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Elephant's Journey

Jos Saramago

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Elephant's Journey Jos Saramago
Solomon the elephant's life is about to be upturned. For two years he has been in Lisbon, brought from the Portuguese colonies in India. Now King Dom Joao III wishes to make him a wedding gift for the Hapsburg archduke, Maximilian. It's a nice idea, since it avoids the Portuguese king offending his Lutheran cousin with an overtly Catholic present. But it means the poor pachyderm must travel from Lisbon to Vienna on foot - the only option when transporting a large animal such a long way. So begins a journey that will take the stalwart Solomon across the dusty plains of Castile, over the sea to Genoa and up to northern Italy where, like Hannibal's elephants before him, he must cross the snowy Alps. Accompanying him is his quiet keeper, Subhro, who watches while - at every place they stop - people try to turn Solomon into something he is not. From worker of holy miracles to umbrella stand, the unassuming elephant suffers the many attempts of humans to impose meaning on what they don't understand. Saramago's latest novel is an enchanting mix of fact (an Indian elephant really did make this journey in 1551), fable and fantasy. Filled with wonderful landscapes and local colour, peppered with witty reflection on human failings and achievements, it is, in the end, about the journey of life itself.

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