Oceans, like highways

by

Emily Kang

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Authored By: Emily Kang

Program in Comparative Media Studies/Writing

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Certified By: Kate Tarker

Lecturer in Comparative Media Studies / Writing and Music & Theater Arts, Thesis Advisor

Accepted by: Seth Mnookin

Head, Comparative Media Studies / Writing

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Submitted to the Program in Comparative Media Studies / Writing on May 1st, 2025, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Writing.

Abstract:

This coming-of-age screenplay of loss, forced confrontation of one's past, and self-discovery tracks a young female protagonist who runs away from a life in her family's touring circus. Her story begins in a vivid, unorthodox environment and moves into a more mundane setting as she builds a life of her own, navigating the world outside the circus and away from her family. Through a series of trial and error, she pursues a career in journalism, seeking to honestly tell the stories of others. Eventually, she is presented with an opportunity that seems perfect in almost all dimension— except this commission requires her to confront her own story rather than deferring to those of others.

The thesis aims to explore a story of emergence from the enclosed bubble of one environment to the entrance into a reality where only some of the prior rules now apply. The protagonist explores the question of how to reconcile with one's past when forced to, despite her best attempts to avoid doing so. Through the many possible lenses to think about a past lifetime— nostalgia, gratitude, regret, among so many others— this story grapples with who we are in the midst of leaving everything we know behind, and how we process our past experiences while in a new stage of our lives.

Thesis Advisor: Kate Tarker
Title: Lecturer in Comparative Media Studies / Writing and Music & Theater Arts

OCEANS, LIKE HIGHWAYS

Written by

Emily Kang

INT. CIRCUS TENT IN SANTA BARBARA - DAY

19-year-old QUINN is preparing backstage as the circus performance begins. She's wearing a bedazzled silver leotard. She peels off jewel adhesives from a sheet and applies them to her face, when:

Her finger snags the paper and slices open in one clean, visceral motion.

QUINN
(whispering)
Shit.

She rummages around for gauze and tapes it to her finger.

CUT TO:

A performer hurls knives at a wheel spinning with another performer tied to it.

An elephant enters the circus ring.

Jugglers juggle pins as they cross paths on intersecting slacklines.

A mime poses, moving from side to side around the circus tent, face heavily adorned with makeup. The mime looks straight at us.

CUT TO:

Another face looking at us in a mirror: Quinn's. She's not *really* looking at us, though. Her gaze shifts and we realize she's putting on the final touches on her makeup, seated in a dressing room backstage. Backstage is dingy, chiaroscuro lighting: messy but organized chaos.

Quinn's every movement is well-defined and premeditated, every touch of her makeup brushes has a precise destination. She's done this a million times.

She checks her watch, waits for the seconds hand to reach the top, then lights a candle and pauses, eyes closed. Deep breath in and out.

Quinn continues with her makeup routine.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

The ringleader, MARIE (Quinn's MOM), 46, sweeps each hand outwards in a grandiose gesture, a resounding note echoing out as she flares each hand out. She takes up the entire stage. She has long wavy ringlets and a flowy cerulean dress on: the image of a modern sorceress. Her essence is otherworldly.

A drumroll begins from behind her, sweeping over the circus tent.

MARIE
And now, get ready for our grand finale: the ONE, the ONLY, JEWELED SISTERS!

Trumpets fanfare as Quinn steps out onto the platform. KRISTA, Quinn's 26-year-old SISTER, emerges onto the opposite platform with her chin held up high, a dramatic gaze into the distance.

The girls mount their trapezes and begin their trapeze routine. They fly through the air like fish through water.

Quinn swings back and forth, gaining more momentum on each swing. On the peak of one swing, she looks uncertain. She's trying to give herself confidence to pull off the move.

The routine builds to the final move: Quinn starts a backend split into a cutaway catch. As she's flying in the air, we see a moment of terror on her face. Krista, completely in the zone and oblivious of Quinn's expression, catches her. From afar, her routine looks seamless.

For a deafening moment, we hold our breaths in anticipation of resounding applause, but the tension is suddenly cut by sporadic cheers from the performers and hollow echoes around the tent. The stands were empty the whole time, save for a few seated members sprinkled around. It was just a dress rehearsal all along.

A man comes up to ringleader Marie with an approving look, and they mutter as they walk away.

MAN
(hushed voice)
Looks good... one more turn...

MARIE
... sightlines? ... penultimate act...

MAN
Absolutely... good shape...

Quinn and Krista scramble down from the platforms and jog to the side, where ELMER, their 45-year-old DAD, awaits, visibly worn down but spritely in spirit. Next to him are MICAH, their 24-year-old BROTHER, and JACKIE, their 6-year-old SISTER.

Elmer holds out his hands to high-five the trapeze artists.

ELMER
All right! That's what I'm talkin' about.

Jackie looks at him and holds out her hands for them too.

JACKIE
That's what I'm talkin' about!

Krista cheers as she high-fives both of them, a ball of energy. Quinn gives a nervous smile and high-fives them less enthusiastically.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

Circus performers haul equipment across the stage on trolleys. Other performers are putting up decorations. One duo, who casually have large, extravagant gold bows haphazardly taped all over them, try placing the same bows in different positions and formations on the front of the audience stands. They curiously compare their designs.

BOW-COVERED PERFORMER
There? Or there.

Another three performers form a line and toss rolled rugs from a cart to one another down the line, three rugs flying in the air at once. A fourth performer unrolls each rug and orients it between the stage and stands.

PERFORMER 1
Hup!

PERFORMER 2
Hup!

PERFORMER 3
Huuuup!

They then rotate around the stage in unison, staying in a line--- as if creating the next spoke on a wheel--- and repeat the process.

Micah carries Jackie on his shoulders. He walks around the edges of the stage, then stops to hand Jackie a wrench. She tightens light fixtures up above their heads. Micah climbs on a stepstool and gives them another tighten. They step back to admire their work.

JACKIE
(triumphant)
Yes!

MICAH
WOoooOOOOooOOOOOOOOOO HOOO HOOOOO!

EXT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

The sky outside is dark blue. Palm trees rustle in the wind as bright stars twinkle in the night sky. Peace and calm. We hear a sudden roar of cheers and applause coming from inside the circus tent as the performers take their bows and conclude the first show in the city.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Quinn and Krista remove their makeup and change out of their outfits. Quinn washes her hands and tends to her paper cut from earlier.

KRISTA
(without looking up from her makeup)
What happened?

QUINN
The backing of the jewel sheet.

KRISTA
Smooth.

QUINN
I *knew* this rebrand was bad news. What was so wrong with “The Flying Squirrels”?

KRISTA
Feels childish. You’re almost twenty now, not to mention *my* ripe old age. Our name should evoke something more... graceful. Delicate.

QUINN
Maybe it adds an element of surprise. They expect cute rodents and then we wow them with our elegance. It’s probably more impressive ‘cause we’re bigger. And human. What a good idea!

KRISTA
Forget it, the name’s stuck. It’s not like we’re looking for even more things to worry about. Like how’re we going to get Joseph up to speed?

QUINN
There’s another good idea. Bringing on someone new just two weeks before we need them.

KRISTA
Ugh, I know. When I’m not practicing I’m busy reworking *his* practice schedule so *he* can practice enough.

They dab away at the makeup on their faces in silence.

QUINN
(cautiously)
I felt like I was falling today too.

KRISTA
Don't be dramatic.

QUINN
No, I couldn't *feel myself*. It was the same as if I was standing on the floor.

KRISTA
How?

QUINN
Don't ask me! I'm just saying what it feels like.

KRISTA
Quinn, we don't need this. On the first day of our act? Not with everything else going on.

QUINN
Why won't you *believe* me?

KRISTA
I believe that you *think* you're gonna fall.

QUINN
And? What happens when I do fall? It's *the finale.*

KRISTA
Feelings aren't prophecies. You know that.

Quinn is silent.

KRISTA (CONT'D)
Figure it out before tomorrow's show, 'kay? I know you can.

QUINN
If I could just "figure it out" then I would've done that already!

KRISTA
Show must go on.

INT. CIRCUS BACKSTAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Circus crew members are moving furniture around to create a makeshift dining table setup while others cook over portable burners. Circus performers BRENT and CURLY carry cooking utensils and a steaming industrial-sized pot.

CURLY
Hey, hey, boiling pot! Behind you!

BRENT
Curly comin' through! Eyes out!

The circus-members-turned-cook-crew stir furiously away at large pots of thick stew. Steam billows up.

CURLY
(in a booming voice)
DI-NNER!

Everyone immediately swarms around the dining table like ants to a sticky crumb.

They sit down and pass around plates, cutlery, and food dishes, family-style. There is an empty seat next to Quinn that is smaller than the others.

MARIE
Thank you, cook crew!

EVERYONE
(in unison)
Thank you, crook coo!

They dig in.

Jackie materializes at the entrance and lunges into a cartwheel, then a series of back handsprings. She tumbles around them and opens her mouth to holler.

JACKIE
AaaaaAAAAaaaaaaaaAAAAaaaaaaaaa-

Her voice shakes with each movement. They all laugh.

BRENT
What an entrance for our first day in town!

JACKIE
-aaaaaAAAAaaaaaaaaah

ELMER
(grandly)
Sit down, my dear. Let’s eat.

Jackie makes her way to the table and begins to scoop the stew into her mouth, exaggerating every movement.

