If These Wings Could Fly

Set in small-town Pennsylvania, ***If These Wings Could Fly*** is a powerful debut YA novel by Kyrie McCauley that blends realism with magical elements. The story follows **Leighton Barnes**, a high school senior living in a house haunted not by ghosts, but by the ongoing threat of her father's domestic violence. Despite the trauma, their home mysteriously repairs itself after each of his violent outbursts—a subtle touch of magical realism symbolizing the repeated cycle of abuse and survival.

Meanwhile, thousands of **crows** have inexplicably descended on the town, a surreal presence that mirrors the chaos in Leighton's life. As she prepares to graduate and considers leaving for college, she grapples with guilt over possibly abandoning her younger sisters. And just as Leighton begins to find solace in a budding romance with Liam, the violence at home intensifies—forcing her to make impossible choices between freedom and protection.

Chapter One

The chapter opens with a tense atmosphere, as the narrator reflects on an oppressive silence that fuels fears about their mother's wellbeing. The setting is a small town suffering from a relentless drought, where rain symbolizes not only relief but also renewal and forgiveness. The narrator's window is open, inviting a non-existent breeze, and the night is heavy with humidity and thick clouds. Amidst this uneasy calm, the narrator's protective instincts emerge as they comfort their two younger sisters, trying to shield them from the underlying tension that permeates their home.

This fragile sense of safety is shattered by the presence of a volatile figure, the narrator’s father, whose anger is as loud and destructive as the classic rock music blasting through the house. The father’s rage is sparked by financial stress—an upcoming mortgage payment and soaring energy bills during a scorching August. The narrator’s fear is compounded by the knowledge that a gun is within easy reach, introducing a menacing threat of potential violence. The mother, caught in the turmoil, is physically pushed yet remains silent, emphasizing the family's cycle of fear and endurance.

As the conflict escalates, the narrator takes decisive action, planning to seek help despite the phones being disabled by the father. The siblings are moved to the roof of their home, a precarious refuge that offers a brief escape and a semblance of adventure amid the crisis. The narrator draws on memories of courage to bolster the youngest sister’s shaken spirit, highlighting the emotional resilience required to survive such nights. This moment of bonding and bravery underscores the children’s struggle to maintain hope and security in an unstable environment.

The chapter closes with a vivid image of crows gathering ominously in the yard, intensifying the foreboding mood. Despite the lack of wind, the trees sway under the weight of the birds, symbolizing the pervasive tension and impending storm both outside and within the family. The narrator’s leap from the roof signals a critical turning point, a leap into uncertainty driven by necessity and protective love. This opening chapter sets a somber, suspenseful tone, inviting readers into a story marked by fear, resilience, and the quest for safety amid domestic chaos.

Chapter Two

The chapter opens with a vivid portrayal of a morning overshadowed by the unsettling presence of crows, symbolizing an ominous atmosphere that permeates the household. The narrator, Leighton, observes the birds as a metaphor for the tension that lingers with the return of a troubled figure in her life. This return disrupts the fragile normalcy she strives to maintain, especially as she prepares for school, hoping to keep peace despite the underlying turmoil.

Leighton’s relationship with her family reveals deep strains, particularly with her mother, whose smiles have lost their warmth and genuine connection. The presence of scarlet roses, a small gesture from the returning figure, contrasts starkly with the gravity of past pain and unresolved conflicts. The mother’s dismissive attitude toward Leighton’s concerns underscores a dynamic of avoidance and resignation, highlighting the emotional distance growing within the household.

The physical environment of the home mirrors the instability and tension experienced by the family. Objects like tilted picture frames and a palpable sense of pressure create a vivid backdrop that reflects the emotional and psychological strain. Leighton’s reflections on a photograph of two teenagers crowned as king and queen evoke a longing for forgiveness and resilience, qualities she questions whether she shares, emphasizing her internal struggle and desire for healing.

In the closing moments, the chapter touches on the limitations and control within the family through the symbolism of the outdated house phone, representing a lack of freedom and safety. Leighton’s act of plugging in the phone and noting the return of the dial tone suggests a small but significant moment of connection and hope amidst the pervasive uncertainty. This scene encapsulates the chapter’s themes of endurance, protection, and the search for normalcy in a fractured environment.

Chapter Three

The chapter opens with a contrast between the typical high school experience of summer as a time of freedom and the protagonist's own reality, where summer offers little respite. Returning to Auburn High, the narrator finds comfort in the predictability of school life, knowing that her daughters, Campbell and Juniper, are safe and that for a few hours, normalcy prevails. This sets the tone of the chapter, emphasizing the protagonist's struggle to maintain stability amidst personal challenges, even as the school year begins anew.

Early in the day, the protagonist reconnects with her friend Sofia, whose joyful and lively demeanor provides a striking contrast to the narrator's more burdened state. Their casual conversation about summer reading, school schedules, and upcoming classes highlights the everyday concerns of high school seniors. Sofia's cheerful personality and their shared experiences create a sense of camaraderie, underscoring the importance of friendship as a source of support during difficult times.

The chapter also touches on typical high school dynamics, such as course selections and extracurricular activities, with the two friends discussing their classes and the possibility of collaborating on the school newspaper. Their banter about gym class and AP English adds a lighthearted element to the narrative, illustrating the blend of humor and routine that colors their daily lives. This interaction reinforces the theme of navigating adolescence amid personal and social pressures.

The chapter concludes with an eerie and symbolic image: thousands of crows covering the soccer field and football stadium, a striking and unsettling sight that draws the characters' attention. This ominous gathering of birds contrasts sharply with the ordinary school setting and hints at deeper, possibly foreboding undercurrents in the story. The narrator's reflection on why creatures capable of flight would choose to remain in Auburn adds a layer of mystery, suggesting that the town—and by

extension, the characters—may be trapped in circumstances beyond their control.

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist, Leighton, discovers that her senior year locker is located in the junior hallway, a subtle but stinging reminder of her outsider status. This placement excludes her from the cherished Senior Wall tradition, a social hub where seniors congregate and assert their status. Leighton reflects on the normal high school experiences she has missed due to her difficult home life, underscoring her sense of isolation. Despite her attempts to downplay the significance of the Senior Wall, the moment highlights her yearning for connection and a typical senior year.

Leighton’s solitude is interrupted when Liam McNamara, a popular senior and student council vice president, mistakenly tickles her, confusing her for his cheerleader friend. Their awkward exchange introduces Liam as someone who embodies the privileged, charismatic side of high school life—football star, socially well-connected, and with a seemingly polished future. Yet, Leighton’s guarded perspective reveals she has witnessed a harsher reality beneath such charm, hinting at complexities in Liam’s character and the social dynamics at play.

As they converse, the interaction shifts from initial discomfort to a surprising moment of camaraderie. Liam carries Leighton’s heavy calculus book, and they bond over their Advanced Placement English class and the summer reading selection, *Beloved*. Their discussion about literature reveals deeper themes of representation, cultural awareness, and disillusionment with traditional romantic narratives. Liam’s candid critique of *Romeo and Juliet* and his perspective on love contrast with Leighton’s guardedness, revealing the nuanced ways each navigates personal and societal expectations.

The chapter closes with an undercurrent of tension and reflection. While their conversation is lighthearted, Leighton’s mind drifts back to the violence she endures at

home, juxtaposing the safety of school with her turbulent personal life. This contrast deepens the reader’s understanding of Leighton’s resilience and vulnerability, setting the stage for the challenges and growth she will face throughout her senior year. The encounter with Liam hints at potential new connections and complexities ahead, blending themes of identity, belonging, and the search for normalcy.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five delves into the complex character of Campbell Grace Barnes, portrayed as a deeply thoughtful and serious young girl whose mind remains largely inscrutable even to those closest to her. Despite her reserved nature, Campbell reveals a rare, carefree side when riding her bike through a nearby affluent neighborhood. This activity offers her a precious escape from her otherwise intense inner world, highlighting the contrast between her contemplative persona and moments of youthful freedom.

The narrative tension arises when Mrs. Stieg, a kindly but judgmental elderly neighbor, confronts the family about damage to her prized rose garden caused by Campbell and her mostly male friends. Mrs. Stieg’s disapproval of Campbell’s choice of companions underscores themes of gender expectations and social scrutiny. The protagonist’s defense of Campbell’s friendships as simply “friends” rather than conforming to traditional gender roles illustrates a subtle challenge to societal norms.

In response to the garden incident, Campbell and her sister take responsibility by agreeing to help repair the damage early the next morning. The detailed description of their laborious effort to clean up the thorny bushes, despite the physical pain inflicted by the thorns, symbolizes the struggle within Campbell’s character—a blend of vulnerability and resilience. The rose bush, with its beauty and inherent defenses, serves as a metaphor for Campbell herself, suggesting that nurturing her will be a difficult but necessary endeavor.

The chapter closes with Mrs. Stieg’s grudging acceptance of their apology and a cautionary message to Campbell about respecting elders and the consequences of reckless behavior. Campbell’s quiet acknowledgment of this advice, coupled with the narrator’s internal skepticism, adds complexity to the story’s dynamic. Overall, the chapter explores themes of identity, responsibility, and the often-painful process of

growing up within a community that holds firm expectations.

Chapter Six

In Chapter Six of "If These Wings Could Fly," the narrator and Campbell pass by Mrs. Stieg’s house on their way to the bus stop. The narrator notices a severely damaged bush in the far corner of the garden, distinct from a previously broken bush nearby. This new damage is more extreme, with the bush pulverized to the point that only disturbed soil, crushed crimson petals, and shattered branches remain. The vivid description emphasizes the extent of destruction, setting an atmosphere of tension and curiosity surrounding the incident.

The narrator points out the damaged bush to Campbell, who reacts with a nonchalant shrug. However, the narrator perceives something deeper in Campbell’s expression—her large brown eyes gleam with a subtle pride. This detail hints at Campbell’s possible involvement in the destruction, suggesting a hidden layer of complexity in her character. The narrator’s observation creates an unspoken understanding between them, adding intrigue to their relationship and the unfolding story.

Despite the strong suspicion that Campbell’s bike might carry traces of the crushed petals, the narrator chooses not to investigate further. This decision reflects a deliberate restraint, possibly to avoid confrontation or out of a desire to preserve their friendship. The narrator’s internal conflict is subtly conveyed, revealing the nuanced dynamics between the characters and the unspoken boundaries they navigate.

Overall, this chapter uses a brief but impactful scene to explore themes of damage, secrecy, and the complexities of adolescent relationships. The focus on small details—the crushed bush, the crimson petals, and Campbell’s proud gaze—builds a layered narrative that invites readers to consider the underlying motives and emotions at play. The chapter’s tone remains observant and subtly charged, maintaining coherence with the book’s introspective style.

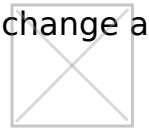
Chapter Seven

The chapter opens with the narrator grappling with feelings of uncertainty and isolation, finding solace in literature, a passion inherited from her mother. While her mother cherished classic literature and poetry, the narrator now struggles with the tragic endings so common in these works, preferring the straightforward truth of journalism over romanticized grief. Despite this, she remains tethered to literature through her required class, where she is introduced to *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. This backdrop sets the tone for her internal conflict between embracing emotional vulnerability and maintaining a guarded exterior shaped by past experiences.

In the classroom, the narrator observes her peers, particularly Liam and Brody, who represent different facets of high school social dynamics. Liam, though often accompanied by a girlfriend, appears somewhat isolated, while Brody embodies the confident, popular archetype, notorious for his entitlement and antagonistic behavior toward the narrator. The narrator’s self-imposed emotional barriers contrast sharply with Amelia’s warmth and social ease, highlighting her struggle to connect despite a desire to be more approachable. This social landscape underscores the complexities of teenage identity and interaction within their small-town setting.

The chapter’s central discussion unfolds around the theme of feminism, sparked by their teacher Mrs. Riley’s enthusiastic lesson on gender inequality in the nineteenth century. Brody’s dismissive and mocking attitude toward feminism contrasts with the narrator’s firm, articulate defense of the concept. Liam’s awkward but earnest attempts to engage with feminist ideas add nuance to the conversation, revealing differing levels of understanding and acceptance among the students. The interaction also serves to highlight the narrator’s sharp wit and resilience in the face of Brody’s persistent provocations, reinforcing her strong, independent character.

As the class returns to literary analysis, the narrator’s attention remains partially fixed on Liam, whose protective gesture toward her during the confrontation with Brody hints at a deeper connection. This subtle moment of alliance suggests the potential for new relationships and personal growth, contrasting with the narrator’s usual caution. The chapter ends with an air of curiosity and tentative openness, as the narrator begins to reconsider her guarded stance, drawn in by Liam’s genuine demeanor and the possibility of change amid the familiar social routines.



Chapter Eight

The chapter opens with the narrator in her room, struggling to focus on her calculus homework amid the rising tension downstairs. The atmosphere in the house is heavy and foreboding, as a volatile argument begins to unfold between her parents. The narrator describes a complex mix of fear and curiosity that compels her to listen closely, knowing that once the confrontation starts, it will eventually end, bringing a temporary but uneasy relief. This emotional turmoil is underscored by vivid imagery of her surroundings and the mounting dread she feels.

As the conflict escalates, the narrator observes her father outside, dealing with a truck covered in crow droppings—a symbol of neglect and decay that mirrors the family's struggles. Despite his pride in the family construction business, financial hardship and unfulfilled dreams weigh heavily on him. The father’s frustration spills over as he angrily throws trash bags into a tree, an act that exposes the family's turmoil to the neighborhood. This scene highlights the father’s internal conflict, shaped by past disappointments and present failures.

