

## The Circus

### Olivia Levez

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*Levez's style is lyrical, infusing the story with atmosphere and emotion.*

Olivia Levez's *The Circus* tells the story of Willow, a young woman whose wealthy father gives her everything she could ask for, except for the one thing she truly needs. Hers is a journey of self-discovery that is at once beautiful, sad, and—for anyone who has ever felt alone—familiar.

Willow runs away, believing that she is unwanted. She dreams of her mother, who left when Willow was three to return to life in the circus. Willow wants to join the circus too, and imagines herself flying free in a golden dress, high above an awed crowd.

She winds up in the town of Hastings. There, she meets Suz, a street performer who teaches her how to walk a wire, how to dance with fire, and mostly, how to survive.

Levez's style is lyrical, infusing the story with atmosphere and emotion. Pain, despair, fear, and longing fill each page. Flashbacks to Willow's childhood clearly relate her feelings of rejection even as her father doted on her. She is a complex, relatable character.

Suz is just as compelling—talented, clever, and full of color. Though initially she steals from Willow, the two are drawn to one another and form a friendship based on shared desperation and dreams of a golden future.

The book does not pretend that running away is noble or romantic. Willow and Suz are constantly unsafe and uncomfortable. Both girls commit crimes on a regular basis, and Suz comments that principles are not a luxury that they can afford. They struggle with hygiene, finding food, and avoiding anyone who might endanger their precarious place in the world. Willow states, "I wanted to reinvent myself, to turn myself into someone different, uncrumple myself like a newly bright butterfly. But instead I am a grub that must burrow itself into the shadows."

*The Circus* is a lovely book. Though it is intended for young adults, it will appeal to a wide audience. The friendship between Willow and Suz is heartrending, and ultimately helps Willow to transform her life and learn to fly.

CATHERINE THURESON (July/August 2017)

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