

appreciate me asking questions.

“William and I met some years ago, at his circus. I ... I used to ride horses.”

“And very talented she was too!” the man added, beaming.

I tried to imagine Mother on a horse. She had never mentioned such a thing! How could she ride with such big skirts and petticoats? Mother and Mr Darby smiled at each other and her eyes misted over. I poked George in the ribs, and he nudged me back, chewing his lip as if he was about to laugh.

She cleared her throat. “But riding horses and being on the road with two children became difficult, so we moved to live with your grandmother. Now, Pablo’s troupe is touring around here, and he has ... stopped by.”

Was she blushing?

The man stood and bowed, with a flourish of his hand, twirling his fingertips. “Pablo is my stage name. Pablo Fanque.” He smirked, though his quirked lip was aimed more towards my mother than us. “Fancier than William, eh?”

What foreign-sounding name was this? I had heard of the famous circuses of the day, such as Banister and West’s, but had never heard of Pablo Fanque.

“Is Pablo a real name?” I muttered.

Mother’s cheeks reddened and she gave a look that