The narrator’s interaction with a crow named Joe offers a brief moment of connection amid the chaos. She taps on the window, seeking comfort and perhaps understanding, but the fragile glass cracks, symbolizing the fragile state of her world. Despite the crack disappearing mysteriously, the narrator’s longing to see it again reflects her desire to confront and process the pain she experiences. This moment provides a poignant contrast to the harsh realities unfolding within the home.

The chapter culminates in a violent outburst as the father shatters dishes in the kitchen, escalating the tension and fear within the household. The mother tries to maintain calm, but his rage intensifies, leading to a physical confrontation. The narrator’s plea for him to stop reveals her desperation and the deep impact of the domestic violence on the family. This intense scene captures the destructive cycle of

anger and fear that dominates their lives, leaving the reader with a powerful impression of the family’s fragile and volatile existence.

Chapter Nine

In Chapter Nine of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist, Leighton, encounters Liam McNamara at lunch, where he casually joins her and Sofia at their table. Liam’s easygoing and humorous demeanor contrasts with Leighton’s guarded attitude, as she pushes away her cold tater tots and tries to maintain her focus on schoolwork and college preparations. Despite Liam’s playful banter and his defense of Leighton against a classmate’s rude behavior, she remains hesitant to engage socially, revealing her deep commitment to her academic goals and the pressures of senior year.

The chapter highlights the subtle tension between Leighton’s desire for connection and her resolute priorities. Liam’s attentive and genuine interest in Leighton stands out, offering a refreshing change from her usual interactions. Even though she recognizes the charm and kindness he displays, Leighton is reluctant to entertain the idea of dating, concerned that it would distract her from her immediate responsibilities. The leather bracelet she wears serves as a poignant symbol of family and loss, grounding her in the reality of her situation and the urgency she feels to protect her sisters.

Leighton’s inner conflict is palpable as she acknowledges the fun and lightheartedness Liam brings into her life, yet she remains weighed down by the challenges she faces at home. The chapter conveys her sense of duty and the emotional walls she has built around herself to avoid additional pain. Her reflections on the fragility of love and the inevitability of heartbreak deepen the narrative, underscoring her fear of vulnerability and the sacrifices she believes she must make to ensure her family’s safety.

Ultimately, this chapter portrays a moment of tentative connection amid personal struggle. Liam’s persistence and Leighton’s guarded responses create a dynamic that is both tender and realistic. The story captures the complexities of teenage life—balancing hope, humor, and heartache—while setting the stage for Leighton’s ongoing journey toward self-discovery and healing. The chapter closes on a

bittersweet note, with Leighton acknowledging the harsh truths of love and loss that shape her world.

Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten opens with a vivid portrayal of an overwhelming presence of crows in the town of Auburn, their watchful eyes seemingly observing every move of the residents. The narrator describes the birds as both a nuisance to many townsfolk and a strangely comforting constant in their lives. This recurring motif of the crows sets a tone of unease mingled with fascination, reflecting the unsettled atmosphere enveloping the narrator’s world. The chapter immediately establishes a symbolic connection between the birds and the ongoing emotional turmoil experienced by the narrator and their family.

The narrative then shifts to a deeply personal reflection, recounting the impact of the grandfather’s death two years prior. The family’s dynamic, once stabilized by visits to the grandparents’ farmhouse as a refuge from the father’s anger, is now fractured. The grandmother’s decline and the sale of the farmhouse to fund assisted living mark a significant loss of safety and familiarity. The narrator’s plea to move in with the grandmother is met with refusal, causing a rift with their mother and highlighting the growing tension and instability within the family structure.

Visits to the grandmother’s assisted living apartment provide the narrator with moments of warmth and connection amid the broader family struggles. These encounters reveal a tender bond, where conversations flow freely without the barriers present in other relationships. The grandmother’s mix of sharpness and vulnerability offers a glimpse of hope and continuity. Yet, despite these comforting interactions, the narrator senses an underlying sadness and an unspoken acknowledgment that the family’s challenges are far from resolved.

The chapter closes with the narrator’s solitary journey back to Auburn, a town marked by its pride and small population but overshadowed by the omnipresent crows. The sign welcoming visitors contrasts with the narrator’s internal search for reassurance

and signs of hope from the past, particularly from the late grandfather. The pervasive presence of the crows symbolizes the persistent difficulties and watchful eyes that dominate the narrator’s life, leaving an impression of unresolved grief and the longing for stability and peace.

Chapter Eleven

In Chapter Eleven, the narrator reflects on the allure of brand-new notebooks, appreciating their untouched perfection and boundless potential before they become marked and filled with personal stories. This metaphor extends to the narrator’s own aspirations and challenges as she embarks on writing her first newspaper column. Despite having secured this coveted role, she struggles with the pressure of deadlines and finding a compelling theme. The local high school football team, steeped in tradition and community passion despite repeated losses, serves as a backdrop to her thoughts, highlighting the town’s enduring spirit and the weight of expectations.

The chapter also explores the narrator’s complicated feelings about Liam McNamara, a classmate with whom she shares a growing but undefined connection. Their interaction, marked by casual locker-side conversations, contrasts with her usual intense focus on academics and future ambitions. Her friend Sofia playfully probes into the nature of their relationship, revealing a lighter, more youthful side to the narrator that she normally keeps guarded. This dynamic adds depth to her character, showing the tension between personal desires and professional goals.

Amidst these personal developments, the narrator’s attention shifts to a practical concern: a local scholarship essay contest. The scholarship represents a crucial opportunity to fund her dream of attending New York University for journalism, diverging from her parents’ wishes for her to stay local. The prompt, “What does Auburn born, Auburn proud mean to you?” challenges her to reconcile her hometown pride with her ambition to leave and forge her own path. This conflict underscores the broader theme of identity and belonging that permeates the chapter.

Finally, the narrator finds inspiration for her column in the persistent presence of crows around the baseball fields, symbolizing both continuity and mystery in her small town. This idea offers a tangible focus amid her uncertainties, blending local color with her

journalistic curiosity. The chapter closes with a sense of tentative hope and determination as she prepares to pitch her idea and face the challenges ahead, capturing the blend of youthful optimism and the realities of growing up in a close-knit community.

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve explores the contrast between structured, logical writing and the emotive freedom found in poetry. The narrator reflects on the school-taught importance of beginning with a thesis statement, appreciating its clarity and focus. This approach demands that every subsequent word support the initial claim, providing a sense of order and purpose. In contrast, the narrator's mother embraces poetry's disregard for rules, valuing its raw emotional expression and freedom from conventional grammar, which allows feelings to be felt deeply rather than logically explained.

The narrator expresses a preference for journalistic writing, which prioritizes truth, proper grammar, and factual accuracy over emotional expression. This perspective highlights a tension between the objective and subjective modes of communication, emphasizing the narrator's commitment to clarity and logic. However, the chapter reveals a personal shift when the narrator begins a literature assignment, choosing to start with a personal thesis statement rather than an academic one, signaling a move towards integrating personal goals and emotions into their writing.

The personal thesis the narrator adopts is a determination to leave their hometown of Auburn and attend college. This declaration becomes a guiding principle, much like the academic thesis statements they are accustomed to crafting. It transforms their actions and decisions, such as writing a winning essay for a scholarship contest, into deliberate steps that support this goal. This shift illustrates how personal ambition can be framed with the same clarity and purpose as academic arguments, bridging the gap between logic and feeling.

Ultimately, Chapter Twelve emphasizes the power of a clear, focused purpose in both writing and life. Whether through the structured logic of a thesis or the emotive force of poetry, the chapter underscores how meaning and direction can emerge when one

commits to a central claim. The narrator’s journey reflects a blending of these approaches, suggesting that personal meaning and ambition are best pursued with both clarity of intent and emotional authenticity.

Chapter Thirteen

In the quiet, unsettling hours of early morning, the narrator is abruptly awakened by the creaking of her bedroom door, her heart pounding with fear. Despite the lingering terror of a nightmare, she reassures herself that her family is safe. The tension in the household is palpable as she hears agitated voices downstairs, signaling a troubled night ahead. Her younger sister, Juniper, seeks comfort and asks to sleep with her, while the older sister, Campbell, remains elusive and distant, embodying a mix of anger and resignation born from their difficult circumstances.

The narrator attempts to soothe her sisters by engaging them in a comforting game called "Anywhere But Here," which serves as a mental escape from the harsh reality surrounding them. They imagine themselves in faraway, peaceful places like the Galápagos Islands and London, weaving vivid scenes to distract from the distressing sounds and fears that permeate their home. This shared imaginative play is a fragile sanctuary, momentarily lifting their spirits and allowing them to bond amidst the chaos.

As the situation escalates with noises from downstairs, the sisters seek refuge inside their grandmother’s large armoire, transforming it into a cozy, protective hideaway. Equipped with a kerosene lantern, a cherished heirloom, they create a warm and adventurous atmosphere that shields them from the tension outside. This small, enclosed space becomes a place of safety and imagination, where the girls can momentarily forget their troubles and embrace the roles of explorers and astronauts, united in their resilience and hope.

The chapter closes on a tender note as the sisters play shadow puppets, a simple yet meaningful activity that highlights their closeness and the narrator’s role as a caretaker. Despite the challenges they face, their interaction is filled with warmth, humor, and a sense of normalcy. The narrator’s dedication to protecting and

comforting her siblings shines through, offering a glimpse of strength and love that persists even in the darkest moments.

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fourteen unfolds on a bustling Saturday morning at the Auburn Diner, a local hub where the Barnes family’s deep roots in the town are evident. The narrator reflects on the family legacy, built by her grandfather’s construction company, which physically shaped much of Auburn. Despite this proud heritage, there is an underlying tension, as the narrator begins to question the dual nature of her father—his public persona versus the private reality within their home. The family’s interactions reveal the complexities of maintaining appearances amidst personal struggles.

During their breakfast, the family encounters familiar faces, including Christine, a waitress and old friend of the narrator’s mother, and Officer DiMarco, a longtime family acquaintance. These interactions highlight the father’s growing isolation as he subtly discourages his wife from socializing, effectively pushing away those who might support her. The father’s attempt to smooth over tensions by treating the family to pancakes contrasts sharply with the narrator’s inner turmoil, underscoring the fragile veneer of normalcy they strive to uphold.

The chapter deepens as Officer DiMarco mentions a recent professional setback for the father, who lost a bid for a library renovation project. This news unsettles the family, particularly the mother, who senses the strain beneath her husband’s composed exterior. The father’s physical gesture toward his wife, a grip on her shoulder that seems both reassuring and controlling, reveals the complicated dynamics of their relationship. The children, especially Juniper, watch closely for cues on how to respond, illustrating the family's silent endurance.

The narrator’s personal distress culminates in a visceral reaction to the breakfast, symbolizing the emotional weight she carries. Despite the outward smiles and polite farewells, the chapter closes with her fleeing to the restroom to vomit, a raw manifestation of her grief and fear. This poignant moment captures the painful

contrast between the family’s public facade and the private suffering that defines their reality, leaving a lasting impression of vulnerability beneath the surface.

Chapter Fifteen

The chapter opens with a serene scene of the narrator and Juniper enjoying an autumn morning in their backyard, embracing the lingering warmth of summer in Pennsylvania. While Juniper reads and the narrator juggles calculus homework and art assignments, their attention is drawn to the abundance of crows nearby. The narrator researches similar crow invasions in other towns, uncovering that migrations from Canada have led to massive flocks, sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands, causing concern and prompting expert interventions elsewhere.

Amid their quiet study, the narrator shares news of the local football team’s unexpected success, a rare bright spot in the town’s routine. The presence of the crows and their gathering behaviors prompt a conversation about the town’s wildlife management efforts, including the use of flares, loud noises, falconers, and even a crow-hunting season in other regions. This discussion reveals a tension between appreciating the birds and the harsh measures taken to control their numbers, reflecting the community’s complicated relationship with nature.

Juniper’s worry about the crows, especially concerning a crow named Joe, brings a personal dimension to the story. Her loss of a symbolic leather cuff adds a note of guilt and concern, which the narrator tries to soothe. Their exchange highlights themes of care, connection, and the emotional ties people form with animals. The narrator’s attempt to distract Juniper with a cherished book of fairy tales introduces a moment of warmth and nostalgia, bridging past and present through shared stories.

The chapter closes with Juniper engaging creatively by inscribing her name in the book and writing letters to Joe, imagining a dialogue with the intelligent crow inspired by the fables. Though skeptical about receiving replies, she hopes for signs of Joe’s presence, symbolizing a hopeful and imaginative bond between human and nature. This intimate interaction underscores the chapter’s blend of everyday life, environmental reflection,

and the enduring power of storytelling.

Chapter Sixteen

In this chapter, the narrator reveals a deep-seated insomnia triggered by a seemingly innocuous feature of their home: a crawl space in the basement. Although the crawl space is just a small, dark hole behind the staircase, it captivates the narrator's imagination and becomes a symbol of hidden fears. The space's dark, damp nature, combined with its obscured location, fuels a growing unease, prompting the narrator to lie awake at night, fixated on what might be concealed within or what it might represent.

The narrator explores the emotional turmoil that accompanies this insomnia, highlighting the underlying reasons for their fixation. Despite the crawl space's mundane appearance, it embodies a sense of lurking danger and secrecy. The narrator's restless thoughts seem to be amplified not just by the physical space but by their own distressing circumstances. This combination of external environment and internal anxiety creates a vivid portrayal of how physical spaces can become repositories for fear and uncertainty during times of personal hardship.

Throughout the chapter, the narrator contrasts moments of temporary calm with the anticipation of violence and chaos. Even when external conditions appear stable—when moods improve, finances stabilize, and fleeting moments of affection occur—the narrator remains unable to find peace. Instead, they brace for the inevitable outbursts of anger and destruction that shatter any semblance of security. This tension between hope and dread underscores the narrator's profound vulnerability and the oppressive nature of their environment.