MICAH
(reaching out his arms)
What a finale. Krista, you looked incredible.

Krista beams and pretends to curtsy.

MICAH (CONT'D)
And Quinn, oh, Quinn, I mean. C'mon. What were you ever nervous about? That was stunning. Absolutely stun-ning.

The circus members cheer. Krista catches Quinn's eye, like, see? I told you.

ELMER
A toast?

Everyone grabs a glass and raises it.

MARIE
To the Jeweled Sisters. May their tenure be long and prosperous. And to all of us. May every show in our new city be one to remember.

Glasses clink. They voraciously return their attention to the food.

QUINN
Really though, that finale was terrifying.

CIRCUS MEMBER
Not this again, we all saw it.

QUINN
No, really, when I was up there, the last cutaway catch--- I thought I wasn't going to make it. While I was already midair.

KRISTA
But you did.

QUINN
I did this time, but... what if I don't?

MARIE
(saccharine)
Quinn, honey. It looked great on a technical level. Didn't it?

Enthusiastic murmurs of agreement.

MARIE (CONT'D)
See now. It's just in your head. Your body's doing everything it needs to.

QUINN
But--

Curly reaches over and ruffles her hair.

CURLY
You know your mother has the eye of a hawk. 'Specially when it comes to that trapeze.

Quinn opens her mouth to speak.

ELMER
Ain’t that right. Speaking of a hawk’s eye... birdwatching on Sunday? There’s a cliff nearby apparently. It’s not every day that we’re on the coast of California.

BRENT
Aye, aye!

ELMER
After *practice*, of course. Right? Right?

He looks around at them teasingly, raising his eyebrows. Everybody groans.

INT. QUINN’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Quinn returns to her room dejected. The room has two beds, a smaller one that belongs to Jackie and the other being Quinn’s.

Her side has magazines, newspapers, and books strewn about. She sits at her desk and opens her a well-worn newspaper, her eyes falling on:

FLORENCE: THE JEWEL OF TUSCANY

She opens a notebook and sketches rolling hills, each phrase and description in the article becoming translated into a feature on her sketch.

She does the same for a profile piece, mindlessly doodling the person and interesting characteristics about them mentioned in the piece.

Quinn moves to sit on top of her bed, swinging underneath to carefully unearth a pristine-looking magazine. It's a sports magazine filled with shots that belong on the cover of Wheaties boxes.

She flips through it slowly, face alive and active. Then, she spots:

GYMNAST MARIA SCHMID SUFFERS GRUESOME LEG INJURY, BREAKS BOTH LEGS

QUINN

Ugh.

Quinn winces and then looks closer at the pictures. In one, the gymnast is in the middle of a vault; another shows an awkward landing; and another has Maria splayed on the floor in agony.

Quinn turns away quickly but looks back again. It's horrific but she can't help it--- like spotting a car crash on the highway. She returns to her sketchbook and starts doodling her trapeze trick, the backend split into cutaway catch, animation-style with sequential "frames."

She's drawing herself and Krista and gets the spacing of her body off- her sketched self won't make it to be caught by Krista. She erases, redraws, and still gets the spacing off. She tries a few more times, then furiously erases the drawing until bits of paper come off with the pencil marks.

Quinn draws herself underneath the trapeze in a similar position as the gymnast. She lays on her side and curls up, deep in thought. Slowly, she dozes off.

She wakes up abruptly, shivering from night terrors. An asleep Jackie is curled up opposite her on her bed. Quinn taps her gently.

JACKIE
Nnnrghhhh.

Quinn sleepily carries Jackie back to her own bed. Quinn returns to her bed and falls asleep again.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Jackie is at the dining room table with 24-year-old CHARLOTTE, whose adoring gaze towards Jackie lights up the room. They're focused on a worksheet. Yawning, Quinn walks in.

QUINN
Mornin'.

CHARLOTTE
Morning!

Jackie waves furiously. Charlotte turns back to the worksheet as Quinn pulls out a stool and sits down with them.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
What about this one?

JACKIE
Three, four? What does this mean?

Jackie points to a problem on the worksheet.

CHARLOTTE
Right, if you have three apples and you want to have eight apples, how many more do you need to get?

JACKIE
Ohhh.

Jackie counts on her fingers, then jots an answer on the worksheet.

CHARLOTTE
Yes! Perfect. How can you do this one?

JACKIE
Four apples, but I want six.

CHARLOTTE
Good job!

JACKIE
I don’t want more apples.

CHARLOTTE
Then it can be pears. Or strawberries. Or anything.

JACKIE
Bear friends.

She runs off with purpose.

CHARLOTTE
Jackie--

Quinn gives a knowing smile to Charlotte.

QUINN
You’re right. California is different.

CHARLOTTE
Right? And this isn’t even what it’s like in SoCal. *I* think this barely compares.

QUINN
Which city again?

CHARLOTTE
San Diego.

QUINN
Where?

Charlotte shows her on her phone's map.

CHARLOTTE
This is us. San Diego's here. And this is the beach that we always go to- it's like a five-minute walk.

QUINN
There's beaches *here*, we saw them on the drive.

CHARLOTTE
San Diego beaches are a lot more active. Even in the winter.

QUINN
Isn't it cold?

CHARLOTTE
'Course. But the ocean's in our bones.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
You'd like it a lot.

QUINN
How do you know?

CHARLOTTE
I feel like our ocean just calls to some people. I can't explain it.

QUINN
Must have my ringer off.

CHARLOTTE
(smiling and shaking her head)
You'll know it when you see it.

QUINN
Can I? Visit sometime?

CHARLOTTE
Yes! Of course! We'd love to have you--

Jackie returns, bear stuffed animal in tow.

JACKIE
Ta-da!

CHARLOTTE
Jackie! C'mon. You can't just run off during our lesson.

JACKIE
Bear-Bear can join us.

CHARLOTTE
Since you have her help now, you should be able to power through these last few.

JACKIE
Okay! Bear-Bear, look...

She mutters to Bear-Bear and gets to work.

INT. CIRCUS PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

Quinn makes her way to the slit that serves as an opening to the circus practice area. She walks in. Other performers are warming up and practicing various tricks.

ELMER
Hey, bud.

QUINN
Hi.

ELMER
Krista’s working with Joseph. So it’s us for today.

QUINN
Kay.

ELMER
You want to run your routine? The part that’s getting caught?

QUINN
I've practiced it so many times. It's not changing anything.

ELMER
C'mon, just one more time.

QUINN
It won’t---

ELMER
What’s this sudden dread coming from?

He claps his hands twice impatiently.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Walk me through what's happening.

Elmer watches from below as Quinn reluctantly gets onto the trapeze. He gets onto the opposite trapeze.

QUINN
(speaking louder so Elmer can hear)
So I start here. Do the swing.

ELMER
When does it start feeling wrong?

QUINN
Here? Or no, it's like midair. I can't... feel. my body. Where the air is around me.

ELMER
In the air?

QUINN
Yeah, I... freeze up. Fight or flight kind of. Let me try to remember.

She tries the cutaway catch. We see a flash of terror on her face as she's in the air. Elmer catches her.

ELMER
That was perfect!

QUINN
No, it's not. The same thing happened.

ELMER
Try again. Tell me when it comes up.

QUINN
I don’t want to feel that over and over again.

ELMER
I can’t help you if I don’t know what’s going on.

Quinn begrudgingly gets back on to the other trapeze. She tries the cutaway catch. Moment of terror.

QUINN
Now! This!

ELMER
Whoa. I got you.

He catches her from the other trapeze.

ELMER (CONT’D)
Are you scared while flying?

QUINN
Can’t be. This is my whole life.

Elmer waits expectantly.

QUINN (CONT’D)

I just, my mind goes blank or something. Or worse, completely dark.

ELMER
Forget about your brain, can you feel yourself?

QUINN
No. That's the problem. I'm not in control. I could overshoot or undershoot and I don't know what's going on when I'm in the air and I've never had this problem before this run, you know that--

ELMER
Hey, hey. Okay.

He guides her to take a deep breath with him.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Just focus on your breath. When you're up there, I want you to only do that. Nothing else. Don't worry about landing it, here we have the net, it's okay.

Quinn nods and closes her eyes.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Tighten your shoulders, and then relax them.

She does.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Couple more times. Just want you to listen to your breath. Nothing else you need to worry about.

Quinn nods.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Now visualize the cutaway catch. Keep breathing. The moment of release, breathing through the whole thing, and the successful landing.

Inside Quinn's mind. We see the fuzzy visualization of how her cutaway catch looks in her mind's eye. She "plays the vision forward" like a video reel, each movement a streaky slo-mo transition into the next, and she overshoots the catch.

Cut back to Quinn and Elmer standing on the mat.

QUINN
Oh, I didn't land that one.

ELMER
It's a visualization. Make yourself land it.

Back inside Quinn's mind. This time, she's in the air in slow motion, then suddenly, as if out of her control even in her mental reconstruction of the moment, she undershoots the catch, reaching out too far from Krista to be caught.

Quinn squeezes her eyes and shakes her head as if to erase the image in her mind and start over. In her mind's eye, her body suddenly teleports to the starting position, then slowly passes through each phase of the trick again.

However, this time, her brain repeatedly makes an impulsive move at different points in the sequence in visualizing her next pose in the sequence, and she has to reset her position to the previous one. She frantically tries to stop these impulsive thoughts from arising, but they just spiral and insert themselves into the visualization more frequently.

