Back to Contents

THE CIRCUS

The story is set in Victorian Times. The Gradgrind children have been brought up very strictly. Their father believes they should spend their time learning facts. He believes there is no time to waste enjoying life or having fun. One day the children decide to make a secret visit to the circus. Unfortunately, their father catches them watching the circus acts. This is how the story continues...

Dumb with amazement, Mr Gradgrind crossed to the spot where his family was thus disgraced, laid his hand upon each erring child, and said:
"Louisa! Thomas!"
Both rose, red and disconcerted. But, Louisa looked at her father with more boldness than Thomas did. Indeed, Thomas did not look at him, but gave himself up to be taken home like a machine.
"In the name of wonder, idleness and folly!" said Mr Gradgrind, leading each away by a hand; "what do you do here?"
"Wanted to see what it was like," returned Louisa shortly.
"What it was like?"
"Yes father."
"Thomas, though I have the fact before me, I find it difficult to believe that you, with your education and resources, should have brought your sister to a scene like this."
"I brought him, father," said Louisa, quickly. "I asked him to come."
"I am sorry to hear it. I am very sorry indeed to hear it. It makes Thomas no better, and it makes you worse, Louisa."
She looked at her father again, but no tear fell down her cheek.
"You Thomas and you, to whom the circle of the sciences is open, Thomas and you, who may be said to be replete with facts; Thomas and you, who have been trained to mathematical exactness; Thomas and you here!" cried Mr. Gradgrind. "In this degraded position! I am amazed."

The children return home in disgrace, and are met by their father's friend Mr. Bounderby, an equally strict Victorian gentleman.
"Well!" blustered Mr Bounderby, "what's the matter? What is young Thomas in the dumps about?"
He spoke of young Thomas, but he looked at Louisa.
"We were peeping at the circus," muttered Louisa haughtily, without lifting up her eyes, "and father caught us."
"And Mrs Gradgrind," said her husband in a lofty manner, "I should as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry."
"Dear me," whimpered Mrs Gradgrind. "How can you, Louisa and Thomas! I wonder at you. I declare you're enough to make one regret ever having had a family at all. I have a great mind to say I wish I hadn't. Then what would you have done, I should like to know."
Mr Gradgrind did not seem favourably impressed by these cogent remarks. He frowned impatiently.
"As if, with my head in its present throbbing state, you couldn't go and look at the shells and minerals and things provided for you, instead of circuses!" said Mrs Gradgrind.