Ultimately, the chapter conveys a haunting sense of fear not just of the dark or the crawl space itself, but of survival. The narrator's insomnia stems from a visceral worry about their very existence and safety, fearing that the crawl space could one day become a grim hiding place for their remains. This chilling thought encapsulates the

chapter’s exploration of trauma, fear, and the psychological weight of living with unpredictable danger within one’s own home.

Chapter Seventeen

The chapter opens with the protagonist struggling to focus amid a tense and stressful weekend at home, where unresolved family issues weigh heavily on her mind. She juggles a large stack of printed research on crow myths and folklore from various cultures and historical periods, indicative of her dedication to a demanding extracurricular project. The pervasive tension in her household, compounded by recent problems such as a lost construction bid and a broken bike, creates an atmosphere so thick with worry that it feels suffocating, affecting her ability to concentrate and function normally.

An accidental collision with Liam, a familiar classmate and football player, interrupts her fraught thoughts. Their ensuing conversation reveals a budding friendship grounded in mutual respect and shared academic ambitions. Despite their different social roles—Liam balancing sports and schoolwork, and the protagonist immersed in journalism—they find common ground in their college aspirations. Their easy banter and Liam’s genuine compliments highlight a growing connection, hinting at deeper feelings beneath the surface.

As they reach the newsroom, Liam’s offer to be a supportive listener underscores his kindness and understanding, contrasting with the protagonist’s guarded demeanor. Though she is tempted to confide in him, the weight of her personal responsibilities—particularly her commitment to her younger sisters—prevents her from fully opening up. Her honest admission about the complexities of her life and the sacrifices she must make adds emotional depth to the narrative, illustrating the challenges she faces beyond school.

The chapter closes on a poignant note, with Liam expressing empathy through his own family experience, yet respecting her boundaries. The protagonist’s internal struggle between desire for connection and duty to family resonates strongly, emphasizing her

resilience and maturity. Ultimately, she chooses to prioritize her siblings’ needs over personal relationships, reinforcing the theme of sacrifice and responsibility that permeates the chapter.

Chapter Eighteen

In Chapter Eighteen of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist, Leighton, receives her progress reports and is dismayed to find a disappointing grade in her art class, a subject she had considered a refuge from her demanding academic schedule. Despite excelling in her other classes, the C in art feels like a significant setback, stirring frustration and self-doubt as she navigates the crowded school hallways. This grade threatens her carefully balanced routine, highlighting the tension between her academic aspirations and personal interests.

Leighton’s mood shifts when Liam, a charismatic and confident classmate, approaches her offering support and teasing her about the art grade. Their interaction reveals a budding connection, as Liam suggests tutoring her to help improve her art skills. Although initially reluctant and defensive, Leighton agrees, recognizing a desire to spend time with Liam outside of school. This exchange marks a subtle but meaningful moment of vulnerability and openness in Leighton’s character, as she tentatively steps toward new social possibilities.

The chapter also explores the social dynamics and pressures of high school life. Liam invites Leighton to a football game and a subsequent party, events she hesitates to attend due to her reserved nature and fear of losing control. Her internal conflict between wanting to be social and maintaining her sense of self is palpable. The narrative captures the complexity of teenage relationships and the challenges of balancing personal identity with social expectations.

Ultimately, the chapter closes on a hopeful yet cautious note. Leighton commits to meeting Liam for art tutoring on Sunday, firmly asserting that their interaction is not a date. This boundary underscores her determination to maintain her independence while cautiously exploring new friendships. The chapter deftly portrays the nuanced emotions of adolescence, blending academic stress, social anxiety, and the tentative

steps toward connection and self-discovery.

Chapter Nineteen

The chapter opens with a vivid scene of young boys practicing flag football under the stern eyes of coaches and anxious fathers, highlighting the intense pressure placed on children to excel and be "the most" in various ways. This competitive environment, while seemingly innocuous, sows seeds of fear and disappointment that can evolve into deeper feelings of failure and anger as the boys grow older. The narrator reflects on their own detachment from football, contrasting it with their father's destructive passion for the sport, and questions why such a game holds so much power over people's lives.

Despite this skepticism, the narrator acknowledges the undeniable local enthusiasm for the team, as evidenced by frequent newspaper coverage and their sister Sofia’s involvement in cheering and reporting on the games. Motivated by a desire to understand this community spirit and support Sofia, the narrator tentatively expresses interest in attending a game. This decision marks a subtle shift from avoidance to engagement, suggesting a willingness to explore new perspectives despite personal reservations.

The family dynamic is tenderly portrayed through a shared dinner scene, where moments of calm and laughter provide a contrast to underlying tensions. The father's steady but exhausting construction work and the family's financial improvements bring a sense of stability. Conversation about a school project involving an interview with their grandmother, Nana, evokes a mixture of hope and unease, hinting at past struggles and the complexity of their familial relationships.

In preparation for the game, the narrator experiences a small but meaningful exchange with their sister Campbell, who helps with wardrobe and hair in a gesture of care and camaraderie. This interaction underscores the support and bonds within the family amidst external challenges. The chapter closes with a light-hearted moment

about a private joke, reinforcing the narrator’s tentative steps toward embracing community life and the uncertain yet hopeful path ahead.

Chapter Twenty

The chapter opens with a vivid scene at a bustling Auburn football stadium, where the protagonist, Leighton Barnes, arrives midway through the first quarter with her family. Despite the cold weather and crowded parking, the atmosphere is lively and filled with community pride. Leighton’s younger sister, Juniper, is excited by the food trucks, especially funnel cakes, highlighting the casual family moments amidst the sporting event. The family settles near the fence, away from the packed bleachers, setting the stage for Leighton’s interactions and observations during the game.

Leighton reconnects with Sofia, a cheerleader who enlists her help to watch a standout player, number thirty-six, Liam McNamara. This task introduces a subtle tension for Leighton, who is drawn into the social dynamics of the game and the local community. Campbell, a peer, joins Leighton, and their brief conversation about the changing season and the game’s mood adds depth to the setting. Their camaraderie contrasts with Leighton’s occasional feelings of detachment, emphasizing her complex social position.

As Leighton moves into the bleachers, she encounters Amelia, whose lively enthusiasm for the game contrasts with Leighton’s more reserved demeanor. Through Amelia’s spirited cheering and Leighton’s quiet observation of Liam’s impressive performance, the chapter explores themes of belonging and personal interest in community events. Leighton’s reflections on Liam’s family cheering him on further underscore a sense of normalcy and connection that she seems to both appreciate and distance herself from.

The chapter culminates in a brief but meaningful exchange between Leighton and Liam as the game progresses toward halftime. Their interaction hints at an ongoing relationship and personal history, adding a layer of intrigue. The narrative balances the excitement of the game with underlying character dynamics, capturing a moment where public spectacle and private connections intersect. Overall, the chapter paints a

rich portrait of small-town life, youth, and the subtle complexities of social engagement.

Chapter Twenty-One

In Chapter Twenty-One, the protagonist receives a call from Liam, who invites her over as promised. Though her mother cautiously allows her to go, the protagonist prepares with a mix of excitement and apprehension. In the bathroom, her younger sister Juniper watches her apply makeup, curious and slightly suspicious about Liam's role in her life. Juniper probes, trying to understand whether Liam is more than just a friend helping with art homework, reflecting the innocent yet perceptive nature of childhood.

The interactions between the protagonist, Juniper, and their older sister Campbell reveal underlying family dynamics. Campbell teases Juniper for being a tattletale but also expresses concern about Liam’s intentions. The protagonist reassures Campbell with honesty, promising to be careful with Liam, which eases Campbell’s tension. This exchange highlights the protective instincts within the family, as well as the challenges of growing up and navigating new relationships while maintaining trust among siblings.

As they prepare to leave, the protagonist comforts Campbell, who is upset about losing her bike and feels guilty for past conflicts with Juniper. Their conversation delves into themes of karma and justice, with Campbell wrestling with the idea of whether bad actions deserve punishment. The protagonist offers a more pragmatic perspective, dismissing the notion of a cosmic ledger keeping track of good and bad deeds, emphasizing the complexity of human experiences and relationships.

The chapter closes with Campbell expressing a wish for some form of justice, particularly in relation to someone she hopes will face consequences. This moment underscores the emotional weight the siblings carry, blending innocence with mature reflections on fairness and accountability. Overall, the chapter explores family bonds, the nuances of trust and protection, and the struggles of growing up amidst uncertainty and emotional turmoil.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The chapter opens with a vivid depiction of Auburn at sunset, using the changing sky as a metaphor for the narrator’s internal reflections. The narrator recalls a childhood memory involving Juniper’s colorful highlighter marks on a book, symbolizing the tension between beauty and underlying chaos. This imagery sets the tone for the visit to Liam’s home, located in a well-maintained, affluent neighborhood contrasting with the narrator’s usual surroundings. The transition from the town’s flaws to the polished environment hints at social and personal contrasts that will unfold throughout the chapter.

Upon arrival, the narrator navigates a subtle family dynamic with her mother, who questions the tutoring story but ultimately supports her artistic struggles. The exchange over the imperfect art portfolio reveals vulnerability and the narrator’s acceptance of needing help, which strengthens the bond between mother and daughter. The interaction is lightened by Juniper and Campbell’s presence, adding warmth and humor. This moment underscores themes of growth, support, and the complexities of familial relationships in the context of personal challenges.

Inside Liam’s home, the narrator meets his sister Fiona, whose friendly and humorous demeanor immediately creates a welcoming atmosphere despite initial awkwardness. Fiona’s playful teasing about Liam’s boredom and teasing establishes a relatable sibling dynamic. The narrator’s discomfort at being mistaken for a date is quickly diffused by the arrival of Liam’s mother, Mrs. McNamara, whose kindness and familiarity offer a sense of community and continuity. This scene highlights the importance of connection and acceptance within social circles during transitional life phases.

The conversation with Mrs. McNamara deepens the chapter’s exploration of identity and belonging. Her pride in progressive values, represented by the equality yard sign,

contrasts with the conservative environment of their town. The dialogue touches on challenges faced by educators in underrepresented communities and the significance of fostering inclusivity. The narrator’s anticipation of college life and broader horizons aligns with these themes, reflecting a desire for growth and change beyond the limitations of their current environment. Overall, the chapter balances personal introspection with social commentary, weaving together individual and communal experiences.

Chapter Twenty-Three

In Chapter Twenty-Three of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrative opens with a vivid description of a bonfire, symbolizing both physical heat and internal turmoil. The protagonist, Leighton, feels overwhelmed by the fire's intensity, which mirrors her own emotional unrest. Amidst the warmth and flickering flames, she finds comfort in Liam's presence, whose attentive and grounding demeanor provides a momentary refuge from her inner chaos. Their quiet connection contrasts sharply with the surrounding environment, highlighting Leighton's desire to escape the discomfort and painful memories ignited by the fire.

As the evening progresses, Leighton and Liam attempt to slip away from the group, but their departure is quickly noticed and met with teasing from Liam's intoxicated friends. The interaction underscores the social tensions and discomfort Leighton experiences within this circle, especially as she faces unwanted attention and judgment. Liam's apology for his friends' behavior and his protective stance reveal a deeper care and sensitivity, setting the stage for a more intimate and genuine connection away from the group's scrutiny.

Choosing to evade the confines of their small town, Leighton playfully suggests impossible destinations, illustrating her longing for freedom and escape. Liam responds with a proposal to simply drive around, and they venture onto dark, quiet back roads. The absence of streetlights and the isolation of the setting create a private space where their relationship can evolve without interruption. Their mutual hesitation and subsequent decision to stop the car signify a pivotal moment of vulnerability and courage, as they navigate the unspoken tension between them.

The chapter culminates in a tender and exploratory kiss, marking a significant shift in Leighton's self-perception and emotional openness. The physical closeness and Liam's gentle attentiveness help Leighton shed her guarded persona, revealing a more

authentic and vulnerable self. Despite an internal voice cautioning restraint, she embraces the moment, experiencing safety and warmth in Liam’s presence. This intimate encounter encapsulates Leighton’s complex feelings of desire, fear, and the hope for genuine connection beyond her usual defenses.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The chapter opens with the protagonist returning home, initially joyful but quickly overwhelmed by a disturbing scene in the kitchen: shattered dishes, burnt food, and a boiling pot left unattended. This sudden shift from warmth to dread sets a tense atmosphere. The silence in the house is unsettling, and the protagonist's concern grows as they discover Campbell and Juniper huddled together, frightened and seeking comfort. The tension hints at a recent domestic conflict, marked by anger and fear, and the protagonist grapples with feelings of guilt for not being present when the turmoil began.

As the protagonist tries to calm the children, they piece together the cause of the chaos: a burnt meal that escalated into a shouting match and physical destruction. The family dynamic is strained, with an unspoken rule that no one can be angrier than a particular male figure, whose volatile behavior dominates the household. The protagonist's instinct is to check on their mother, but the children's fear and urgent pleas make them hesitate. Instead, they focus on comforting the children, engaging them in conversation to distract from the underlying tension, while remaining acutely aware of the danger lurking upstairs.

The chapter explores themes of fear, helplessness, and the complexity of family relationships under stress. The protagonist's internal struggle is palpable, torn between the need to protect their family and the paralyzing fear of confronting the source of conflict directly. Moments of tenderness, such as Juniper's curiosity about Amelia Earhart and the protagonist's gentle responses, contrast sharply with the ominous presence of the father's aggression. This juxtaposition highlights the fragile safety within the home and the resilience required to endure emotional turmoil.