Quinn shuts down.

From the outside perspective, she is nothing more than deep in thought.

After a moment, she slowly comes out of her focused state and looks at Elmer.

ELMER (CONT'D)
Another go now? And remember, I want you to just focus on one thing. That breath. The in and out.

Quinn mounts the trapeze and Elmer mirrors her on the other trapeze, ready to catch her. She repeats the trick, stopping to center herself and really breathe. Then, midair, she panics, grasping out. She falls into the net and stays there, planted face down.

QUINN
(muffled)
Didn't help.

ELMER
You looked like you were there that time though! Before flying!

QUINN
It didn't work.

ELMER
C'mon, it's just once. Practice that way and it'll go away.

QUINN
I've already tried practicing it.

ELMER
Then it’s not enough. Practice some more.

QUINN
I spend all day practicing---

ELMER
And if you keep at it it’ll sort itself out.

Quinn goes to a corner to practice on her own. She does some simple swings, gaining momentum to do a backflip dismount, when she sees a flash of herself falling, like a premonition.

She freezes and releases the trapeze, dropping herself limply into the net. She sees a flash again, a continuation of the previous one, this time with herself landing in the net after her fall.

INT. CIRCUS PRACTICE ROOM - NIGHT

It’s dark out, and the sound of crickets chirping forms a blanket of background noise. Quinn is the only one left in the training room, and she’s still practicing trapeze. Her tricks are still going poorly.

She lies motionless on the floor, face down, resigned to a fate that seems inevitable. It’s occurred too many times already.

INT. QUINN’S PARENTS’ ROOM - DAY

Quinn swishes the sheet that serves as the door of her parents’ room.

QUINN
‘llo.

MARIE
Come in.

She walks in, holding her pristine sports magazine at her side. Marie and Elmer are laying in bed, propped up with pillows. Marie's looking over forms with numbers, accounting statements and taxes, things of that sort. Elmer is reading a book. They both look over at her.

Quinn looks very small.

QUINN
I want to ask you something.

MARIE
Yes?

QUINN
You know I've been struggling with my routine.

They look at her expectantly.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I want to take a break. From performing.

Marie and Elmer immediately look disapproving.

QUINN (CONT'D)
(quickly)
Just for the next few shows. Not permanently. I just want to see if it helps, and--

MARIE
What are you talking about?

ELMER
My dear, you just need more practice. It’s going well.

QUINN
No, it’s not. I’m seeing things. When I fly. And now I see them when I’m on the trapeze, when I’m not even doing anything particularly advanced.

MARIE
Like...?

QUINN
Like... I can see myself performing and going through the moves, and it looks right, and then... all of a sudden--- it doesn’t. Falling. Or freezing up during my routine.

MARIE
You have the grand finale, you can’t back out. You know that’s not an option. And not at this stage of our run, when we’re already short a few?!

QUINN
Something bad’s going to happen to me, and it’s only a matter of time.

ELMER
It won’t. We know it won’t.

QUINN
That’s not how things work!

She pulls out the magazine and flips to the gymnast Maria Schmid article.

QUINN (CONT'D)
See? These things are very real and very possible. *She* couldn't feel where she was in the air. Look how it ended up for her.

Elmer and Marie peer at the article and skim it.

ELMER
We don't know that that's what happened.

QUINN
It's what it says!

ELMER
I find that hard to believe.

MARIE
Maybe she tried her routine without enough practice.

ELMER
And you *have* enough practice. And you're going to keep practicing.

QUINN
She's an *Olympian*! We all know Olympians famously don't practice much.

MARIE
Well, maybe she was in poor physical condition. That's far from your situation. You're doing great, you're in peak form,

ELMER
You've been perfect onstage, my dear.

MARIE
Quinn, honey, don't be fanciful. That's a vision. This is real life. It's just in your head, so keep it there.

QUINN
What? Of course I *want* to keep it there. Even better, I would *love* to not have visions at all! Don't you think that's concerning?

ELMER
We believe in you, dear.

QUINN
You *don't* think that's concerning?!

ELMER
You're under a lot of stress. It makes sense.

QUINN
Can't I change my routine at all? Or do some other act? Not trapeze?

MARIE
Quinn.

QUINN
Please! You've seen me struggling with this. You know it's real and trapeze is becoming terrifying for me.

MARIE
Sometimes you have to buckle down and this is one of those times, honey. You're going to learn a lot from it. I promise.

QUINN
No! You think I'm going to work through it and everything will be resolved and I'll just LOVE trapeze again? This is RUINING MY LIFE. I'd rather leave this place. Leave you guys. Never see the circus again.

Elmer sucks in a sharp breath. The air changes. There's a sudden chill in the room.

MARIE
You don't mean that.

QUINN
I do. I'd rather do anything else than stick this out and re-traumatize myself again and again. If it means leaving the troupe and y'all behind, so be it.

ELMER
DON'T be dramatic.

MARIE
You think the outside world is much better? We give you responsibilities here, and ownership over your work,

QUINN
Clearly not much ownership.

MARIE
And you have a duty to this show. You get to do what you love and call it work. Not many others have that luxury out there.

QUINN
Is it worth it when you're just going to silence me when I finally have an opinion? A *real need*?

ELMER
Quinn, we can't change the show now. Everything's set. And think of the precedent it would set. If one person backs out for the next shows, that's already a huge impact. If others pull the same trick, then there won't be a show anymore.

QUINN
I'm your *daughter.*

MARIE
We can't be giving you better treatment because you're family. The others would riot.

QUINN
I'm your DAUGHTER! I'm not just some employee. You can't just pretend we're actually equal. So you care about your kids. Everyone would understand when it comes to your own kids.

MARIE
Then as your parents we’re saying
you need to stick it out.

Hot tears sting Quinn’s eyes and her throat tightens. She lets out an overwhelmed huff of hot air and she slams the door-sheet as best as she can. It flutters quietly in a wholly unsatisfying way.

INT. CIRCUS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Quinn, Micah, and Curly are cleaning up the last remnants from dinner. They form a line near the sink, each at a station marked by a bin. Curly starts by wiping off food scraps from each dish, passes dishes to Quinn, who submerges them in a bin of soapy water and scrubs away. Micah dips the dishes in his bin filled with water and dries them with a washcloth. Quinn’s face is sullen and serious.

Amid this, Curly and Micah are dancing funkily and humming along to the slowest, saddest Simon & Garfunkel songs. Their dancing clashes against the music, and that’s how they like it. “April Come She Will” starts playing.

CURLY
(singing off-key)
When streams are ripe and swelled
with rain---

With a flourish, he gestures dramatically towards Quinn.

CURLY (CONT’D)
May, she will stay

Micah joins in, gesturing to Quinn.

MICAH
Resting in my arms again,

Curly and Micah look expectantly at her. Despite her best efforts, Quinn can't help but crack a small smile, which she follows up with a funky dance move. They cheer. They all continue singing off-key and dancing for a while, Quinn joining in this time--- reluctantly at first, then more earnestly.

Curly scrapes food off of the last dish and puts it in Quinn's bin. He washes his hands and grabs a few dishes from Micah's clean pile to put away.

MICAH (CONT'D)
Don't worry about it, we got it.

CURLY
You sure?

MICAH
Get your beauty sleep for *[singing]*
press tomorrow!

CURLY
(playfully)
Oh, if you insist...

Curly leaves. Quinn and Micah continue scrubbing, rinsing, and drying the last few dishes.

QUINN
Press tomorrow.

MICAH
Excited, aren't ya.

QUINN
It's an exciting job. They get to
see the world.

MICAH
They get to see *us*.

They finish the dishes and start putting them away.

QUINN
You ever think about leaving?

Micah puts down his dish and looks at her.

MICAH
What’s goin’ on, Q.

QUINN
I can't deal with this anymore. I'm terrified to do the one thing I know how to do and no one is BELIEVING me.

MICAH
I believe you.

QUINN
But Mom and Dad won't let me pull out from the show. They’re ignoring everything I’m telling them about. Stupid.

MICAH
Don’t. They care more about us than you think they do ... you ARE the finale. I'm sorry.

QUINN
No, it’s nuts. Even if it’s the finale, doesn’t my *life* matter?

MICAH
'Course it does. And that's not at odds with you performing. We all believe in you.

A circus performer enters the room and smiles at them, then rummages around for a snack. Quinn and Micah awkwardly put away the dishes in silence. Quinn fumes. The circus performer finds his snack and shuffles off.

MICAH (CONT'D)
(sharp whisper)
Say you leave. Where would you even go off to? This is all we know. How would you know how anything works? You know about... taxes and shit?

QUINN
I read about other people, their lives...

MICAH
You can't actually believe that's enough. To get you through.

QUINN
Well, I can't keep plowing past this. And it's getting worse. I was practicing with dad yesterday and I couldn't even do a fucking backflip dismount.

MICAH
God.

QUINN
I know.

A beat.

MICAH
You really couldn't?

QUINN
Yup.

MICAH
How? You should have it down, no question. Muscle memory.

QUINN
I don't *know* how these things work and it's freaking me OUT!

MICAH
Can't you just hold it together for this leg?

Quinn lets out a heavy sigh.

MICAH (CONT'D)
Where's the Quinn who begged me to teach her how to fly? Before you could barely even reach the trapeze?

QUINN
This has nothing to do with that.

