



Jumbo: This Being the True Story of the Greatest Elephant in the World

Paul Chambers

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Jumbo was a superstar of the Victorian era. Every day tens of thousands of people would visit this adored animal known as “the Children’s Pet” or, more simply, “the Giant Elephant,” at the London Zoo. When P.T. Barnum purchased him for his Greatest Show on Earth, Jumbo’s transport to the U.S. made headlines for weeks, and he was an instant sensation in America. His name entered our lexicon as an adjective for oversized things, and half a century after his death his still-famous and unrivalled popularity was the inspiration for Walt Disney’s *Dumbo*. But fame comes at a price and, like so many modern celebrities, Jumbo led a troubled private life that was far from idyllic. His best friend – a zookeeper named Matthew Scott, who remained by Jumbo’s side in Britain and the United States for twenty years – was moody and manipulative, and Jumbo himself attracted rumors of violent tantrums, a fondness for drink, and of a “wife” he left behind in order to make it big in America.

From an eyewitness account of Jumbo’s capture in Africa after ivory hunters had killed his parents, to his early years at the Paris zoo where he was mistreated and regarded as a disappointing runt, to his stunning growth spurt in London where he became the largest elephant in captivity, to the “Jumbo craze” that swept across Britain and the United States, Paul Chambers utilizes new archival material in fully telling Jumbo’s story for the first time.

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