The climax arrives as the parents descend the stairs, bringing a mix of relief and renewed tension. The father's smug demeanor and the mother's exhaustion

underscore the ongoing dysfunction. The father’s loud music and sharp outburst about the burnt food reignite conflict, but Campbell’s composed response to clean up signals a small act of defiance and strength. The protagonist’s restraint, repeating “Don’t make it worse,” reveals their desperate attempt to maintain peace amid chaos. The chapter closes on this uneasy balance, emphasizing the precariousness of the family’s situation and the quiet courage of its members.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Twenty-Five explores the fragile, complex nature of a family home marked by cycles of damage and repair, both physical and emotional. The narrator reflects on a childhood memory when a violent outburst from their father shattered the kitchen environment, yet the broken cabinet door appeared mysteriously whole the next day. This paradox symbolizes the family's experience of trauma and healing—though the house and its inhabitants endure pain, they also exhibit resilience, as if the fractures can somehow be mended or erased over time.

The chapter reveals the recurring pattern of the father’s anger erupting unpredictably, leaving the family in fear and confusion. Despite his apologies and promises to change, the narrator understands that these violent episodes are inevitable. The father’s love, though genuine, is entangled with his destructive behavior, creating a painful dynamic that binds the family together in a cycle of hope and disappointment. The narrator and their sibling, Campbell, learn to cope by silently observing the aftermath and internalizing the contradictions of their home life.

This narrative captures the bewildering coexistence of love and harm, highlighting how the children reconcile with the brokenness around them. The house, much like their family, is described as “unbroken the way a healed bone is,” implying that while scars remain, there is a form of wholeness in survival. The children’s perception fluctuates between denial and acceptance, as they witness the physical repairs to their home alongside the emotional fractures that persist beneath the surface.

Ultimately, the chapter delves into themes of resilience, memory, and the complexity of familial love in the face of dysfunction. It portrays how trauma can distort reality and challenge one’s understanding of safety and trust, yet also how individuals adapt by compartmentalizing pain. The story’s quiet observations and subtle magic suggest a yearning for stability amid chaos, while acknowledging that some wounds leave

lasting marks that are never fully erased.

Chapter Twenty-Six

In Chapter Twenty-Six, the narrator describes a comforting new routine with Liam, who begins driving her to school each morning. This simple act of consistency brings a sense of stability and ease to her life, replacing her nighttime fears with anticipation. Their drives are quiet yet meaningful moments of connection, filled with conversation, laughter, and shared music. Although their relationship remains innocent without further romantic gestures, the narrator values these drives as a peaceful and reassuring start to her day, highlighting Liam’s steady presence as a source of comfort.

During one morning drive, they prepare for a literature exam by quizzing each other on the novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. Their discussion explores themes of social class and gender inequality, with Liam demonstrating thoughtful insight beyond typical teenage perspectives. His reflections on the persistence of gender discrimination and harassment surprise the narrator, revealing his awareness and sensitivity. This academic exchange not only helps them study but also deepens their understanding of the societal issues woven into the literature and their own world.

As they arrive at school, their lighthearted banter about chivalry and the stress of the exam underscores the growing warmth between them. Despite their youth and the pressures of school and sports, Liam’s gestures and openness suggest a genuine care that contrasts with the challenges the narrator faces. This moment embodies a blend of innocence and maturity, where simple kindness offers a refuge from the complexities surrounding them, reinforcing the chapter’s theme of finding solace in human connection amid uncertainty.

The chapter concludes with the narrator’s introspective thoughts on the tragic fate of Tess and the broader reality of women’s struggles, especially regarding domestic violence and silence. She acknowledges the danger in speaking out but expresses a

fierce determination to one day use her voice as a reporter to illuminate these hidden stories. This resolve marks a turning point, emphasizing her desire to break the cycle of silence and advocate for those trapped in suffering, promising growth from quiet endurance to empowered action in the future.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The chapter opens with the protagonist venting frustration from a challenging literature exam by retreating to the newsroom, her familiar refuge. There, she encounters Sofia, who intuitively senses her mood and offers support. Their playful banter reveals a close friendship grounded in shared interests and lighthearted teasing. The protagonist's focus quickly shifts to a practical task: contacting an ornithologist for an interview, signaling her dedication to her journalism work despite the day's earlier academic stress.

Sofia's interruption with a flyer about the upcoming winter formal introduces a contrasting social element. The dance, themed around the eighties and scheduled on New Year's Eve, represents a typical high school event with its own cultural pressures. Sofia is convinced the protagonist will be asked by Liam to attend, encouraging her to embrace the opportunity. This moment underscores the tension between the protagonist's journalistic ambitions and the allure of youthful social experiences.

As they prepare for the interview, the protagonist negotiates Sofia's company, highlighting their supportive dynamic. Sofia's gentle insistence that the protagonist accept Liam's potential invitation reflects a nurturing friendship that balances ambition with personal growth. The protagonist's reluctant agreement hints at her internal conflict—she is torn between responsibility and the desire to indulge in the carefree aspects of being seventeen.

The chapter closes with the protagonist's introspection upon noticing a flyer for a township essay contest, which demands pride in their community. This challenge feels insurmountable to her, as she struggles with feelings of disconnection and doubt. The juxtaposition of her professional drive, social pressures, and personal insecurities paints a nuanced portrait of a young person navigating the complexities of identity, ambition, and belonging.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The chapter opens with a quiet Monday morning scene where the protagonist wakes to the comforting smell of coffee and finds her mother patiently waiting with two mugs. Despite the early hour and still-dark sky, there is a calm intimacy as they share coffee and discuss the protagonist’s college plans. The mother reveals she knows about the daughter’s application to New York University, a choice made in quiet defiance of the father’s expectations. This moment highlights the subtle but strong bond between mother and daughter, as well as the tension between individual desires and familial pressures.

As the family prepares for the day, the atmosphere shifts from ordinary to spontaneous. The protagonist is hurriedly dressed and ushered out by her mother and sisters, who tease and joke, creating a lively and affectionate dynamic. The mother insists on a surprise, despite the protagonist’s resistance, and soon they embark on an unexpected trip to New York City. This adventure symbolizes a break from routine and an embrace of possibility, reflecting the protagonist’s yearning for independence and exploration beyond her hometown.

During the bus ride, the conversation turns nostalgic as the sisters reminisce about their family tradition of "Apple Days," a joyful autumn ritual of apple picking and baking that once brought them together. The memory contrasts with their current reality, marked by distance and loss, especially with the absence of their grandfather. Yet, the youngest sister’s playful renaming of their trip as an “Apple Day” to the Big Apple rekindles laughter and warmth, underscoring the resilience of family bonds and the power of shared traditions to heal and connect.

The chapter closes with a tender moment between mother and daughter, as the mother reads from her favorite book, symbolizing comfort and continuity. The protagonist quietly questions the financial strain of their spontaneous journey,

receiving a simple, reassuring answer about the source of the funds. This exchange encapsulates the mother’s quiet sacrifices and the unspoken support underpinning their relationship. Overall, the chapter weaves themes of family, aspiration, memory, and the courage to embrace change, setting a hopeful tone for the protagonist’s future.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Chapter Twenty-Nine opens with the town’s excitement over the Auburn Wolves’ undefeated season, a rare and celebrated achievement that has energized the local community and media. Sofia, a reporter for the Auburn Gazette, is deeply engrossed in covering the team’s success, even seeking an interview with the protagonist’s father about their winning streak. Despite the growing public interest, the protagonist hesitates to participate, avoiding the interview and choosing instead to attend the final regular-season game with Liam’s family, marking a moment of personal and communal significance.

The chapter delicately explores the protagonist’s observations during the game and the ride home, revealing subtle yet meaningful family dynamics in Liam’s household. The warmth and quiet affection between Liam’s parents stand in contrast to the protagonist’s more reserved nature, highlighting an intimate glimpse into what a supportive family environment looks like. These moments underscore the protagonist’s growing awareness of relationships and emotional connections, setting a reflective tone that permeates the chapter.

A significant segment is devoted to the protagonist’s interaction with Fiona, Liam’s sister, in their family basement, which doubles as a cozy gathering space and a dance studio. Their conversation touches on themes of self-acceptance and social pressures, particularly when Fiona shares an experience of subtle racism from a peer regarding her hair. Their candid dialogue about friendship, dating, and the courage to reject insincerity further develops the characters’ depth and the challenges they face navigating adolescence and identity.

The chapter closes on a tender note as the protagonist and Liam transition from discussing football to collaborating on art. The protagonist shares a drawing titled "Portrait of an Old Crow," which Liam approaches with curiosity and care, symbolizing

a growing bond and mutual understanding. This creative exchange reflects the chapter’s broader themes of connection, vulnerability, and the balance between intellect and emotion, leaving the reader with a sense of hopeful intimacy and character growth.

Chapter Thirty

In this chapter, the protagonist returns home quietly after her father falls asleep, setting a tone of careful navigation within her family dynamics. She spends time with her friend Sofia at the mall, where they experiment with various dresses for an upcoming eighties-themed dance. While Sofia effortlessly suits the neon colors popular in the store, the protagonist struggles to find a color that complements her complexion and hair. The moment of excitement arrives when Sofia secretly passes her a sleek, black dress with pockets—an ideal choice that ignites feelings of normalcy and youthful anticipation.

The protagonist faces a dilemma when she sees the price tag, realizing she cannot afford both the dress and other necessities. Sofia encourages her to find a way to make it work, highlighting the importance of the dress for the upcoming event. Meanwhile, Sofia herself purchases two bright-colored dresses, showcasing their differing priorities and styles. Their shopping trip ends with an encounter at the sporting goods store, where the protagonist spots a Tiffany Blue bike on clearance—a tempting purchase that symbolizes freedom and joy amidst financial constraints.

Choosing the bike over the dress or textbooks reveals the protagonist’s shifting values and her desire to reclaim simple pleasures lost in recent years. Upon returning home, she surprises Campbell by gifting her the bike, prompting an uncharacteristic display of gratitude and affection. This gesture underscores themes of generosity, connection, and the importance of small acts of kindness within their relationships. The cold weather signals that the bike will be a limited source of enjoyment, adding a bittersweet note to the gift.

The chapter closes with the protagonist searching for an appropriate dress at home, finding only old, ill-fitting clothes. Campbell then delivers a bag containing the black dress from the store, along with Sofia’s playful ultimatum about friendship tied to

wearing it to the dance. This moment encapsulates the supportive and sometimes humorous bonds between the characters, as well as the protagonist’s ongoing journey toward self-expression and belonging within her social world.

Chapter Thirty-One

The chapter opens with a serene weekend at home, where the narrator finds solace in the quiet and mundane moments shared with her family. This calm is a stark contrast to the usual chaos in their lives, offering a fleeting sense of normalcy that feels both precious and fragile. Despite the peace, a subtle undercurrent of apprehension lingers, hinting that this tranquility might be temporary.

As Sunday progresses, the family attempts to reconnect through a game night, a tradition from their past that carries both nostalgia and complexity. The father’s suggestion sparks cautious hope among the siblings, who are willing to embrace this rare moment of harmony. However, tensions rise quickly when the father discovers his wallet is missing, an event that disrupts the fragile calm and reveals the underlying stress and volatility present in the household.

The recovery of the wallet brings a brief relief, yet the father’s frustration and subsequent apology underscore the ongoing struggles within the family dynamic. The mother’s efforts to maintain peace and the children’s silent observations expose the emotional toll that the father’s behavior exerts on everyone. The chapter poignantly illustrates the delicate balance between hope and fear, as the family navigates the complexities of love, anger, and forgiveness.

The narrative delves into the father’s troubled past, unveiling a legacy of abuse and trauma inherited from his own father, a war veteran whose harshness shaped the family’s emotional landscape. This generational cycle of pain and anger is portrayed as a heavy inheritance, with fear as its lasting imprint. The chapter closes with a somber reflection on how the past continues to influence the present, shaping the family’s struggles and their attempts to break free from this painful legacy.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Chapter Thirty-Two opens with a tense and unsettling scene where the narrator is abruptly awakened in the middle of the night by a man’s harsh and aggressive demands. The man’s anger centers on the family’s failure to complete household chores correctly, specifically the folding of towels, which escalates into an oppressive and intimidating atmosphere. The narrator’s protective instincts surface as they try to shield the younger girls from the confrontation, while also grappling with the emotional weight of the situation and the realization of the man’s volatile nature.

The man’s relentless and cruel insistence on perfection turns a simple chore into a moment of fear and humiliation. He criticizes the girls and the narrator, tearing towels from their hands and rejecting their efforts, culminating in a moment of explosive rage when he shouts a hateful insult and smashes a vase. This act shatters the fragile calm, physically and emotionally, and leaves the household in disarray. Despite the abuse, the narrator struggles to maintain composure, suppressing tears and pain while enduring the harsh lesson he imposes about folding towels “correctly.”

After the man leaves, the narrator painstakingly folds the towels to his demanding specifications, taking care to avoid any mistakes despite the exhaustion and emotional strain. The aftermath of the broken glass requires careful cleanup, symbolizing the lingering damage caused by the man’s outburst. The narrator moves through the house, turning off lights and restoring order, yet the emptiness of the towel shelves and the disarray on the floor reflect the deeper disorder within the family’s life. The physical chores become a metaphor for the struggle to maintain stability amid chaos.

The chapter closes with the narrator lying awake, contemplating the future and the possibility of escape through academic success. The looming Honors Calculus exam represents a potential path away from the oppressive environment, yet the thought of leaving the younger siblings behind weighs heavily. The narrator’s attempt to focus on

studying is undermined by fatigue and emotional turmoil, highlighting the ongoing conflict between hope for a better life and the harsh reality of the present. This internal struggle underscores the chapter’s themes of resilience, fear, and the desire for freedom.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Chapter Thirty-Three explores the profound impact that words, especially those uttered in anger, can have on an individual’s psyche. The narrative contemplates the metaphorical weight of words, suggesting that their significance may be measured not just in physical terms like ink and paper, but more poignantly by the emotional harm they inflict. It highlights how certain words can embed themselves deeply within a person, acting like invisible burdens that pull one down emotionally, illustrating the lasting damage verbal abuse can cause.