MICAH
The one we had to wrestle off the bar so you didn't forget to eat?

He knocks on her head.

MICAH (CONT'D)
(smiling)
That girl still there?

Quinn fights a smile.

QUINN
Stop it. You know people can change. Maybe I can't do trapeze anymore.

MICAH
I'd be very surprised. All I'm saying.

He leaves. Quinn goes over to the crates that are creating a sort of coffee table. She takes the top crate off of the stack and rotates it to rummage through its contents of binders, folders, stray papers. She finds what she's looking for: a binder that reads "QUINN 5 y/o, MICAH 10 y/o, KRISTA 12 y/o.

She flips through the pages of pictures in sheet protectors. In every image, she's on the trapeze in some form: clinging to it sideways, upside down, hanging from one arm. She absentmindedly runs her thumb over herself in the photos as if stroking her younger self's hair.

INT. CIRCUS - DAY

Press day at the circus, one day before the circus opens. A few journalists swarm and snap away. Cameras flash.

The circus performers prepare the stage for their show, putting on the last finishing touches. A hustle and bustle of circus crew holding equipment, hurrying around under the tent. Journalists weave in and out between them to capture it all.

JOURNALIST
One more from the side. And we need more coverage from backstage.

Quinn lights up like a child as she watches them. She looks carefully at the reporters.

Quinn walks up to FRAN, a journalist. She has short hair in bouncy curls and is rocking a turquoise hat with a matching dress, strikingly reminiscent of Jackie O.

QUINN
Hi.

FRAN
Hi babe! You're one of the kids, aren't ya?

QUINN
Yeah.

FRAN
Marie and Elmer.

QUINN
Yeah.

Fran returns to jotting in her notebook furiously.

FRAN
Excited?

QUINN
(smiling politely)
... Yeah.

Fran continues fervently writing in her notebook.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Can I ask about [*nodding to Fran's equipment*] this?

FRAN
Long as you don't mind me workin' at the same time? Time's a'tickin.

QUINN
Yes ma'am.

FRAN
You a photographer yourself?

QUINN
No, no. But I love looking.

A beat.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I tried to figure out how you decide when to take a picture. Besides the obvious moments in the show--- like, what about now? We're just setting up, won't it be boring?

FRAN
Sometimes things just line up, darlin'.

The circus performers setting up onstage form a perfect frame, just for a moment. Fran holds up her camera and snaps a picture.

QUINN
Like that! How'd you know that would---

FRAN
There’re stories everywhere if you just try to find them.

QUINN
But –

FRAN
It’s about the relationships, the architecture around them, you don’t have to pose people because they’ll find their way into interesting shots. There’s theory to it but sometimes you can just feel it in your gut.

QUINN
And what about the writing?

FRAN
Same thing.

QUINN
But one is words, one is what you see with your eyes---

FRAN
If you can paint a story about a person, really get honest and persistent, you’ve got yourself a piece. But you have to have tact. Same with photography. Can’t just go around sticking a lens in everyone’s face.

Quinn mulls over Fran’s words.

QUINN
How did you get started?

FRAN
Oh, that's a whole story itself. Can't *possibly* tell it all to you right now.

QUINN
But like, did you train for it? Is there some school, or--

FRAN
A lot of people go to school for this, but I had a strange path, my dear. We all find our own ways to this profession.

QUINN
What was your strange path?

FRAN
I don't quite have the time to unravel all that right now.

QUINN
Oh. Sorry.

A beat.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Do you think someone like me could try it?

FRAN
Ours is a busy life, I don't know how easy it'll be when you're already fully devoted to the circus,

QUINN
Oh, I don't want to stay here.

Fran's interest is immediately piqued. Perhaps another story is brewing.

FRAN
Oh?

QUINN
(hushed)
I want to leave. Soon.

Fran has a curious look on her face.

FRAN
Really.

QUINN
I can't be here for another day.

FRAN
Huh. Imagine that.

She laughs to herself.

FRAN (CONT'D)
You remind me of myself. A bit. Without all the circus bits, of course.

QUINN
Thank you?

FRAN
If you're serious about it--

QUINN
I am. Please. Any way you can help me. I'd do nearly anything.

FRAN
(thinking for a moment)
Can you get to San Diego? I have more contacts there who might be able to help.

Quinn nods, a little too eagerly, before she can realize what she's signed up for.

QUINN
How do I find you?

FRAN
My phone number.

QUINN
Let me get my phone.

Quinn runs off.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Quinn is at the shared computer in the living room.

She goes on a incognito window and searches online confusedly for how to get from Santa Barbara to San Diego, how to pay fare, how the train system works, whether you need a credit card to pay for the train. She furrows her brow in deep concentration and jots down notes on a mini notebook next to her in detail, knowing that she won't have access to the Internet when she leaves.

Quinn quickly switches windows when someone approaches close enough to catch a glance of her search.

INT. QUINN'S ROOM - DAWN

Quinn and Jackie appear to be sleeping in their respective beds. Jackie is snoring. Quinn opens her eyes and slowly gets up, trying not to stir Jackie.

She grabs her backpack and unceremoniously stuffs it with clothes, toiletries.

JACKIE
(mumbling in her sleep)
Need more green.

She glances over at Jackie. When Jackie doesn't move, Quinn returns to packing.

Jackie's eyes sleepily flutter open and take in Quinn with her backpack. She frowns, only half-awake.

JACKIE (CONT'D)
Wha? Where-

QUINN
Shhhhhh. Shhhhh. Just going for a walk.

Quinn goes to her and sits on her bed. She strokes Jackie's hair slowly and hushes her, almost inaudibly, just enough to hear the air slowly being pushed through her teeth.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Jackie's breathing slows. Quinn slowly gets up from the bed and gathers her belongings together.

Quinn does a final sweep to check if she's leaving any belongings behind. Jackie's breath catches. Quinn's eyes dart towards her, but Jackie remains asleep.

Quinn tiptoes out and slowly closes the sheet that serves as their door.

EXT. SANTA BARBARA TRAIN STATION - DAWN

Quinn wanders around reading the signs, poking into different corners of the train station. In one corner, two people are asleep on the floor, looking disheveled. In the seating area, another traveler sits upright and types away on his computer. She stares for too long.

She finds the ticketing desk and buys a ticket to San Diego. Outside, the sun is starting to rise as the train approaches the station. She boards.

INT. TRAIN - DAWN

On the train, she passes in and out of consciousness, switching between sleeping and dazedly observing the other passengers. A businessman on a call with his laptop open. A well-dressed woman reading. A couple trying to calm down their rambunctious kids to a noise level more fitting for 6AM.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Quinn’s asleep in her seat, curled up at an odd angle. The train conductor’s voice rings out and she stirs.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR (V.O.)
Next stop, San Diego, San Diego in just a few minutes. Doors open on the right, that’s San Diego coming up.

Quinn groggily gathers her belongings and tries to gather her sense of self, the day, her surroundings. It takes her a moment to remember where she is.

EXT. SOLANA BEACH - DAY

Quinn gets off the train and explores the area around the train station in Solana Beach. She walks along Cedros Ave and examines the antique shops, peers into the windows of art studios, and curiously lingers on the people drinking coffee on cafe patios.

She goes down to the shore and watches some teenagers play beach volleyball. Laughing, well-tanned, long hair on both the guys and girls --- these volleyball players belong on a magazine cover. In fact, Quinn thinks she's seen them in one. She's mesmerized.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #1
(yelling)
Hey! You wanna join?

Quinn freezes. She is clearly not dressed for playing volleyball. She looks around.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #1 (CONT'D)
Yeah, you!

QUINN
(yelling back)
I don't know how!

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #1
Whaaaat?

Quinn comes closer.

QUINN
I said, I don't - know - how - to - play.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #2
Oh, don't worry, we'll teach you!

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #3
C'mon c'mon, we're just about to start a new game.

And teach her they do. Quinn plays a few games with the volleyball players and catches herself enjoying it.

They take a water break, and Quinn checks her flip phone. She has repeated missed calls from her parents, then Micah, then Krista. Notifications for streams of text messages flood her screen. She doesn't read them and quickly puts her phone away.

Overcome with a flood of guilt, Quinn grabs her backpack and walks away from the group, trying to leave without them noticing.

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #3 (CONT'D)
Hey, you're not leaving! Already?

VOLLEYBALL PLAYER #2
What?

QUINN
(awkwardly)
I... have to go.

Quinn runs along the beach and up the wooden stairs to get to the main road.

QUINN (CONT'D)
(to herself)
What am I doing here.

She pulls out her phone and calls Charlotte. Charlotte picks up immediately.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Quinn, oh, thank GOD, where ARE YOU? We're all worried sick,

QUINN
Shhhh! I don't want my family to know.

CHARLOTTE
Huh?

QUINN
I'm in San Diego.

CHARLOTTE
What - What do you think you're doing?

QUINN
You said I'd like it here! And that I could stay with you.

CHARLOTTE
I meant when we're off, not when you're supposed to perform in a few hours!

QUINN
I didn't know where else to go.

CHARLOTTE
God, what am I supposed to tell your family? How are you gonna get back in time?

QUINN
I'm not. Going back.

CHARLOTTE
WHAT?

QUINN
Tell my family anything, that I'm safe--I think--, that I'm okay, just don't tell them where I am, I don't know, say I called but didn't tell you.

