floor.
  - He walked to the window and stood looking out at the cathedral spire, the birds wheeling in the air.
- “I am done talking now, sir,” said **PETER**.
  - “Tomorrow I will go to the elephant and then I will find my sister and I will be done with you. I am done, too, with being a soldier, because soldiering is a useless and pointless thing.”
    - “Do not say something so terrible,” said **VILNA LUTZ**.
      - “Think of your father.”
  - “I am thinking of my father,” said **PETER**.
  - And he was.
    - He was thinking of his father in the garden.
    - And he was thinking of him on the battlefield, bleeding to death.