The chapter delves into specific examples of derogatory terms and their varying effects on the narrator. Words like "ice queen" are described as stones that sink inside, symbolizing coldness and emotional distance that leave a lasting sting. Lesser insults, such as "brat," are portrayed as fleeting irritations—drops of water that can be shrugged off. However, harsher words like "bitch" are likened to a sharp splinter, painful but manageable, underscoring the nuanced ways different insults impact resilience and self-perception.

The most devastating term examined is "cunt," which the narrator describes as a festering wound that lingers, symbolizing deep psychological trauma. This word is not only hurtful but carries a tone of triumph from the abuser, who recognizes its power to wound irreparably. The chapter captures the moment this word was first spoken, emphasizing the lasting imprint it left on the narrator’s sixteen-year-old self. The intensity of this insult reduces the narrator to an object of hatred, stripping away humanity and identity.

Ultimately, the chapter poignantly conveys how language can be wielded as a weapon to diminish and dehumanize. It reflects on the enduring scars left by verbal cruelty and the way certain words can define and confine a person’s sense of self. Through this introspective examination, the chapter invites readers to consider the invisible but

heavy burden carried by those subjected to verbal abuse, underscoring the profound emotional consequences words can carry.

Chapter Thirty-Four

In the opening of Chapter Thirty-Four, the narrator confronts a poignant moment of denial and acceptance. Upon descending the stairs, they initially avoid noticing the restored window and the vase placed neatly on the coffee table, symbols of a return to normalcy that feel unsettling. Despite the rain, the narrator takes deliberate action to discard the shattered remnants of the vase, an act that signifies letting go of the past and an attempt to move forward amidst emotional turmoil. This sets a tone of internal conflict and the struggle to reconcile with recent events.

The scene shifts focus to the front yard, where the presence of crows becomes a powerful symbol. The tree, once leafy and vibrant, is now bare but teeming with black birds, evoking a haunting atmosphere. Among them, a crow named Joe delivers a note from Juniper, pleading for help. This unexpected communication through the crows introduces an element of mystery and connection between the characters and nature, highlighting the crows' role as messengers and possibly protectors. The narrator's emotional response underscores the significance of this plea.

Further deepening the narrative, Joe retrieves a wedding band belonging to the narrator's father, linking tangible family history to the unfolding story. The discovery of the ring and the lost wallet suggests that Juniper's intentions were not merely practical but also emotional, seeking meaningful connections through these objects. The narrator's reflection on this act reveals a layered understanding of Juniper's actions and the symbolic weight of these personal items, emphasizing themes of loss, memory, and hope.

The chapter concludes with an exploration of crow behavior, informed by the narrator's correspondence with an ornithologist. Crows are portrayed as intelligent creatures capable of reciprocity and holding grudges, which invites speculation about their understanding of the household's dynamics. This insight adds depth to the

narrative, raising questions about the crows’ motives and their relationship with the characters. The ambiguity surrounding whether the crows found or stole the wallet leaves readers contemplating the blurred lines between nature and human experience.

Chapter Thirty-Five

In this chapter, Leighton’s emotional turmoil surfaces as she struggles with the weight of her family’s troubled dynamics. After ensuring her sisters are off to school, she seeks refuge in Liam’s car, her tears triggered unexpectedly by his gentle greeting. The rain outside mirrors her internal storm, emphasizing her vulnerability. Liam’s presence offers a rare comfort, allowing Leighton to release the flood of emotions she usually suppresses. This moment of raw honesty reveals the depth of her pain and the isolation she feels, despite her efforts to maintain control in her daily life.

Leighton opens up about the ongoing difficulties at home, revealing a history marked by fear and uncertainty. She explains the complex reasons that keep them tethered to an unhealthy environment, including love, hope for change, and practical constraints like money and housing. The blurred line between affection and abuse complicates her understanding of her father’s behavior, making it difficult for her to fully accept the reality of their situation. Liam’s concern and willingness to listen without judgment provide a crucial support system for Leighton as she navigates these conflicting emotions.

The chapter also highlights the challenges of breaking free from toxic family patterns. Despite attempts to escape, Leighton and her siblings always end up returning, anchored by their mother’s decisions and the concept of "home." Liam’s urgent insistence that Leighton deserves better contrasts with her resigned acceptance of their circumstances. This tension underscores the emotional and psychological barriers that prevent Leighton from leaving, even as she acknowledges the need to change. The chapter poignantly portrays the complexity of familial bonds and the struggle to find safety and stability.

As the rain subsides, the imagery of crows playing in the trees symbolizes fleeting moments of freedom and lightness amidst hardship. This brief scene of natural beauty

offers a glimmer of hope and normalcy before Leighton faces the demands of her school day. Her rush to catch a calculus exam reflects the ongoing pressure to maintain appearances and responsibilities despite personal turmoil. The chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension, capturing Leighton’s fragile balance between vulnerability and resilience.

Chapter Thirty-Six

In Chapter Thirty-Six of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrator reveals a tense dynamic with Campbell, who frequently demands that she stop talking back, especially when he is angry. The narrator acknowledges her ability to provoke him with sharp, pointed remarks that escalate his mood from mild irritation to full-blown rage. Despite this, she consciously restrains herself, suppressing many of the words she wishes to say. This internal conflict highlights a deep struggle between self-expression and self-censorship, emphasizing the emotional restraint she practices to avoid further conflict.

The narrator’s vivid metaphor of swallowing words that are "pointy on their corners and sharp on their edges" conveys the physical and emotional pain caused by this silence. The words, though unspoken, remain lodged inside her, creating a persistent ache that symbolizes the burden of unexpressed feelings. This imagery powerfully illustrates the toll that suppression takes on her psyche, as the internalized emotions become increasingly difficult to bear, likened to a painful, inescapable presence within her.

Moreover, the narrator draws a poignant comparison between herself and a whale that has ingested too much human garbage, turning her body into a “time capsule” of discarded things. This metaphor extends the theme of internalized suffering, suggesting that the narrator’s silence and withheld words accumulate like toxic waste, poisoning her from within. It underscores the destructive impact of emotional repression and the sense of being overwhelmed by the detritus of unspoken pain and resentment.

Overall, this chapter delves into the complex dynamics of communication and power within the narrator’s relationship with Campbell. It explores themes of control, emotional suppression, and the physical manifestation of psychological distress. The narrator’s introspective reflections reveal the deep cost of holding back her voice,

painting a vivid picture of the silent struggles that often lie beneath the surface of fraught interpersonal interactions.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The chapter opens with the narrator preparing to interview hunters on a cold Saturday morning, reflecting on the unusual situation of facing a crow problem in their town. Despite the chilling weather and the armed men around, the narrator contemplates the futility of the crow hunt, referencing expert advice that such measures are unlikely to reduce the large crow population significantly. Instead, the narrator contrasts this approach with another town’s innovative response—a crow festival that embraces the birds as a tourist attraction, turning a nuisance into a celebration.

The narrator’s conversation with Liam reveals a personal dimension to the event. Liam shares that his father once wanted him to participate in the hunt, a tradition rooted in bonding and heritage, but Liam himself feels disconnected from this part of his upbringing. Both express a fondness for the crows rather than hostility, highlighting a generational and emotional divide regarding the town’s approach to the crow problem. This exchange adds depth to the narrative, showing how individual values and relationships influence perceptions of the hunt.

As the hunt commences, the narrator remains uneasy, distracted by thoughts of a character named Joe and the violence unfolding nearby. The hunters, while seemingly indifferent to the ecological impact, participate more for enjoyment than for any real solution. The narrator’s internal conflict and desire for an alternative—such as the festival idea—underscore a broader dissatisfaction with the town’s handling of the issue and a yearning for pride and harmony that currently feels absent.

Ultimately, the chapter conveys a mood of ambivalence and longing. The narrator wishes to escape the town’s tensions and imagines offering it as a gift to the crows, pondering what might be returned in exchange. This metaphor reflects a deep connection to place and a hope for transformation, capturing the emotional complexity of living in a community grappling with environmental challenges and cultural

traditions.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

The chapter opens with a vivid and somber scene where the narrator surveys a cold, harsh landscape littered with dead crows. The air is biting, and the ground is speckled with mud, blood, and ice, setting a bleak and chilling tone. The narrator reflects on the sheer number of fallen birds, emphasizing their lifeless forms frozen in a final confrontation with death. This imagery evokes a powerful sense of loss and the weight of mortality, as the crows, once vibrant and intelligent, now lie motionless across the field.

As the narrator moves through the scene, they notice that the dead crows are arranged deliberately into numbers—32, 57, 82, 154—each figure formed by the bodies of the birds themselves. This arrangement transforms the field into a macabre tableau resembling a child’s math homework, a stark and unsettling contrast between innocence and death. The narrator contemplates the perspective of the live crows above, imagining their view of the scene and questioning whether these arrangements hold any meaning or significance to them.

The chapter delves deeper into the narrator’s emotional response, as they recall Dr. Cornell’s assertion that crows mourn their dead, suggesting a complex awareness and communal grief among the birds. This reflection introduces a poignant consideration of memory and retribution, as the narrator wonders if the crows will remember the humans’ violent actions. The hunt, initially expected to be a straightforward event, instead becomes a moment of moral and emotional reckoning, underscored by the disturbing use of the birds’ bodies as symbols of death.

In the closing thoughts, the narrator reveals a haunting internal association between the dead crows and a more human tragedy—girls trapped in a crawl space—highlighting the perverse nature of the scene. The image of the birds arranged in numbers becomes a grim metaphor for loss and suffering beyond the immediate

context, blending the natural and human worlds in a shared experience of mortality. This final reflection leaves the reader with a lingering sense of unease and contemplation about the impact of violence and the ways it is memorialized.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

In Chapter Thirty-Nine, the narrative centers on a literature class exploring the portrayal of women in writing, highlighting works by Jane Austen, Alice Walker, and Mary Shelley. The protagonist reflects on the distinct ways men and women depict female characters, appreciating how women write women as fully realized individuals, while men often portray them in limited roles. Mary Shelley’s fearless and powerful voice, especially in "Frankenstein," resonates deeply, inspiring contemplation on strength and identity. This academic setting serves as a backdrop for the protagonist’s internal dialogue about courage and self-expression.

Following class, the protagonist’s teacher, Mrs. Riley, encourages her to apply for a writing contest sponsored by the Auburn Township Council. Despite previous struggles with prompts and self-doubt, Mrs. Riley urges persistence, emphasizing the importance of finding a unique angle and trusting one’s voice. The protagonist is working on a column about crows in folklore, using the fable of a thirsty crow raising water levels with pebbles as a metaphor for incremental progress toward seemingly unattainable goals, such as admission to NYU. This metaphor encapsulates the tentative hope and effort driving her aspirations.

The protagonist wrestles with the tension between speaking truth and confronting the conservative, male-dominated power structure in her town. She recognizes the council’s composition—police officers, teachers, and family friends—and the risks of presenting controversial ideas to an audience resistant to change. Past experiences of witnessing dismissive attitudes toward women’s voices, both in school and her mother’s workplace, reinforce her awareness of the social constraints and the cost of dissent. Despite this, she acknowledges the necessity of challenging these norms.

Ultimately, the chapter explores themes of voice, courage, and social inertia. The protagonist contemplates the potential consequences of exposing uncomfortable

truths in a town that values conformity. She reflects on the metaphor of flames that can either burn out or rage uncontrollably, symbolizing the precarious balance between maintaining the status quo and igniting transformative change. The chapter closes with a poignant recognition that some destructive forces persist because they are essential to survival, underscoring the complexity of personal and communal growth.

Chapter Forty

At the close of the day, the protagonist wrestles with anxiety about going home alone due to her mother's absence and the office being locked. Liam, a thoughtful and supportive friend, notices her predicament and offers her a place to stay during his practice. Their interaction reveals Liam's attentiveness and the protagonist’s vulnerability, setting a tone of cautious hope amid her difficult circumstances. Liam’s gesture of kindness provides a rare moment of comfort, even as the protagonist contemplates the dangers she faces in her home environment.

Liam surprises her further by offering an old smartphone as a lifeline for emergencies, highlighting the trust and concern in their relationship. Despite the potential safety net the phone could provide, the protagonist refuses it, fearing the consequences if her abuser discovers it. This refusal underscores the complexity of her situation—where even help can carry risks—and the depth of her isolation. Liam’s understanding response reflects his respect for her boundaries, even as he struggles with the limits of what he can do.

While Liam practices, the protagonist stays in the gym, trying to distract herself with schoolwork and thoughts of a scholarship essay that frustrates her. Her attempts to focus are interrupted by Brody, a confrontational character who taunts her about her social life and exhibits aggressive behavior. This encounter escalates when she defends herself by throwing a basketball that accidentally injures Brody, intensifying the tension and drawing the attention of others, including the football coach.

The chapter closes with the aftermath of this confrontation, as the football team and coach intervene, signaling potential consequences for the protagonist’s actions. The scene captures her ongoing struggle to assert herself in a hostile environment while navigating complex social dynamics and personal fears. Throughout, the narrative maintains a balance of vulnerability and resilience, illustrating the protagonist’s

challenging journey toward safety and self-empowerment.

Chapter Forty-One

In this chapter, the narrator and her sisters find comfort in each other's company as they wrap themselves in blankets on the narrator’s bed, savoring a rare peaceful moment after a tense Thanksgiving. Despite financial struggles and the cold creeping into their home due to the heating being off, they plan a cozy movie marathon to make the most of their weekend. Their bond is evident as they share ideas and laughter, creating a warm atmosphere that contrasts with the harshness of their external circumstances.