Charlotte is silent.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Please, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE
You're putting me in a TERRIBLE position, you know. This looks so bad. If your family finds out, they'll think I encouraged you to leave the circus, and my job...

QUINN
If that happens I'll come clean, I promise. But it won't happen. Because they won't know where I am. Right?

CHARLOTTE
God.

QUINN
I don’t have a place to stay, Char.

CHARLOTTE
You’re really pushing your luck with me.

QUINN
Please. Charlotte. If it’s okay. I can’t stay in the circus another day. I can’t go back. I’ll sleep on the sand here if I need to.

CHARLOTTE
You owe me big time. For this. And for what I’m about to hear from your parents.

QUINN
I know. I promise I’ll pay it back to you.

Quinn listens to Charlotte and writes down an address on her palm.

INT. TOURIST SHOP - DAY

Bright, flashy store with all the latest trends of toys and little souvenirs.

QUINN
Do you maybe have a map?

SHOP OWNER
Maps? Who uses a map anymore?

QUINN
Do you?

SHOP OWNER
This some kind of prank? You part of that group?

QUINN
No! I’m not!

SHOP OWNER
‘Cause if you are then I don’t have anything for you.

QUINN
Okay, I guess not then. ... Are you hiring by any chance?

SHOP OWNER
You didn’t hear me?

QUINN
Please, just give me a chance.

SHOP OWNER
You got a resume or something?

QUINN
What’s that?

SHOP OWNER
Get out. Not going to be pranked again.

INT. SOUVENIR SHOP - DAY

Dusty shop with small knickknacks on every wall.

OLD SHOP OWNER
Welcome in.

QUINN
Hi, I was wondering if you have any maps? Of San Diego...?

OLD SHOP OWNER
Oh, gosh, of San Diego... Must have some around here somewhere. What area?

QUINN
Anywhere around here, I guess.

He starts rummaging in boxes. Quinn walks around.

OLD SHOP OWNER
Don't think I've seen a map around here in ages.

QUINN
It's okay if you can't find one. [*hurriedly*] I know they're not a big thing anymore.

He keeps looking.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I was also wondering if you... have jobs open here...

OLD SHOP OWNER
Oh, we don't have anything open for now, but maybe in a few weeks? Sometimes we need someone to come in every so often.

QUINN
How do I find out about that?

The shop owner tears off a few pages from a legal pad and spins it towards Quinn with a pen.

OLD SHOP OWNER
Write down your email right there.

QUINN
I don’t. I have a phone number, do I need an email?

OLD SHOP OWNER
You’ve never needed an email before?

Quinn writes on her palm: MAKE EMAIL.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE STORE - DAY

Quinn hesitantly presses the “Internet” button on her flip phone. She walks around, trying to get service, but the screen is stuck loading.

INT. GYMNASTICS GYM - DAY

Quinn spots a gymnastics gym and walks in. She earnestly walks up to the MANAGER, who looks much too young to be a manager and is aimlessly scrolling on her phone. Quinn stands in front of her for several long seconds before the manager shows any sign that she’s noticed her.

MANAGER
(monotone, slowly looking up)
Yes?

QUINN
I was wondering if you’re hiring.

MANAGER
(curtly)
Depends.

Quinn tries again.

QUINN
I’m from the circus.

MANAGER
Cool.

QUINN
The traveling circus--- you might’ve heard of it? We’re making our way down---

MANAGER
What do you want.

QUINN
I want a job.

MANAGER
Which position.

QUINN
I don’t know--- whatever works? I’ve been on a trapeze since I was five, tumbling since I was four.

The manager is wholly uninterested.

MANAGER
Congrats.

Quinn spots the paper job applications next to the manager. She grabs a pen and scribbles down her information onto the form, filling it out and handing it in before the manager can say anything.

QUINN
Thank you!

The manager doesn't look up from her phone.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Quinn sits at a table at a cafe. She checks her watch restlessly. Fran walks in and spots Quinn.

FRAN
Oh, hello!

She rushes in to give Quinn a hug.

QUINN
It's good to meet you again.

FRAN
How've you been?

QUINN
Good, good. I got here this morning.

Fran looks into Quinn's eyes, searching silently. Quinn is hesitant, pausing before she next speaks.

QUINN (CONT'D)
It's been a lot.

FRAN
I figured.

QUINN
And it’s only been a day...

FRAN
(reassuringly)
It’s only *been* a day. I was so shocked when you said you were going to leave. And you actually did!

QUINN
It’s a big step for sure.

FRAN
(understanding)
Give it more than a day.

QUINN
(reassuring herself more than anything)
I’m glad I left. I needed to. I couldn’t stand any more time at home, I had to get out.

They’re quiet. Fran knows Quinn is just reeling from the whole experience and doesn’t actually know yet. And that the shock of the decision, the weight of the decision, hasn’t hit Quinn yet.

FRAN
I invited someone for you to meet. He might be a good place to start. His name’s Joel. We used to work together at the Herald. Now he does some... more experimental stuff. Unstructured pieces. He’s kinda on his own, he’d be happy to have an extra hand, I should think.

QUINN
He’s coming *now*?

FRAN
I told him that we were meeting at 2:30. I hope it’s okay with you. Well, I hope he shows up. I’m not sure that he will.

QUINN
You don’t even know me. Why are you... I’m very thankful, of course, but...

FRAN
Just a feeling. I remember feeling lost trying to find my way to journalism. My path wasn’t straightforward at all and I had no one to ask at the time. I got a lot of help when I was coming on up that I couldn’t have done it without. So it’s up to me to keep that alive. It’s how we keep the next crop healthy.

Fran watches over as customers walk in and out of the cafe. JOEL, a man in his 40s with shifty eyes, walks in. He’s rather well-dressed for the loose, casual, unfolded way he holds himself. Like a crumpled up tissue. Fran catches sight of him, gets up, and waves. She runs over and gives him a hug.

JOEL
Long time no see, bud.

FRAN
Only because you never let yourself be seen!

JOEL
Can’t play much these days when time is money.

FRAN
Well, hopefully it’ll help to have another set of hands on deck.
(gesturing to Quinn)
This is Quinn. She wants to do what we do.

QUINN
(quickly)
I’ll do anything. Nothing’s too small for me to do. And I’m a hard worker.

FRAN
Joel runs a news channel on YouTube. Short-form documentaries, that kind of thing.

JOEL
Very different from what *we* used to do together.

QUINN
Why’d you leave?

Joel’s face sours.

JOEL
Little thing called the Great Recession. You probably don't know anything about it.

QUINN
I know--

JOEL
They laid me off. And the market was shit, so no one was hiring. It's okay. Don't care for breaking my back all for some execs with their puffed-up chests anyways. Worked out for the best.

QUINN
I'm sorry, I didn't mean--

JOEL
That's right. I bet you didn't know that all newsrooms are leeches. They don't give a damn about you, only what you can do for them.

FRAN
Joel--

Fran clearly didn't want the conversation to go this way.

JOEL
(more abrasively, to Fran)
What does *she* do?

QUINN
I don't know much--

JOEL
Then why are we here.

FRAN
Joel!

QUINN
-- but I'm willing to learn it all.
Learn anything.

JOEL
Anything?

Quinn nods. Joel looks up. Fran smiles at him, measured and slightly warning.

QUINN
I love reading pieces and articles and stories. Whatever I can get my hands on. I can be available whenever. And I won't be a bother.

A beat as Joel thinks it over. Fran and Quinn watch him carefully.

JOEL
I could use a hand on some projects.

Quinn looks at him hopefully, trying not to shatter the magic, trying not to breathe in case it would change Joel's mind.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Yeah. I can bring you on. Long as you're willing to actually work.

QUINN
Yes. Yes, I am. Sir.

JOEL
No need to go that far. Joel is fine.

Joel checks his watch.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Need to head out soon.

FRAN
It was nice to see you again.

JOEL
Nice meeting you.

He gets up and walks towards the door.

QUINN
(calling after him)
Wait,

JOEL
(still walking towards the door)
Rock on!

QUINN
How do I get in touch?

JOEL
(over his shoulder)
Fran has my number. She can connect you.

FRAN
(looking at Quinn, bewildered)
That man. I must say. He is always a whirlwind.

QUINN
Seems... interesting.

FRAN
Oh, don't worry, dear. He's a good colleague. And at the very least you can pick up tidbits from his experience.

QUINN
Yes, thank you so much for setting this up. I can't... you don't even know me. I could be a terrible person to work with. I could have zero journalistic instinct.

FRAN
Then how else are you going to cultivate that instinct than to practice?

A beat.

QUINN
Are you going to stay here?

FRAN
No, I was thinking of seeing this new exhibit at the art museum--

QUINN
No, the city-- San Diego.

FRAN
Oh, no. I can't do that. This was just a weekend trip. My work is far, far away from the beaches of sunny southern California.

QUINN
Oh.

FRAN
You don't need me to do any of this, though.

QUINN
Why are you so invested in me?

FRAN
You yourself are such a story, Quinn. Waiting to come alive. In a sense, I'm writing a story right now. Watching it unfold. Helping the pages turn with a guiding hand. I mean, think about it. Circus runaway. That's not someone you see every day.

A beat.

FRAN (CONT'D)
What stories are you drawn to?

QUINN
People very... different than me. I left the circus for a reason.

FRAN
Hm.

FRAN (CONT'D)
There's an element of seeing ourselves in all of these people we interview, in sympathizing with their circumstances, in navigating a story as it breaks.

