



2020

The Magician's Elephant

Cynthia Frazier

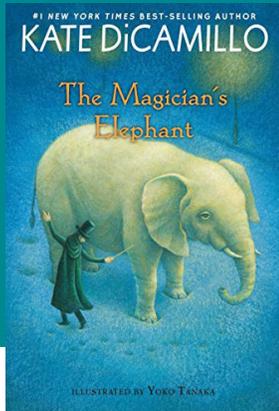
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Book Review

The Magician's Elephant

Author

Kate DiCamillo

Illustrator

Yoko Tanaka

Reviewer

Cynthia Frazier

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Rating

Excellent

Level

Primary, Intermediate,
Young Adult

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Pages

208

Year

2009

ISBN

9780763644109

Publisher

Candlewick Press

Peter Augustus Duchene is a ten-year-old orphan, taken in by an old soldier who served with his father. When a fortune teller comes to town, Peter uses his guardian's food money to ask her a question that has long haunted him. She assures him that despite what he has been told, his baby sister is alive. To find her he must follow the elephant, but finding an elephant in the small town of Baltese seems impossible. However, during a magician's performance at the Opera House, an elephant crashes through the ceiling, injuring a patron of the arts. For this, the magician and the elephant are thrown into prison. The stories of Peter, the elephant, his sister, the magician, the crippled Madam LaVaughn, a nun, the police chief and his wife, a stonecutter, and a beggar with his blind dog all intertwine in a curious tale that shows how even impossible things can sometimes be true.

DiCamillo's lovely book is best for reading aloud. Tanaka's illustrations complement the prose and set the mood for the story. His full-page, black and white paintings create the atmosphere of an old-fashioned city somewhere in the past with carriages, gas lights and fireplaces. The story mentions dreams often, and Tanaka's dream-like illustrations help create this ambience. The author uses these pictures to fill the imagination with details not mentioned in words. This book, aimed at elementary school readers, is well written and heartwarming. Though predictable, the ending is all that a fairytale ending is supposed to be, with everyone ending up happily ever after.