The sisters decide on watching the entire "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, embracing the idea of spending the day immersed in a shared adventure. Their excitement extends to planning a balanced assortment of snacks, blending salty and sweet treats to accompany their viewing. This simple joy highlights the importance of small pleasures and togetherness during difficult times, serving as a temporary escape from the stresses of winter and financial hardship.

A significant moment arises when Campbell asks if Liam, presumably the narrator’s romantic interest, can join their movie marathon. Initially hesitant, the narrator wrestles with the idea of mixing her close-knit, female-only tradition with someone new. Yet, her sisters’ insistence on meeting Liam and the narrator’s own reflection on the importance of acceptance and support from her family lead her to consider inviting him. This decision symbolizes a step toward vulnerability and the merging of different parts of her life.

The chapter closes with the narrator falling asleep to the soft whispers of her sisters, feeling a rare sense of calm and hope. The looming worries about their living conditions and the future momentarily fade, replaced by the warmth of familial love and the possibility of new connections. This quiet, intimate scene underscores the resilience found in sisterhood and the tentative optimism that can emerge even in

uncertain times.

Chapter Forty-Two

The chapter opens with a serene winter morning where the protagonist wakes to a sunlit room reflecting the freshly fallen snow. The quietness of the house is comforting, and the usual presence of crows around the yard is notably absent, signaling a peaceful moment before the day's activity begins. The narrator carefully navigates the house to avoid waking her younger sisters, Campbell and Juniper, highlighting a tender family dynamic. The arrival of their mother in the kitchen adds to the calm atmosphere, symbolizing stability and warmth amidst the cold outside.

As the morning unfolds, the playful energy of Juniper contrasts with Campbell's sleepiness, illustrating the unique personalities within the family. The narrator's effort to prepare for the day includes a trip to the attic to retrieve winter clothes, where she unexpectedly discovers a box of her mother's high school memorabilia. Among the nostalgic items, a literary magazine edited by her mother reveals a previously unknown side of her, showcasing her poetic talents and creative past. This discovery deepens the narrator's appreciation for her mother and creates a meaningful connection between generations.

The chapter also touches on the theme of familial support and growing relationships, as the protagonist thoughtfully leaves a note encouraging her mother's creative expression. The warmth of the kitchen scene, filled with laughter and preparations for the day, reflects the strong bonds and shared moments that define their family life. The protagonist's interaction with her mother about inviting Liam over signifies a step forward in her personal life, indicating trust and the blending of family and romantic relationships.

Finally, the conversation between the protagonist and Liam reveals a lighthearted and affectionate dynamic, filled with teasing and genuine care. Their playful exchange about snowball fights and the protagonist's smile conveys the happiness and comfort

she finds in this connection. The chapter closes on a hopeful note, emphasizing themes of love, family, and the joy found in everyday moments during a snowy winter day.

Chapter Forty-Three

In this chapter, the narrator eagerly awaits Liam’s arrival on a snowy day, capturing the nervous excitement and hopeful anticipation of their meeting. Despite the snow-covered streets and the difficulty parking, Liam’s presence brings warmth and joy. The scene transitions to the backyard where the narrator, Liam, and the children—Campbell and Juniper—engage in playful snowball battles. The initial hesitation between Liam and the narrator fades as they dive into the fun, highlighting the growing bond among them. Their playful interactions reveal the tenderness beneath their youthful energy, blending warmth with the chill of winter.

The snowball fight quickly escalates into a spirited competition, with Liam leading one team and the narrator and Campbell on the other. The children’s enthusiasm, especially Juniper’s fierce and fearless attitude, adds a lively dynamic to the game. Despite their best efforts, the narrator and Campbell’s fort is overwhelmed, resulting in laughter and camaraderie rather than defeat. This moment of shared joy and lightheartedness contrasts with the narrator’s internal feelings of coldness and vulnerability, revealing a deeper emotional layer beneath the surface of the playful afternoon.

Following the game, Liam offers comfort and warmth to the narrator, symbolized by their intimate exchange of kisses. The playful teasing from Campbell about their relationship highlights the closeness between the group. The narrator’s attention shifts to a crow sliding down the roof, a metaphor for playfulness and freedom that resonates with her reflective mood. Liam’s casual and supportive presence helps ground her overthinking, underscoring the growing emotional connection between them and the quiet moments of understanding that accompany their relationship.

The chapter concludes with a poignant discovery of a letter from Juniper to a crow named Joe, revealing a tender and imaginative relationship between the child and the

bird. The letter and the gifts Joe brings symbolize innocence, kindness, and the magic of childhood. Liam’s surprise at Juniper’s correspondence with Joe adds a layer of wonder to the scene, while the narrator’s knowledge of the gifts hints at a deeper story. This delicate moment enriches the chapter’s themes of connection, family, and the small acts of love that bind them together.

Chapter Forty-Four

In the middle of the night, the protagonist is abruptly awakened by their mother’s distressed cries, followed by the sudden and frantic entrance of the younger girls, Cammy and Juniper. Their terrified demeanor and urgent pleas reveal a dangerous situation unfolding downstairs, where the mother appears to be suffering at the hands of a violent presence. The protagonist quickly takes charge, instructing the girls to hide in the armoire for safety, despite the unsettling feeling of leaving them alone in the dark. The tension escalates as the protagonist battles their instinct to intervene immediately, understanding that any rash action could worsen the situation.

As the protagonist sits frozen on the staircase, straining to hear the events below, the house itself seems to fracture under the weight of the turmoil. A growing crack in the wall symbolizes the fragility of their home and the breaking point of their family’s safety. The mother’s silent communication and the menacing figure wielding a kitchen knife heighten the sense of danger. The protagonist’s internal struggle intensifies, torn between the urge to protect their mother and the necessity to remain hidden to prevent further violence.

The confrontation reaches a climax when the protagonist attempts to lead their mother away from the threat, only to be violently pushed back and spat upon by the aggressor. Despite the physical and emotional assault, the mother intervenes to shield the protagonist, urging them to escape while reassuring them that everything will be alright. This moment underscores the complex dynamics of fear, protection, and resilience within the family, highlighting the mother’s strength amid vulnerability.

Finally, the aggressor departs, leaving the family shaken but momentarily safe. The protagonist reunites with the younger girls in their hiding place, overwhelmed by relief and tears. The chapter closes on a note of fragile survival, capturing the raw emotions of fear, love, and hope as the family braces for what lies ahead. The scene conveys a

powerful portrayal of domestic turmoil and the courage required to endure it.

Chapter Forty-Five

The chapter opens with poignant memories of childhood pain, illustrating the narrator’s early experiences of physical and emotional hurt. From stepping on scrap metal at age four to enduring a fever at seven and grappling with the overwhelming emotions of puberty at eleven, these instances set the stage for understanding pain as both a physical and psychological experience. The recurring question, "Where does it hurt?" reveals a deep concern and an attempt to locate and comprehend suffering, framing the narrative’s exploration of trauma and vulnerability.

As the focus shifts to the present, the narrator confronts a reversal of roles: it is now the mother who is hurt, physically and emotionally. The mother’s pain is palpable, expressed through her withdrawn posture and silent tears that fall unnoticed. The surrounding environment, marked by the cawing of crows, adds a haunting, almost ritualistic atmosphere to her suffering. This imagery underscores the depth of her despair and the isolation she feels, contrasting with the narrator’s desire to provide comfort and reassurance.

The mother’s anguish is revealed to be rooted not only in physical abuse but in the emotional aftermath of abandonment. The chapter exposes the harrowing reality of domestic violence, recounting the mother’s experiences of verbal and physical torment inflicted by a violent partner. Her pain is compounded by his departure, which leaves her devastated and longing for his return despite the harm he caused. This complex interplay of fear, love, and loss highlights the enduring impact of trauma on both victim and family.

In the closing reflection, the narrator internalizes the question, recognizing that pain is pervasive and multifaceted. The final admission, "Everywhere," captures the all-encompassing nature of suffering that transcends physical wounds to include emotional and psychological scars. This chapter poignantly portrays the cyclical nature

of pain within a family affected by abuse, emphasizing the profound and lasting wounds borne by both mother and child.

Chapter Forty-Six

The chapter opens with Leighton waking up to a heavy, aching sadness rather than fear, surrounded by her mother and sisters in a cramped bed. She notices the absence of Liam's truck, suggesting he stayed at the office overnight. The quiet tension contrasts with the usual anxiety she feels, setting a somber tone. As her mother quietly tends to the younger children, Leighton senses the fragility of their situation, reflecting on the complex emotional dynamics within her family and the strain caused by Liam's behavior and the financial pressures they face during the winter slowdown.

Leighton and her mother share a bittersweet moment recalling their childhood game of creating nonsensical malaphors, a tender memory that now feels distant and fraught. Their playful exchange quickly sours as Leighton confronts her mother about the need for a restraining order against Liam, revealing the depth of her concern and frustration. Her mother, however, remains conflicted, emphasizing the importance of preserving the marriage and the home Liam grew up in, while suggesting a temporary retreat to Nana’s house to let tensions cool, a plan Leighton resists vehemently.

The emotional divide between mother and daughter deepens as they argue over responsibility and safety, with Leighton’s sharp words leaving both feeling wounded. Despite the pain, her mother asks for time to think, offering a fragile truce. Leighton decides to spend the weekend apart, staying with a friend instead of joining the family at Nana’s, highlighting her need for space to process the turmoil. Campbell’s quiet support underscores the uncertainty and unresolved tension that pervades their family life.

As her family leaves, Leighton faces the cold reality of her fractured home and uncertain future. Liam’s delayed arrival to drive her to school adds to the strain, yet their brief exchange is marked by a muted understanding of the challenges they face. The chapter closes with Leighton stepping into the cold, snow-covered landscape

dotted with crows—a symbolic backdrop that mirrors the darkness and complexity of her internal and external struggles, leaving readers with a sense of unresolved conflict and fragile hope.

Chapter Forty-Seven

In this chapter, the protagonist finds comfort in a quiet Friday evening spent with Liam, who kindly shows her the ropes of his home and offers her a shirt to wear for the night. Their interaction is relaxed and domestic, highlighted by Liam’s thoughtful preparation of a tray filled with various peanut butter sandwiches and a selection of female-led superhero movies. Their bonding over these simple pleasures underscores a sense of ease and connection, despite the scarcity of women-fronted superhero films. The night’s atmosphere is intimate yet unhurried, setting a tone of warmth and budding closeness between them.

As they settle on the couch to watch Wonder Woman, the tension between their growing attraction and caution becomes apparent. Liam expresses concern about moving too quickly, fearing that progressing physically might lead to feelings of pressure or imbalance given recent events in their lives. This hesitation reveals his respect and sensitivity toward the protagonist’s emotional state, even as it sparks frustration in her. She asserts her autonomy and reassures him that their relationship is separate from the troubling influences of her past, emphasizing mutual consent and desire as the foundation for any intimacy.

The protagonist then reveals that she is on the birth control pill, a decision she made thoughtfully and independently, which surprises Liam but helps alleviate his worries. This disclosure signifies her readiness to take control of her choices while also demonstrating her maturity and careful planning in contrast to impulsive decisions. Their dialogue about timelines for intimacy reflects a shared understanding and willingness to move forward at a pace that feels right for both, reinforcing the trust and respect growing between them.

The chapter concludes with a heartfelt confession from Liam, who distinguishes his feelings for the protagonist from his past superficial relationships. He openly admits

that he is falling in love with her, marking a pivotal moment in their connection. This declaration leaves the protagonist momentarily speechless, highlighting the depth and sincerity of their evolving bond. The chapter closes on this emotional note, emphasizing the significance of love and genuine connection amidst the complexities they face.

Chapter Forty-Eight

The chapter opens with the narrator awakening before dawn to the gentle sound of rain against the window. In this quiet, liminal moment, the narrator experiences a profound sense of weightlessness and freedom, likened to a lone bird suspended in the night sky. However, this fleeting sensation is quickly replaced by the grounding reality of their surroundings, marked by the physical presence of Liam beside them. The intimacy of sharing a bed without any romantic or physical developments emphasizes a deep, comforting connection rather than passion.

The narrator reflects on the rarity of such peaceful sleep, free from nightmares or fear, highlighting a history of unrest or trauma. The tranquility of Liam’s room contrasts with previous nights of anxiety and vigilance, suggesting a temporary refuge from the narrator’s inner turmoil. Sleep here is metaphorically described as something elusive yet desired, a fragile state just beyond reach, underscoring the narrator’s ongoing struggle to find rest and peace.

A new presence is introduced with the subtle but significant detail that they are not alone. The narrator notices Joe, a bird perched outside the window, portrayed with almost mythical stillness and timelessness. Joe’s silent vigil, resembling a statue more than a living creature, evokes a sense of watchfulness and mystery. The bird’s sharp features, illuminated by streetlight, symbolize a quiet guardian or sentinel, bridging the natural and emotional landscapes of the scene.

The chapter closes with a gentle farewell to Joe, as the narrator draws the shade closed, signaling an end to this moment of shared solitude and observation. This act encapsulates the chapter’s themes of connection, protection, and the delicate balance between freedom and grounding. The imagery and mood evoke a contemplative pause in the narrative, inviting reflection on the characters’ relationships and the subtle forces that watch over them.

Chapter Forty-Nine

The chapter opens with a reflection on the symbolism of crows, challenging the common misconception that they are omens of war and death. Instead, the narrator explains that crows represent change and new beginnings, often signaling an awakening or upheaval rather than a literal death. This sets a thematic tone, linking the bird’s symbolism to the unfolding events in the narrator’s life. The scene then shifts to a morning interaction between the narrator and Liam, highlighting their evolving relationship and the narrator’s mixed feelings about intimacy and connection.