(MORE)

FRAN (CONT'D)
When these are real people's lives. It's a privilege to get to be so close and tender with people at their most vulnerable moments. To educate the masses. These are noble pursuits, aren't they?

Quinn nods at her with shining eyes.

FRAN (CONT'D)
Where are you headed to after this?

QUINN
I need to figure out how to get to...
(squinting at her hand, then showing Fran)
this place. In Lahoya?

FRAN
Oh! I can drive you.

QUINN
Are you sure?

FRAN
Yes. Don't even worry about it.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S FAMILY'S HOME - DAY

A car pulls up in a suburban driveway, Fran driving and Quinn in the passenger seat. They look at each other and Quinn smiles nervously at Fran. Fran squeezes her shoulder, then Quinn gets out of the car and walks up to the door. She hesitates before knocking three times.

After a moment that is just too slightly too long, the door opens a crack and a woman's face peeks out from behind the door: Charlotte's MOM, a woman with a well-worn-in face who makes you feel cozy just looking at her.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Hello?

QUINN
Hi, I'm Quinn-- from the circus--
Charlotte said I could--

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Oh yes! She did say that, didn't
she. Let's see, now. Come on in.

She leads Quinn into the house. Its ceilings are high and the windows stretch floor-to-ceiling. Rays of sun stream in from outside. Quinn is awestruck. She didn't expect Charlotte from the CIRCUS to live like this. To have grown up like this.

QUINN
This is such a nice place.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Oh, thank you. Can I get you water
or something? Tea? Do you drink
coffee?

QUINN
I'm alright, thank you.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Alright.

They walk through the house and enter a large room at least twice the size of the one that Quinn and Jackie share in the circus. Quinn lets out a small gasp of awe, involuntarily.

Charlotte’s mom looks over at her, initially concerned, but then smiles.

QUINN
I don't need a whole room. Really.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Nonsense. It's not being used anyways. You will take this room.

QUINN
I don't want to ask too much--

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Don't worry about it. These rooms are built for living in anyways, aren't they, now.

Quinn examines the place in wonderment.

QUINN
I’ve never lived in a place like this before.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Oh, you flatter us too much. I want you to make it feel like your own. Charlotte said you have a complicated situation at home.

QUINN
I've never been away from the circus this long. And I've never had an actual place to live in before, for a long time.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Charlotte sent me pictures. Like a tent house kind of thing? Is that what you use?

QUINN
And we'd pick it all up and hop towns for our next leg of tour. And do it again. And again. For all my life.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Nomadic. Sounds.... dynamic. Exposed to the elements. Bare bones. Nature?

Quinn nods.

QUINN
Like highways, cars honking at each other when you’re trying to sleep... real soothing stuff. This house has that beat. By far.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
You’ve never sat in one place for a time?

QUINN
No, not really. Well, some summers we spent time together as a family. In one spot. But mom and dad get a little squirrelly when that happens. It’s not good for them, settling down for longer than two months or so. Mom gets migraines.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Wow. Imagine that. Charlotte's joining on for the time being, but for that to be your entire life--

QUINN
They need the change of pace in their lives to function.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
What a unique upbringing.

QUINN
It's the only one I know.

A little BOY with rosy cheeks and tousled, fluffy blonde hair who looks no older than 6 years old runs into the room. Spotting Quinn, he hides behind Charlotte's mom. He pokes his head out to peek at Quinn, who smiles kindly at him.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
Jack, c'mon. Say hi to our guest. This is Quinn. Charlotte's friend. From the circus!

QUINN
(in disbelief)
Your name is Jack?

JACK
Jack.

CHARLOTTE'S MOM
She's going to be staying with us for a bit.

JACK
What about Char?

QUINN
She’s not here with me.

Jack’s face falls.

QUINN (CONT’D)
Sorry, bud.

A beat.

QUINN (CONT’D)
Do Charlotte and Jack have other siblings?

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Nope, there’s Charlotte’s dad, who you’ll meet when he gets home from work. But it’s just the four of us.

INT. QUINN'S ROOM IN CHARLOTTE’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Quinn doodles on a notebook in bed. She looks around at her surroundings, thinking about how this room compares to her room at home.

She starts drawing a familiar face. Hair. It’s Jackie. She leaves the facial features empty and closes her eyes, concentrated, trying to draw Jackie’s face in her mind’s eye. Without a reference, Quinn’s struggling to remember already.

She tears out the drawing and slips it in the back of her notebook.

INT. JOEL’S STORAGE ROOM - DAY

Quinn and Joel are poking around in the storage room. Quinn looks carefully at each piece of equipment that Joel hands her.

JOEL
You can use this one.

He tosses her an old MacBook. It's thick and caked in a layer of dust and is clearly a significantly outdated model. Quinn is mesmerized.

QUINN
For myself?

JOEL
You need something to edit with.

Quinn runs over and gives him a tight hug. Joel is perplexed.

QUINN
Thank you.

JOEL
Don't ever do that to me again.

BEGIN APPRENTICESHIP WITH JOEL MONTAGE

... Joel teaches Quinn how to operate a camera and tripod, set up mics.

... Joel interviews people at their homes, an office, inside cafes, as Quinn operates the equipment with a picky attention to detail, triple-checking each setup every few seconds.

... 2AM, Quinn waits outside Charlotte's house to get picked up. Joel takes her to his storage room, where they pick out footage together, Joel helming at the computer and Quinn watching for a second opinion.

... Quinn realizes the mic isn't plugged in and no audio has been recording for a whole day of footage. Despair.

... Quinn looking more natural at operating the equipment while Joel interviews documentary subjects. She now incorporates more dynamic camera movements into her work.

... Quinn tries her first interview, this time Joel operating the equipment. She messes up but Joel is forgiving and laughs it off. He is more endeared to her.

... Quinn edits footage from her room in Charlotte's home. She is faster and the keyboard shortcuts are more natural, her mouse clicks more directed with less stalling and searching for the right button.

... Joe splits cash and gives Quinn a portion.

... Quinn buys a smartphone with her savings.

END APPRENTICESHIP WITH JOEL MONTAGE

INT. BALBOA PARK - GOLDEN HOUR

Quinn is crouched down on the edge of a lookout point near a meditation garden, trying to get a shot overlooking Balboa Park. Her stance and position are almost a mirror image of 22-year-old LARA, who is trying to get the same shot.

Quinn notices Lara.

QUINN
It's a good spot.

LARA
In this light? Near unbeatable. But you know about the notch? That one's especially good if you like birds.

QUINN
The what?

LARA
The notch. You wanna see it?

QUINN
Sure.

LARA
I'll show you. C'mere. It's really cool.

Quinn eyes Lara warily.

Lara leads Quinn under a clearing and through a patch of trees. There is a well-forged trail, but the surrounding nature hides away the path, tucked away like a nook. The song of birds chirping.

LARA (CONT'D)
Nice, isn't it?

Quinn looks around before looking up and closing her eyes, absorbing the sun.

QUINN
You were right.

She opens her eyes.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I'm Quinn.

LARA
Lara. Are you visiting?

QUINN
... I don't know.

LARA
Is it your first time here?

QUINN
Yeah.

LARA
The park, or San Diego...?

QUINN
Both.

QUINN (CONT'D)
Are you also here to...

LARA
Take pictures? Duh.

QUINN
Well, for fun? Or your job?

LARA
It's complicated. For fun, I guess.

QUINN
Complicated how?

LARA
It's not important.

QUINN
I want to--

LARA
I'll show you some other places in the park that you probably don't know. How about that. We can take pictures. In silence. Compare what shots we get.

QUINN
I'm game.

The two go around to different spots and take pictures. They compare their shots.

INT. TACO STAND - DAY

Quinn and Lara sit at an outdoor table on the patio of Taco Stand, a spread of tacos in front of them. The patio is alive with chatty groups and people are lined up around the patio to buy tacos.

Quinn looks confusedly at her tacos while

LARA
(in between bites)
What’re you waiting for?

QUINN
I’m trying to figure out how to eat this.

LARA
How? You don’t know about the beautiful architectural feat that is the taco?

QUINN
Are they common?

LARA
Oh my god, you’ve been living under a rock.

QUINN
No...

LARA
You hold it like this, and you kinda tilt your head,

Quinn tries but her taco's fillings spill out.

QUINN
Can't I just ask for a fork and knife?

LARA
You can't eat a taco with a fork and a knife!

Quinn tries again. And again. And again. Soon enough, her tortilla is empty and all the taco filling is on the plate.

LARA (CONT'D)
Okay. It might be a lost cause.

Quinn gets up. She returns with a fork and a knife and starts scooping up her taco filling.

LARA (CONT'D)
So you're not from here. You can't be.

QUINN
Yeah.

LARA
Where're you from?

QUINN
"It's complicated."

LARA
Hit me.

QUINN
What, you don't like your own tactics being used against you?

LARA
Fine. I'll tell you if you tell me.

QUINN
I moved around a lot.

LARA
Military brat?

QUINN
What?

LARA
Like, your dad's in the military?

QUINN
Oh. No. Definitely not.

LARA
Foster care?

Quinn shakes her head. Lara tries to think of other possible explanations. Quinn grabs a taco and neatly slices into it using her fork and knife.

QUINN
... I was part of this traveling circus.

LARA
A traveling circus.

