

you will learn how to ride, tend the horses and earn your keep. And you will return to me a man."

Tenderly, she pressed the palm of her hand against my cheek. "I promise you, it will be a perfect adventure! My circus days were the happiest of my life. Now, if you've anything else you wish to take, best hurry along and pack it."

She kissed me on the forehead, sweeping out of the room with her skirts rustling.

From under the bed I grabbed my kaleidoscope (my most treasured special thing), tin soldiers, marbles and my issues of *Varney the Vampire*. All these I stuffed into the cloth sack. But remembering how George still liked the soldiers, I took them out and set them up in rows atop the drawers. Seeing them lined up reminded me I was leaving, and I became furious again. Just because circus days had been the happiest days of *her* life did not mean they would be mine! I belonged here with my family.

After a short time, I walked downstairs, my head and heart weighed down by what lay ahead. I did not want to leave, but my future had already been determined.

George was sat on the bottom step, twisting his cloth cap in his hands. I sat next to him, and I bumped his shoulder with mine. "I left the soldiers."

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