Liam’s morning routine and enthusiasm for hiking contrast with the narrator’s hesitation, illustrating their differing personalities. Despite the cold, Liam persuades the narrator to join a hike with friends, framing it as a leisurely activity with opportunities for bird-watching, cleverly tying back to the crow motif. Their playful banter over hot cocoa versus coffee reveals deeper insights into Liam’s vulnerabilities, particularly his aversion to caffeine due to anxiety, which adds emotional depth to his character and fosters empathy from the narrator.

As they meet their friends Amelia and Sofia, the group dynamic introduces social elements and anticipations around an upcoming art show. Conversations about their artwork and the shared experience of preparing for the exhibition underscore themes of creativity and personal expression. The narrator’s pocket full of mysterious gifts from Joe adds an element of intrigue and connection to past events, while the scenic lookout offers a moment of quiet reflection on their small town and the bigger changes happening in their lives.

The chapter concludes with a candid conversation between the narrator and Sofia about the narrator’s relationship with Liam, particularly the revelation that Liam has declared his love. The narrator’s panic and uncertainty about reciprocating these feelings are met with Sofia’s supportive and understanding advice, emphasizing

patience and emotional honesty. Throughout, the imagery of the crows soaring and playing in the wind reinforces the motif of change and freedom, mirroring the narrator’s internal journey toward embracing new beginnings and emotional growth.

Chapter Fifty

The chapter centers on a high school art show where the protagonist, Leighton, reluctantly participates by standing beside her submitted drawing, "Portrait of an Old Crow." Despite her low self-esteem about her artistic skills, her classmate Liam encourages her, seeing potential in her work. The event becomes a moment of vulnerability as Leighton endures the discomfort of public scrutiny. The small-town setting amplifies her feelings of exposure and embarrassment, highlighting the emotional weight of adolescent self-consciousness and the pressure to perform in a social setting.

Leighton's discomfort intensifies when she notices Liam's own displayed artwork, a comic book-style piece titled "These Broken Wings: An Origin Story." The drawings depict a progression from a young girl with a crow to a young woman with wings, surrounded by feathers and appearing devastated, a figure Leighton recognizes as resembling herself. This revelation stirs complex emotions as she confronts the unintended personal symbolism in Liam's art, feeling both hurt and exposed by the portrayal, especially since it was shared publicly without her prior knowledge.

The tension culminates in a private conversation between Leighton and Liam, where he apologizes and explains the artwork was a class assignment inspired by his thoughts of her, not meant to hurt. He admits to prioritizing his grade over her feelings, which deepens Leighton's sense of being objectified rather than truly understood. Their dialogue reveals the challenges of navigating friendship, artistic expression, and personal boundaries, emphasizing Leighton's assertion that she is not broken or a project to be fixed, but a person deserving respect and honesty.

In a moment of reconciliation, Liam shares the full comic, showing the heroine's transformation into a powerful, fearless figure rather than a broken one. This act shifts Leighton's perspective, allowing her to see the intention behind the art and to

appreciate Liam's creativity and care. Their interaction ends on a hopeful note, suggesting the possibility of healing and deeper connection through communication and empathy. The chapter poignantly explores themes of identity, vulnerability, and the complexities of adolescent relationships.

Chapter Fifty-One

In Chapter Fifty-One, the protagonist Leighton returns home to a tense family atmosphere marked by recent conflict. Her father expresses sincere regret for his outburst, attributing it to mounting pressures from his failing business and personal struggles. Despite his apologies and a detailed plan to improve the household environment and reduce stress, Leighton senses that the family's issues run deeper than just managing the physical space. The parents emphasize practical changes and more affordable family activities, hoping to restore harmony, but Leighton remains skeptical about the effectiveness of these measures.

The chapter reveals the complex dynamics within the family, particularly the unspoken tensions between Leighton and her father. While her siblings and mother appear willing to embrace the proposed plan, Leighton is conflicted, recognizing that the root causes of their struggles are emotional and relational rather than purely logistical. Her internal resistance highlights a fracture within the family system, where past grievances and ongoing disappointments create a fragile atmosphere. The quiet exchange of looks with her sister Campbell underscores the shared understanding that surface-level solutions may not suffice.

Leighton's reflections deepen as she observes the natural world around her, symbolized by the birds in the yard, which serve as a metaphor for the family's state—numerous, yet precariously balanced. Her mother's words attempt to humanize their father, acknowledging his flaws and struggles without excusing his behavior. However, Leighton grapples with her feelings of resentment and distrust, especially upon learning where her father has been staying, which further complicates her perception of his role within their lives and the community.

The chapter closes with a poignant contrast between Leighton's view of the family as a fractured, unstable system and her mother's steadfast belief in the concept of home as

a place of resilience and love. This duality encapsulates the central tension of the chapter: the challenge of maintaining familial bonds amid chaos and pain. Leighton’s tentative gesture of holding her mother’s hand symbolizes a fragile hope for reconciliation, even as the underlying issues remain unresolved and the future uncertain.

Chapter Fifty-Two

In this chapter, the narrative unfolds within the quiet but uneasy atmosphere of a home during a harsh winter night. The protagonist assumes the role of comforter, engaging in playful distractions with Juniper to ease the tension that lingers in the house. Through storytelling, a tale of a girl made of flowers is shared, symbolizing gentle strength and the sacrifices made in love. The flower girl’s relationship with an oak tree reflects themes of giving, support, and the gradual depletion of one’s own vitality in the name of care for another, underscoring the emotional depth of the moment.

As the children fall asleep, the protagonist tends to them and then turns attention to practical matters, scanning the local newspaper for job and housing opportunities. The limited options highlight the protagonist’s struggle and concern for the future, especially regarding the possibility of pursuing college. This moment conveys a sense of responsibility and the weighing of difficult choices, emphasizing the challenges faced by the family in their current circumstances and the desire to provide stability and hope despite uncertainty.

The discovery of Campbell’s notebook reveals a quiet but profound form of support: she has meticulously saved every column the protagonist has written, demonstrating loyalty and encouragement. However, the notebook also contains numerous cutouts of police blotter reports, which introduces an undercurrent of anxiety and foreshadowing. Campbell’s habit of collecting these reports suggests a preoccupation with safety and the looming presence of danger, reflecting the tension and vulnerability felt by the characters as they navigate their precarious lives.

The chapter closes with a poignant exchange in darkness, where the protagonist confronts Campbell about the significance of the police reports. Campbell’s response—that one day they will appear in those reports, either for a positive or tragic

reason—evokes a chilling sense of foreboding. This moment encapsulates the fragile hope and fear intertwined in their existence, leaving the reader with a powerful impression of the characters’ resilience amidst uncertainty and the haunting possibility of what the future might hold.

Chapter Fifty-Three

In Chapter Fifty-Three of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrator attends a December town hall meeting focused entirely on addressing the growing crow problem in Auburn. Despite personal challenges, including a lack of transportation and strained family relations, the narrator makes the effort to participate by biking to the municipal building. Upon arrival, a solitary crow nearby humorously smokes a cigarette, setting a tone of subtle defiance as the narrator enters the meeting. Inside, the atmosphere is tense, with officials and residents gathering to discuss the failure of previous crow control methods and contemplate new solutions.

The town council reviews past efforts, including two crow hunts, with the game warden reporting disappointing results—while the initial hunt yielded over six hundred crows, the most recent attempt captured none. The crows' apparent intelligence and adaptability frustrate the hunters, prompting discussions about hiring wildlife experts to use more aggressive deterrents like flares and loud noises. The town's civil servants, who double as council members, weigh the cost and potential disturbances from these methods, highlighting the community's growing desperation to resolve the issue.

Residents share personal grievances that illustrate the crows' disruptive impact on daily life. A woman describes how the birds have learned the trash collection schedule, scavenging garbage with precision, while another man claims the crows killed his cat, eliciting concern and skepticism from officials. Additionally, a neighbor recounts the destruction of her cherished rose garden, emphasizing the emotional and material damage inflicted by the persistent birds. These testimonies reveal the depth of frustration and the desire for decisive action against the crows.

Ultimately, the town votes on Ordinance 4420, a proposal to allocate funds for contracting expert help to eradicate the crows. Despite the narrator's lone dissenting

voice, the ordinance passes overwhelmingly, reflecting the community’s collective resolve to confront the problem head-on. The chapter closes with the narrator’s urgent departure from the meeting, underscoring the emotional weight and urgency surrounding the issue of Auburn’s crow infestation.

Chapter Fifty-Four

The chapter opens with Leighton hesitating at the threshold of her home, sensing the quiet tension within. She observes her family gathered in the living room, her parents' gentle embrace contrasting with the emotional constriction she feels. Despite the silence, they attempt normalcy through a simple movie night, made more modest by the cancellation of their cable service. Leighton offers popcorn to Campbell and Juniper, signaling her desire to engage and make an effort to bridge the emotional distance that lingers. The scene sets a tone of tentative connection amid underlying strain.

In the kitchen, Leighton and her father share a candid moment, revealing their mutual attempts to connect despite past difficulties. Her father's gesture of retrieving the popcorn machine and his conversation about a local sports game reflect his effort to participate in family life and community spirit. Leighton responds with empathy, acknowledging the pressures her father once felt and encouraging him to open up. Their interaction is marked by a fragile balance of hope and sadness, highlighting the complexity of their relationship and the father's struggle with disappointment and vulnerability.

The chapter shifts as Leighton retreats to her room, where an encounter with Joe, a crow, introduces a symbolic element. Joe's persistent presence and the gift of a rusted key deepen the narrative's sense of mystery and connection to the natural world. Leighton's collection of small tokens mirrors this ongoing exchange, suggesting themes of memory, communication, and the significance of seemingly mundane objects. This quiet ritual contrasts with the earlier familial tension, offering a moment of solace and reflection.

Finally, Leighton contemplates the pervasive presence of crows over her town, describing them as relentless invaders that cannot be ignored or shut out. Despite

their overwhelming nature, she expresses an affinity for the birds, admiring their refusal to be dismissed. This metaphor underscores the chapter’s exploration of resilience and acknowledgment of difficult realities. The crows symbolize both disruption and persistence, mirroring Leighton’s internal struggle and her determination to face the challenges within her family and community.

Chapter Fifty-Five

In Chapter Fifty-Five of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrator reluctantly attends Liam’s out-of-town game, despite a deep sense of discomfort and longing for familiar surroundings. The vibrant atmosphere of the crowded bleachers contrasts sharply with the narrator’s internal unease. The community's presence is palpable, from familiar faces to local officials, underscoring the significance of the Wolves’ rare success. Yet beneath the excitement, subtle tensions simmer, hinted at by the narrator’s observations of their parents’ strained interactions and the unsettling sounds of cowbells that feel more like warnings than celebration.

As the game progresses, the narrator becomes increasingly aware of a palpable shift in their family dynamic. The father’s growing agitation culminates in a public confrontation with the mother, revealing underlying conflicts that disrupt the seemingly joyous occasion. Despite the mother’s composed exterior, the physical and emotional strain is evident, creating a stark contrast to the festive environment. The narrator’s perspective captures the complexity of witnessing familial discord amid a community event, blending personal turmoil with public spectacle.

The chapter also highlights moments of warmth and connection, particularly through the interactions between the narrator’s siblings and new acquaintances. The introduction of Fiona, Liam’s sister, brings a brief respite from tension, fostering a sense of belonging and support. These exchanges provide a counterbalance to the unfolding family drama, emphasizing themes of friendship and solidarity amidst adversity. The narrator’s protective instincts and desire to shield younger family members further illustrate the emotional stakes involved.

Ultimately, the chapter portrays a family on the brink of fracture, set against the backdrop of a communal celebration. The narrator’s vivid observations and internal reflections reveal the complexities of navigating personal pain in public spaces. The

unresolved conflict and the narrator’s urgent pursuit of their mother leave readers with a sense of anticipation and concern, underscoring the chapter’s exploration of vulnerability, resilience, and the challenges of maintaining cohesion under pressure.

Chapter Fifty-Six

In this emotionally charged chapter, the protagonist grapples with the sudden absence of a significant figure, symbolized by the missing truck in the overflow parking field. Overcome by a suffocating ache, she finds solace in the unexpected presence of her friend Sofia, whose empathy and steady support offer a brief respite from her turmoil. Their quiet moment together, amidst the cold and flurries, underscores the depth of the protagonist's internal struggle and the importance of friendship in times of distress.

The conversation between the two reveals the protagonist's ongoing difficulties at home, highlighting a tense and painful family dynamic that she has long tried to conceal. Sofia’s perceptiveness and unwavering presence provide a safe space for the protagonist to acknowledge her reality. Sofia’s offer of refuge and understanding emphasizes the theme of chosen family and the power of compassionate allies in navigating personal crises.

As the protagonist returns to the stadium, the encounter with her mother introduces a complex layer of familial relationships and the yearning for safety and normalcy. The mention of transportation plans and a possible visit to “Nana’s place” signals a desire for escape and stability amid chaos. The chapter captures the protagonist’s conflicted feelings about home, which no longer feels like a place of comfort but rather a source of pain and uncertainty.

The closing reflections convey a poignant metaphor of identity and resilience, with the protagonist likening herself to a powerful, tumultuous season rather than a gentle or predictable one. This self-realization embodies her determination to endure and transform her circumstances despite the darkness surrounding her. The chapter ends on a note of cautious hope, suggesting that even in the midst of mourning and hardship, miracles—however unconventional—are possible.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

The chapter opens with Erin, Campbell, and Juniper returning late to Auburn by bus, where they face a tense and hostile atmosphere upon arriving home. Their attempt to reach out by phone results in a delayed pickup, signaling a strained relationship. The home environment is immediately unsettling, marked by the loud stereo and the father's aggressive behavior, setting a tone of conflict and emotional turmoil. His anger is palpable, and the family dynamic is fraught with tension as he confronts Erin harshly for what he perceives as an embarrassment.