QUINN
Yeah.

LARA
What? You ran away to the circus?

QUINN
No. I was born there.

LARA
How does--

QUINN
It was my family's circus. So we moved around. Performed in different cities every few weeks.

LARA
WHAT? That's insane. So *you*...

QUINN
Yeah.

LARA
What did you do?

QUINN
Mostly trapeze. I think that's enough about me. So you *are* a photographer?

LARA
I'm in this limbo state. I used to study communications and marketing in college. And then I switched to journalism. I really wanted to work at a fashion magazine. I did everything right--- the internships, networking events, publications... and then I graduated and worked for a bit, but... I dunno. I don't know if this is what I want to do.

QUINN
Why not?

LARA
It stopped being fun for me.

QUINN
But you’re doing it again now.

LARA
I’m trying to rekindle the spark.

QUINN
We should do more things together.
Make some weird projects.

BEGIN QUINN & LARA COLLABORATION MONTAGE

... Quinn and Lara return to Balboa Park and interview random passerby. Lara interviews them while Quinn jots down notes and occasionally pops her head up to add a question or comment.

... Quinn and Lara at a hip-hop cypher. People are standing in a circle around one performer, who is freestyle rapping. One of the freestyle rappers daps up Quinn, who goes along with it. They clearly have a sense of rapport between them.

... Quinn and Lara take pictures inside an abandoned house. They speak with an older couple with greyed hair on the lawn of the house next door. The couple is excited to talk to them and gestures expressively.

... Quinn and Lara sit at a table doing a brain jam. They scribble ideas on a huge piece of paper and scroll through an online calendar of events happening in the area. Lara points out a Cirque de Soleil performance, to which Quinn winces and shakes her head.

... Quinn and Lara laying on the floor of Lara's apartment with several weeks' copies of the New York Times splayed out in front of them. They look at a laptop screen together, picking out apartments together. They know it's just wishful thinking.

END QUINN & LARA COLLABORATION MONTAGE

EXT. TORREY PINES GLIDERPORT - SUNSET.

Lara and Quinn sit on the grass near the beach, watching the sunset.

QUINN
The rolling tides sounds like the static of the highway. What I used to fall asleep to.

LARA
Back home.

A beat.

LARA (CONT'D)
Do you miss it?

Quinn looks out at the ocean before she responds.

QUINN
How much of this feeling is from actually missing the place and the people, and how much is because they were the only constant for me to miss, for my whole life?

LARA
You never bring up your past.

Quinn's quiet.

LARA (CONT'D)
You have such a unique, singular background.

QUINN
Maybe it's too unique. I feel like people look at me like a unicorn or something when they find out.

LARA
But *embracing* your background would help you far more. Especially in a field like journalism. You're not trying to "make it" despite your background, you can use it to help you.

QUINN
Isn't that like taking a shortcut?

LARA
That's not cheating or gaming the system, it's just the way things work. You might as well use it to help you.

QUINN
That doesn't feel right to me.

LARA
You just don't want to think about your past, don't you?

QUINN
No, there's just so much going on here. In this moment. With these real stories and people that we're making real things with.

(MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)
I don't have time to figure out what my own story means.

LARA
You have to have time to figure it out. It'll help us.

QUINN
How?

LARA
Well, we're so different. If we use our perspectives, our backgrounds, together, we can have a good angle to tackle topics together.

QUINN
But this isn't about us. This is about the people we center.

LARA
You bring something to the stories you tell. Even if you're behind the camera or just guiding the interviews.

Quinn looks unconvinced.

LARA (CONT'D)
And, can I be honest? I'm sick and tired of avoiding topics just because they feel like too much for you to think about or because, I know, they remind you of your past.

QUINN
That's not true.

LARA
Quinn, be fucking for real with yourself.

QUINN
I am!

LARA
We’re avoiding projects when we don’t have that luxury. You need to suck it up. Figure your shit out. I’m sorry but I can’t keep turning back whenever things start to get interesting because you can’t handle it.

QUINN
I shouldn’t have to bring in my personal stuff into my work.

LARA
We’re working in the arts practically. We’re telling stories. You don’t think your experiences shape that? Come on. In school all of our journalism majors start within. The stories you know. You live your work.

QUINN
I disagree with that take! I’ve always used stories as something external to myself. To see someone different.

LARA
You’re being unreasonable. You’re new to this field and you have to make the most of whatever you can. Whatever you can use to get ahead.

QUINN
I can’t bring that stuff into my current life. I can’t.

They sit at an impasse.

LARA
Listen. If you can’t figure it out, that’s fine. But I’m not coming with you unless you do. You can keep avoiding your past forever, which will only keep you tied to it, at its whim. Or we can try to get close to our dreams.

QUINN
I still don’t know.

LARA
You’re being selfish! It should be an easy choice. Our success as a team relies on it.

QUINN
I don’t know!

LARA
Really. It’s that hard? You would throw this all away.

QUINN
It’s not that easy.

LARA
Fine. It’s your choice.

Lara packs up her things and walks away. Quinn sits watching the ocean tides. She closes her eyes to try to calm down but the sound of rolling ocean waves morphs into the static of cars on the highway. A tear leaks out when she opens her eyes again.

INT. QUINN’S ROOM IN CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Quinn falls into a lull. She lays in bed all day and ignores her phone notifications. Finally, she gets up to brush her teeth, only to crawl back into bed and do nothing, eventually falling asleep. This repeats every day, and Quinn seems to sink deeper and deeper into her bed.

Quinn grabs her notebook and remembers the half-finished drawing of Jackie stuffed at the back. She turns to find it and stares at it, thinking about the choices she’s made. She slams the notebook shut and tosses it on her bed. After a moment, she retrieves the notebook and closes it more gently, feeling bad for taking her discontentment out on this pseudo-Jackie.

Her gymnastics manager calls her angrily, demanding answers for why she’s missed the last week of shifts. Quinn stares ahead lifelessly as she is berated from the other end of the line.

INT. GYMNASTICS GYM FLOOR - DAY

Quinn shows up late to her shift. The manager is leading the kids through a warmup. When she spots Quinn, she angrily swaps out with Quinn.

MANAGER
(angrily whispering, head turned to the side)
See me after.

Quinn lifelessly continues the warmup and moves the kids to the balance beams and mats to run two activities at once.

KID 1
Why were you gone, Miss Quinn?

KID 2
Yeah, why?

KID 1
Were you getting marrrrrried?

QUINN
I was sick. Sorry guys.

While Quinn is watching the balance beam, a kid comically falls off. She looks straight at him without reacting.

KID 1
AHHHHHHH! DIEGO!!!

KID 2
Is Diego dead?

DIEGO
Owwww everywhere hurts. Am I bleeding?

KID 3
HELP!!! MISS QUINN!

KID 2
HELLO??

The kids all start screaming and running around the gym floor, crossing into another area where a group of teenagers are being coached.

Quinn blinks, only now noticing what happened.

QUINN
Diego, let me take a look--

The gym manager is storming towards the mess.

MANAGER
Annabelle?

The teenage group's coach looks up, and the manager points to Diego.

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Can you--

QUINN
I got it.

MANAGER
You. Come with me.

She practically drags Quinn behind her.

INT. GYMNASTICS GYM PICKUP AREA - DAY

The kids collect their belongings and put on their shoes to the background noise of muffled yelling coming from inside the manager's office. They gawk at the sight of the manager scolding Quinn.

KID 1
Oooooh, she gonna get firedddddd.

INT. QUINN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Quinn calls Lara.

LARA
Hello?

QUINN
Lara. I miss working together.

A beat.

QUINN (CONT'D)
I've change my mind. I'm ready now.

LARA
I'll believe it when I see it.

QUINN
Please, Lara.

LARA
By which I mean I don't.

QUINN
Lara-

Lara hangs up, leaving Quinn looking at her phone, mouth agape.

INT. QUINN'S ROOM IN CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Quinn wakes up to a stream of congratulatory texts from Fran. Confused, she clicks on a link in one of the texts, which leads to her and Lara's documentary project about the local rap community. The video has over a million views and thousands of comments. Quinn does a double take.

Quinn reads the comments. They're mostly positive, raving about the documentary's portrayal of the community and of the perspective taken by the filmmakers.

She opens the video description:

A DOCUMENTARY BY LARAQUINN PRODUCTIONS

Quinn gets up and washes her face, staring at herself in the mirror. She tries to look past her eyes to see what's inside, searching for answers or a sign for what she should do.

INT. LARA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lara is making a matcha latte. She gets a call.

LARA
Hello?
Yes, speaking.

Yes, that was me.

I would absolutely love to! What were you thinking specifically?

I would. Yes. I'll get on it as soon as possible.

Thank you so much. This means a lot. Yeah.

Oh, one last thing. That project? It wasn't just me. I had a collaborator. She's new to journalism and grew up in the circus. Could be an interesting piece.

(MORE)

LARA (CONT'D)

But it would really have to be solo, I think.

Yes, I'll read her contact to you.

INT. QUINN'S BEDROOM IN CHARLOTTE'S HOUSE - DAY

Quinn is on the phone. A parallel image to Lara's phone call.

QUINN
THE NEW YORK TIMES?

Yes. I just can't believe it. I'm sorry. Thank you.

You want... Does it have to be about my own story?

CUT TO:

Flashbacks to the circus: the jarring, scary elements. Close-up of the mime's face. Jagged figures in dramatic costumes and high-contrast makeup. A vision of Quinn falling from the highest trapeze.

