

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the narrator contemplating the bonfire that burns brightly before her. The flames flicker hungrily, mirroring the turmoil within her mind as she recalls unsettling memories from a past house on Frederick Street. These recollections, paired with the intense heat of the fire, overwhelm her, leaving her feeling emotionally and physically scorched. The sensation of being consumed by the flames is intensified as she struggles with the weight of her thoughts. As she stands by the fire, Liam notices her discomfort and moves to provide comfort. His presence serves as a grounding force, and he gently steers her away from the unsettling thoughts, encouraging her to leave the bonfire and the chaos of her emotions behind. His offer of support brings a small sense of relief, but the lingering anxiety stays with her as they plan their departure from the gathering.

However, their attempt to escape is interrupted by playful jabs from Liam's friends, who tease them as "lovebirds," lightheartedly making fun of their closeness. While their teasing is meant in jest, it leaves the narrator feeling exposed, adding an additional layer of tension to the already strained evening. Despite the teasing, Liam reassures her with a calm smile, reaffirming his intention to leave with her. They continue with their plan, but the chill in the air after the heated exchange amplifies the lingering discomfort. The drive away from the bonfire feels like a small victory, but the tension from earlier still clouds their evening. Rather than heading directly home, they choose to drive aimlessly, embracing the fleeting freedom of the open road. The quietness of the car ride offers a moment of respite, yet the teasing and uncomfortable tension still gnaw at the edges of the night.

Eventually, they stop in a secluded lot, surrounded by dark trees and a sense of stillness that contrasts sharply with the earlier chaos. The isolation offers them a rare moment of privacy, where the world feels distant, and the weight of their surroundings

is momentarily forgotten. It is here, under the vast night sky, that they share their first kiss—an electric and hesitant moment charged with anticipation. The kiss begins softly, but as it deepens, an awkwardness settles in. The boundaries of physical intimacy, once unknown, now feel more defined, and the narrator expresses her discomfort, which Liam immediately respects. They move to the car's hood, hoping to regain some comfort and ease through the quiet peace of nature around them. The act of lying back and staring at the stars softens the mood, allowing them to reconnect without the pressure of the earlier moments. The vastness of the sky above them, with its movement of satellites, creates a playful competition between them, offering a brief escape from the emotional complexity of their connection. Liam's natural charm allows the narrator to feel more relaxed, and as they share laughs, the night feels more like an opportunity for lightheartedness and understanding.

As the evening winds down, they both experience a deepening bond. They continue sharing small, meaningful moments, reinforcing their connection. When it is time for the narrator to go home, Liam offers to take her, and she senses a shift in their dynamic. He expresses his willingness to go along with whatever she desires, signaling his care and openness. The moment of their farewell is marked by a tender kiss, which aligns with the narrator's expectations for their first kiss—a moment of sweetness and intimacy. Yet, as she steps away from the car, doubt creeps into her mind. She wonders if there could have been more time together, away from the prying eyes of their world. She walks away filled with conflicting emotions, unsure of what the future holds but hopeful for more moments like this. The kiss and the connection they shared are powerful, but the narrator is left wondering whether these fleeting encounters will lead to something more profound. As she heads home, the complexities of her emotions swirl, leaving her with a quiet sense of anticipation for what may come next in their evolving relationship.