

1.

March 1867, Bradfield, South Yorkshire

I was twelve years old when I joined the circus.

One cold afternoon, Mother called me and my older brother George in from the street, where we'd been running along the tops of the walls between houses and the alleys, chasing each other.

George could never catch me; I ran too fast and was sure of my footing – even though the walls were high – and George always looked down, worried about stumbling over loose bricks.

I thought Mother meant to scold George again for not being wrapped up warm enough, but when we burst through the door, there was a man sitting with his back to us in the high-backed chair reserved for guests. His hat was on the hook inside the door and Mother's good china was upon the table, which meant