QUINN (V.O.)

Are there collaborators for the piece?

Yes, of course I will. Thank you so much.

CUT TO:

Quinn jumps onto her bed, kicks her feet in excitement and jumps around on the bed, and then the realization settles in of what exactly she’s been tasked with doing. She flops down, turns over, and screams into the pillow.

INT. CHARLOTTE’S FAMILY'S HOME - DAY

Quinn’s scream radiates throughout the rest of the empty house.

EXT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

Quinn sets up her recording equipment outside a circus tent. She walks in.

INT. MAKESHIFT INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Quinn sits across from a pair of twins in their costumes and makeup. She has a notebook and field mic in front of her on the table.

TWIN 1
We love it. We wouldn’t trade it for any other way of life.

TWIN 2
I mean, you must know.

TWIN 1
There’s nothing better than getting to work with family.

The twins’ faces morph into a strange, off-putting version of their own faces mixed with Micah and Krista’s faces, respectively. Quinn tries to shake their faces off.

QUINN
What was your favorite cereal growing up?

The twins look at each other, perplexed.

TWIN 1
... Cheerios?

Quinn unintentionally lets out a sigh. Micah's face remains superimposed on Twin 1's face.

TWIN 2
Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

Poof. Krista's face disappears from Twin 2's face. Quinn's head is spinning. The twins look at her sympathetically and lean in creepily.

TWIN 1
We're just so excited to meet another person who grew up in the circus.

Marie walks into the makeshift interview room: same mannerisms, same way of commanding confidence in a room. Quinn blinks and Marie's face dissolves, replaced by the twins' mother's real face. Quinn shakes her head rapidly as if trying to ward off a nightmare.

TWIN 2
Are you okay?

QUINN
Yeah... Let's just... go on with the questions.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Charlotte's parents, Jack, and Quinn sit in the car as Charlotte's dad drives.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

The four of them exit the car and walk over to the train station, shivering. They're all bundled up.

Then: Charlotte comes flying from the other end of the station lobby, suitcases in tow, running straight at them. She gives them each a big hug.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S FAMILY'S HOME - NIGHT

Charlotte's parents, Charlotte, Jack, and Quinn sit at the dining table. The lighting is warm: the picture of spending holidays with loved ones. They pass around large platters of food and pile heaps onto their plates.

CHARLOTTE
It's so good to be back.

Charlotte turns to Quinn.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
(in a hushed voice)
It's... good to see you. Weird.

QUINN
(to Charlotte)
I have so much to tell you. But promise me one thing.

CHARLOTTE
What?

QUINN
Don’t tell me about how my family is.

CHARLOTTE
If you insist.

After dinner, Charlotte’s family hangs up ornaments on the Christmas tree and Jack cuts out paper snowflakes with Charlotte’s help. Quinn is homesick seeing all of the family traditions.

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
(to Quinn)
Your family must miss you so much.

CHARLOTTE
Mom--

CHARLOTTE’S DAD
When do you head back?

CHARLOTTE’S MOM
Eric!

CHARLOTTE’S DAD
No, I didn’t mean-- Like that-- I just meant as like, a--

QUINN
Don’t worry. I understand.

Quinn’s thinking about it too, for the first time.

INT. DREAM SEQUENCE - NIGHT

Quinn dreams about her encounter with Jackie the night she ran away.

Her dreams flash to other moments since leaving the circus: filming with Lara, fighting with Lara, Charlotte's mom opening the door to the "guest room"--- but this time, it's the same room setup as her circus room--- and the last night's Christmas dinner.

In these clips, Jackie continuously appears and asking, "Where are you going?". Echoey sounds, distorted and trippy visuals.

She wakes up in the middle of her dream sweating and distressed, only for it all to repeat throughout the night.

Quinn gets up, sits at her desk, and opens her notes to the New York Times piece. She agonizes over what to do and writes down a plan in hopes of continuing her project.

BEGIN OTHER CIRCUS MONTAGE

... Quinn takes the train to other circuses.

... She interviews another circus performer, who offers long anecdotes. As she describe her experiences, Quinn sees flashbacks to her memories in the circus. She falls in and out of the present. She apologizes and cuts the interview short, rushing outside to get fresh air.

... Quinn interviews another performer but has to ask him to repeat himself several times because she keeps spacing out.

... Quinn has flashbacks to her nightmares of Jackie. The line between real and nightmare is blurred.

... The circus performers watch Quinn in her erratic state and murmur amongst themselves.

... Quinn breaks down outside the circus tent. She's starting to think that everything that transpired since she left her own circus life was a fluke.

END OTHER CIRCUS MONTAGE

INT. QUINN’S BEDROOM - DAY

Quinn tries to call Lara multiple times, but she keeps reaching voicemail.

INT. QUINN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Quinn gets up from the desk where she’s been working on her laptop. She looks like she’s about to tear about her hair. She packs her bag.

INT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

A lone silhouette of Quinn stands at the boarding area as a train honks and slows to a stop.

EXT. FIELD IN SANTA BARBARA - DAY

An empty patch of grass, dead and dried up around a faint outline of where the circus tent once was. A few tattered remnants of decorations. Quinn walks around and picks up a leftover gold bow.

She closes her eyes and walks through “the circus” in her mind, imagining each room where it used to be. She’s trying to talk herself out of visiting the circus at its current stop.

She heads back to the train station.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

Quinn peeks into the circus tent. Curly spots her from afar and moves towards her to shoo her away. A look washes over his face as he realizes who it is.

CURLY
WHAT? MICAH! JACKIE! C'MON OVER HERE!

Curly runs up to greet her, Micah and Jackie tailing closely behind. Micah and Jackie stand in shock when they come close enough to recognize her. Curly hugs her tightly.

The other performers around them notice the commotion and swarm around her. Krista walks up.

KRISTA
You came back.

QUINN
I did.

KRISTA
(accusatory)
You've given all of us enough worry for five lifetimes.

Krista stiffly embraces Quinn.

Elmer and Marie walk up from far off. They look relieved.

MARIE
Oh, I don't believe it.

They all collapse into each other.

INT. CIRCUS DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Family dinner.

JACKIE
And then I got my front aerial!

QUINN
Oh, I'm sorry I missed that.

JACKIE
It's okay, I can show you--

Jackie tries to get up, but Quinn sits her back down.

QUINN
No, no, no. Sit down and eat for now.

JACKIE
Ugh.

QUINN
I... I came here because I'm writing a piece. About growing up with you guys. For the New York Times.

CURLY
See that, Jackie, we're big news. Don't let anyone tell you any different now.

MARIE
But you'll stay when it's finished, right?

Everyone’s eyes are on Quinn. She takes in the moment, everyone she thought she would never see again sitting at the table around her, excited to see her.

QUINN
(weakly)
Yeah.

KRISTA
It’s gonna take you forever to get up to speed again. And we’ll have to reorder the show program.

ELMER
I’m just glad you girls will have your set together again.

INT. CIRCUS PRACTICE AREA - NIGHT

Quinn gets on the trapeze and tries a few tricks but doesn’t push herself to do anything risky. Micah walks in.

MICAH
See, you aren’t even so rusty after months away.

Quinn turns around quickly, startled.

QUINN
Why are you here?

MICAH
Just getting in some midnight practice. Like you, eh?

QUINN
I’m just... trying something out.

MICAH
Looked smooth.

QUINN
This is barely anything. You don't know that.

INT. CIRCUS LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Quinn scribbles away some notes and ideas onto a notepad. She excitedly maps out a timeline and sketches the events from deciding to leave to coming back home.

Krista walks in and makes a cup of tea. She sits down opposite Quinn.

KRISTA
Are you going to leave again?

Quinn shrugs.

KRISTA (CONT'D)
You better not.

Quinn continues sketching.

KRISTA (CONT'D)
It was terrible when you left. We didn't know what was going on. If you'd died. Or gotten kidnapped.

QUINN
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you all.

Krista sips her tea.

KRISTA
What was it... like? Living outside?

QUINN
So different.

KRISTA
But not worse?

QUINN
San Diego was beautiful. And the beaches there. The city is so alive, Krista.

KRISTA
So you're going to go back.

QUINN
I can't. Somehow it reminds me too much of here.

KRISTA
So you are leaving.

QUINN
I don't know, Krista.

INT. QUINN'S MAKESHIFT BEDROOM AT THE CIRCUS - DAY

Quinn spends the next day writing her piece as the circus performance goes on, cheers peppering the background noise. Her room rustles with the force of the crowd's stomping.

Jackie walks in and curls up in her bed, gazing adoringly at Quinn until she falls asleep in the same position.

Quinn copies her piece down by hand, makes her bed, and leaves the piece on top.

She tucks the sleeping Jackie in and plants a kiss atop her forehead, then grabs her packed bags and slips out of their room.

EXT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

Quinn walks out of the circus, where Lara and Fran waiting for her. They walk to the train station.

LARA
How does it feel to turn in your final journalism piece?

QUINN
Who knows if it’s really the final one.

LARA
C’mon, you can’t back out like that now.

QUINN
This chapter has to have a tidy end to it. For now at least.

FRAN
You figured out what your next thing is?

QUINN
Don’t have a clue what I want this time. Guess I’ll just spend some time wandering around.

FRAN
Let the tide take you.

END OF SCRIPT

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