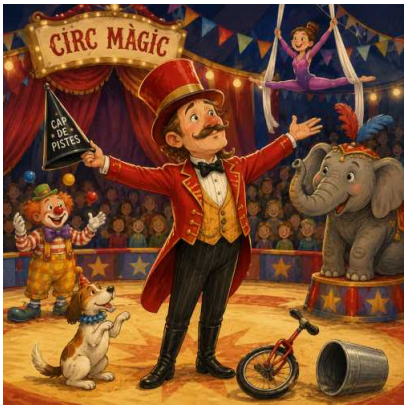


The Ringmaster

In a very small circus,

but with a very large tent,

there lived a forty-year-old man

who was the Ringmaster.

His name was Ringmaster.

Yes, you heard right.

“What a strange name!” the children would say.

“It’s because I’m not just any man,” he would reply. “I’m the one in charge when the show starts!”

Every afternoon, before the audience arrived, the Ringmaster would enter the ring wearing his red hat, black boots, and a mustache so long it almost tickled his nose.

“Ladies and gentlemen!

Boys and girls!

Cats and dogs, if you have any!”

And he would bow.

But that day, something very strange happened.

The circus was ready.

The acrobats were waiting.

The clowns were waiting.

The ribbon girl was waiting.

Even the elephant, named Margarida, was waiting.

But...

THERE WAS NO AUDIENCE.

Not a single child.

Not a single grandmother.

Not a single father.

Not a single mother.

Not even that gentleman who was always late and asked:

“Has it started yet?”

The Ringmaster looked at the door.

“Perhaps they’ve gotten lost.”

He looked at his clock.

“Perhaps they’ve fallen asleep.”

He looked at the sky.

“Or perhaps today the world has forgotten about the circus.”

And then Pepet the clown said:

“Well, we’ll do something.”

“What?”

“Let’s put on the show anyway.”

The Ringmaster thought for a moment.

“But nobody’s watching us!”

Margarida the elephant lifted her trunk.

“Whoosh!”

“What’s she saying?” asked the Ringmaster.

“That there’s always someone watching,” said Pepet.

And they began.

The acrobats jumped.

The ribbon girl flew through the air.

The clowns fell on their bottoms.

Margarida did a complete somersault.

And the Ringmaster, who had always been the one to announce everyone else’s acts, decided to do one too.

He grabbed a tiny bicycle.

It was so small that his knees reached his ears.

“I can do things too!” he shouted.

He got on.

He pedaled.

One lap.

Two laps.

Three laps.

And…

PLOOP!

He fell into a bucket.

The performers laughed.

Margarida too.

“Don’t laugh, Margarida!”

The elephant went again:

“Whoosh!”

And at that moment…

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP!

Everyone froze.

There was applause.

The Ringmaster looked toward the door.

There was a little girl.

And behind her, a crowd of people.

They had all arrived at once!

“We thought there wasn’t a show today,” said the girl.

“So did we!” replied the Ringmaster.

And he began to laugh.

That night, the circus was filled with lights, music, laughter, and applause.

And the Ringmaster discovered something important:

A circus isn’t a tent,

or a ring,

or a bunch of performers.

A circus is a place where, for a while,

problems cease to weigh you down

and laughter lifts you up.

From that day on, before each performance, the Ringmaster would say:

“Ladies and gentlemen!

Boys and girls!

Welcome to the place where anything is possible…”

And Margarida would add:

“Phew!”

Because elephants also have the right to have the last word.