

defend Mother's honour set the neighbours' tongues wagging enough as it was! Poor Mother worked herself to exhaustion taking in laundries and mending to support us and now that he was here, were we supposed to be overjoyed? Did he expect a fanfare?

Perhaps he *was* my father in name, but I had no need of this man in my life. I'd done fine up until now. George and I knew our friends' fathers and didn't think much of them, working in the mill or steel works but then spending their free time stumbling around from inn to inn, ordering everyone around, or, worse still, whipping them.

Mother said quietly, "Edward, as you know, we've discussed finding you a new apprenticeship. Since none is forthcoming, it has been decided that you are to accompany your father and learn the ways of the circus. George will remain with me until he grows strong enough to join you."

I coughed, nearly choking on my sweet. She was sending me away with this stranger? Father or not, she had not mentioned this possibility before. Although I hadn't attended night school in many months, I studied when I could. I wanted to better myself and was certain I'd find an apprenticeship soon. But was I expected to abandon my books and hopes simply to attend to this man?

George gave me a small smile, but his eyes looked sad.

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