

got particles in his left eye, leaving him partially blind, and developed a terrible cough, Mother stopped us working there.

“Edward,” Mother said, sounding stern. “Edward and George, this is ... well, this is William Darby the circus owner: your father.” She didn’t look at us but lifted her chin proudly.

The silence was big enough to fall into. This man was our *father*?

Sometimes, in the dead of night, George and I played guessing games about who, and where, our father might be – George fancied him to be a sailor, and I an inventor, but we only spun such tales to amuse and comfort each other. We had no idea who he really was. If we ever asked, Mother became upset. She said we were too young to know the details and that life ‘was complicated’ when a white woman chose to marry a man of colour. She told us that although some people were tolerant, her parents had refused to embrace him into the family because they disapproved of his profession – his class – as much as, or more than, his skin colour. But now here he was – a circus man?

Even though a thousand questions fizzed on my tongue, I waited quietly, staring at my grimy nails with my hands folded, knowing Mother would not