As the scene unfolds, the physical damage in the house reflects the fractured relationships within it. The father’s destructive actions—tearing a coat closet off its hinges, scattering shoes, and breaking picture frames—symbolize deeper emotional fractures. The broken homecoming photo, with obscured faces, poignantly represents the loss and disruption experienced by the family. Erin's protective instincts surface as she directs her siblings away from the chaos, highlighting her role as a caretaker amidst the turmoil.

The father's outburst reveals his frustration with his life circumstances, particularly his inability to find work and the failure of his business, which he believes defines his current despair. His anger towards Erin and the family is intertwined with his own feelings of failure, exacerbated by reminders of past mistakes. The mother's response, marked by an unexpected display of anger, challenges his authority and demands change, culminating in a confrontation where she insists that he must leave the house, signaling a critical turning point in their relationship.

The chapter closes with a chilling power struggle, as the father physically blocks the mother and exerts control by taking her car keys, symbolizing his dominance and the family's entrapment. Despite his threats and provocations, the mother remains resolute, yet the silence that follows is heavy with unspoken fear and uncertainty. Erin

retreats upstairs, seeking refuge, while the family grapples with the aftermath of the confrontation, underscoring the chapter’s themes of conflict, control, and the fragile bonds holding the family together.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

The chapter opens with a sense of fragile restoration as the narrator observes that the physical damage from the previous night has mysteriously healed, yet the emotional wounds remain palpable. The mother’s tactile recognition of the once-shattered glass and wall underscores a shared awareness of the violence endured. Despite this, the oppressive presence of the abuser continues—he withholds keys, restricts movement, and monopolizes the phone, reinforcing a climate of control and fear. The narrator’s usual courage is replaced by a profound feeling of powerlessness, highlighting the intense emotional toll of living under such domination.

Amid this turmoil, the narrator turns to writing, focusing on a final column about local crow folklore, specifically the Morrigan, a Celtic goddess symbolizing war, fate, and death. The imagery of crows darkening the sky parallels the narrator’s internal struggle, while the town’s efforts to dispel the birds serve as a metaphor for confronting the darker realities lurking beneath the surface. The fleeting presence of the crows reflects the temporary nature of external disturbances, contrasting with the enduring, unseen conflicts within the narrator’s life and community.

The arrival of a scholarship flyer with the slogan “Auburn born, Auburn proud” triggers a critical reflection on the town’s culture. The narrator associates pride not with honor but with silence and complicity, revealing how local loyalty often masks the abuse and injustice inflicted upon women. The community’s tendency to ignore desperate cries for help and to protect male reputations at the expense of truth exposes a deep societal failure. This pride enforces shadows of secrecy and stigmatizes those who dare to speak out, perpetuating cycles of violence and denial.

Concluding the chapter, the narrator resolves to confront these harsh realities through writing, beginning with a bold thesis: “It is not the crows that make Auburn ugly.” This statement challenges the town’s willful blindness and calls attention to the true

ugliness rooted in human behavior and social indifference. The chapter thus blends personal pain with broader social critique, using the motif of the crows to symbolize both the visible and invisible forces shaping the narrator’s world and the urgent need for truth and change.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

In Chapter Fifty-Nine of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist faces a turbulent Monday morning marked by concern and emotional strain. Liam, visibly distressed, picks her up and reveals his worry after hearing unsettling news from Fiona and Sofia. His protective instincts prompt him to consider calling the police, underscoring the gravity of the situation. Despite the tension, their interaction reveals a deep bond, as Liam downplays his own disappointments and focuses on her well-being. The protagonist acknowledges the uncertainty of her plans and reflects on the paradox of fear—whether known and familiar or unknown and daunting.

The journey to school is slow and symbolic, with crows densely populating the roads, creating a surreal atmosphere that mirrors the protagonist's internal conflict. Liam's cautious driving through the ominous presence of the birds emphasizes the weight of unspoken fears. Upon arriving at school, the protagonist bypasses her classes, instead seeking refuge in the newspaper office where she finds comfort and support. Sofia's immediate protective stance and encouragement to write highlight the importance of solidarity and creative expression during times of emotional upheaval.

Writing becomes a crucial outlet for the protagonist, who channels her anger and vulnerability into an essay she is determined to submit. The act of writing is both a personal catharsis and a strategic move—motivated by a desire to win a scholarship and to make her voice heard. She confronts the complexity of her hometown, Auburn, recognizing that her previous portrayal was incomplete. The town's narrative is not solely defined by pain and neglect but is also shaped by acts of kindness, solidarity, and resilience embodied by those around her.

Ultimately, the protagonist realizes that her story is an integral part of Auburn's fabric. Her critique and love for the town coexist, reflecting a nuanced understanding of identity and community. By acknowledging her own presence and experience within

Auburn, she completes her essay with clarity and purpose. This chapter emphasizes themes of vulnerability, courage, and the power of storytelling as a means to reclaim agency and foster connection amidst adversity.

Chapter Sixty

In this chapter, the narrator and Liam revisit a secluded spot where they previously shared time together, finding comfort in the quiet and the warmth of the car’s hood under a blanket. The scene is peaceful, surrounded by trees that seem to protect their small world. Their shared silence speaks to a mutual desire for solitude, yet also a unique closeness that allows them to be alone together. The atmosphere reflects both the intimacy and the complexity of their relationship as they navigate personal and communal challenges.

The narrator reveals to Liam that she submitted an essay critical of their hometown, Auburn, to a scholarship contest, risking local backlash since the essay would be published if she wins. This disclosure brings tension, as Liam expresses concern for her safety, highlighting the risks involved in speaking out. Their conversation reveals the narrator’s internal struggle between the desire to expose uncomfortable truths and the fear of the consequences, underscoring the theme of courage amid vulnerability.

Liam shares his own feelings of alienation within Auburn despite his success, describing the pressure to maintain a flawless image to avoid rejection. He acknowledges the town’s selective acceptance of his identity, which weighs heavily on him. Their exchange contrasts his external vigilance with the narrator’s hypervigilance at home, illustrating the different ways they cope with societal judgment. Both express a shared hope for a future beyond the limitations of their current environment, emphasizing resilience and the longing for freedom.

The chapter closes with a tender moment where Liam praises the narrator’s bravery and admits his affection began with her quiet strength and surprising outburst in class. Their playful banter reveals deep affection and mutual respect, reinforcing their bond. Despite the narrator’s doubts about being fully accepted, Liam’s unwavering support highlights a theme of unconditional love and acceptance, affirming their commitment

to face challenges together.

Chapter Sixty-One

In this chapter, the protagonist, Leighton, is unexpectedly called out of art class by Mrs. Riley to the newsroom, where she delivers significant news regarding Leighton's essay. The council has chosen Leighton's essay for a scholarship, which is a substantial achievement accompanied by a $5,000 award. However, the council refuses to publish the essay in the local newspaper, the Auburn Gazette, citing concerns that it poses a liability. This decision introduces a complex dynamic between recognition and censorship, highlighting the tension between personal achievement and community sensibilities.

Mrs. Riley explains that although the council acknowledges the merit of the essay and believes Leighton deserves the scholarship, they consider the essay potentially dangerous—not just for Leighton and her family but for the town as a whole. This reasoning suggests that the essay touches on sensitive or controversial issues that the council fears could provoke backlash or unrest. The protagonist’s reaction is one of quiet defiance and determination, underscored by the symbolic presence of Joe, a bird outside the window, who seems to silently urge her to take action despite the risks.

Leighton proposes a compromise: to publish the essay anonymously. She argues that if the council refuses even this option, it would reveal that their objections are not solely about protection but about suppressing the essay’s message. She expresses a strong desire to see her work shared with the Auburn community, even without public credit, emphasizing the importance of the essay’s impact over personal recognition. Mrs. Riley is hesitant but agrees to advocate for anonymous publication, reflecting the delicate balance between institutional constraints and individual expression.

The chapter closes with Leighton contemplating alternative uses for her essay, such as submitting it to other college applications, including New York University. This resolution reflects her resilience and adaptability in the face of censorship. The

absence of Joe at the end symbolizes a moment of transition, leaving Leighton poised to continue her journey with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to her voice, despite the challenges posed by the town’s resistance.

Chapter Sixty-Two

The chapter opens with a reflection on the ancestral home that has housed the narrator’s family for generations. This house, passed down from their father’s father, stands as a symbol of legacy and history. While the narrator doubts any inherent evil in the house’s origins, there is an unsettling sense that something intangible has been embedded within its structure—a residue of the emotions and intentions of those who built it. The narrator contemplates how the house might carry a silent influence, shaped by the temperament and actions of their grandfather.

Delving deeper, the narrator suggests that every creation carries a fragment of its creator, whether conscious or not. In this case, the grandfather’s anger and flaws may have been unknowingly infused into the very foundation and walls of the house, and perhaps into the surrounding town itself. This idea extends beyond the physical, hinting at a metaphysical connection between human emotions and the spaces they inhabit. The notion of "magic," as referenced by a character named Campbell, is reconsidered not as fantasy but as a haunting reality tied to the family’s history and environment.

The narrator once yearned for a protective force within the house, hoping it might offer something beyond fear—a guardian watching over the family. However, this hope is dispelled by the realization that the house’s power has not safeguarded the innocent but rather shielded a particular individual, presumably the grandfather, from the consequences of his actions. This protective influence has created a cycle where wrongdoing goes unchecked, fostering a dangerous sense of impunity.

The chapter closes with a poignant meditation on the psychological effects of such protection. The idea of acting without facing repercussions might lead one to believe their actions are justified or harmless, encouraging repeated misdeeds. This reflection underscores the corrosive impact of unchecked behavior, suggesting that the house’s

legacy is not one of comfort or safety, but of enabling destructive patterns. The narrative leaves readers with a somber understanding of how history, environment, and human nature intertwine to shape both place and people.

Chapter Sixty-Three

In the early hours of Christmas Day, the narrator is abruptly awakened by the unsettling noise of Axl Rose’s music and raised voices downstairs. She finds her younger sisters frightened and huddled together, prompting her to lead them to her room for safety. Attempting to secure the door against their volatile father, she manages to fix the lock partially, offering a fragile sense of protection. Despite their efforts, the father forcefully breaks through the door, his presence looming with anger and unpredictability, setting the stage for a tense confrontation within the household.

The father’s fury centers on a newspaper article featuring the narrator’s winning essay in the Auburn Gazette, a piece that exposes the town’s complicity in its own ugliness. Although anonymous, the essay is unmistakably hers, and the father’s reaction is one of rage and fear. He worries the essay will ruin their family’s construction business and bring unwanted attention, revealing the deep fractures within the family and the community. The narrator, however, feels a quiet defiance, hoping the truth will be acknowledged rather than hidden.

As tensions escalate, the father’s destructive behavior intensifies—he slams cabinets, turns off the heat, and opens windows, creating a chaotic and cold atmosphere. The mother attempts to defuse the situation, urging calm and retreat, but the father’s dark mood grows more menacing. A violent altercation ensues when he assaults the mother, prompting the narrator and her siblings to intervene. The physical struggle leaves the narrator injured and terrified, underscoring the perilous and volatile nature of their family life.

The chapter closes with the narrator shielding her sisters and mother, fearing the presence of a gun nearby and the potential for irreversible tragedy. The tension culminates with a symbolic moment: a crow’s sudden flight outside the window, representing both the darkness enveloping their lives and a glimmer of elusive

freedom. The narrative captures the raw fear, unresolved conflict, and fragile hope that define this critical moment in the family’s story.

Chapter Sixty-Four

The chapter opens with the stark image of red and blue police lights flashing against the worn siding of a house, symbolizing a fractured version of the American dream. The cold night and the narrator’s protective grasp on a smaller hand emphasize a feeling of vulnerability and tension. The arrival of Officer Bill DiMarco marks a turning point, as the narrator anxiously wonders whether their father will be released again, only to see him handcuffed and taken away. The scene conveys a deep sense of fear and the harsh reality of their family’s situation.

As the situation unfolds, a second officer contacts a judge to obtain an emergency protection order, highlighting the procedural challenges posed by the holiday timing. The temporary order will remain in effect until a formal hearing can be held after the new year, barring the father from the home and requiring him to surrender his firearm within twenty-four hours of release. This legal intervention introduces a fragile sense of safety and control amid ongoing uncertainty. The family’s cautious hope is underscored by the official actions taken to protect them.

Officer DiMarco’s discomfort and awkward apology to the narrator reveal the emotional weight of involvement in such personal and painful circumstances. His acknowledgment of the narrator’s essay, which presumably detailed their lived experience, contrasts with the narrator’s exhaustion and skepticism toward adult apologies. The interaction reflects a complex mix of empathy and helplessness from those tasked with enforcing the law, as well as the narrator’s guarded response to these gestures.

The chapter closes with a moment of quiet resilience. The narrator’s mother remains resolute, and for the first time in a long while, the narrator feels genuinely heard and possibly safe. This fleeting reassurance, born from the protection order and the presence of law enforcement, offers a glimpse of hope amid hardship. The final

sentiment captures the bittersweet relief of feeling protected, even if only temporarily, in a situation shaped by fear and uncertainty.

Chapter Sixty-Five

The chapter opens with a cozy yet anticipatory scene at the narrator's house, where she and her friend Sofia prepare for a New Year’s Eve event. The narrator dons a striking black satin dress that accentuates her fiery hair, evoking a blend of classic and playful imagery. Their lighthearted banter about appearance and style sets a warm, intimate tone. The arrival of Campbell adds to the excitement as they all get ready to face the cold winter night, highlighting the close-knit relationships and the support system surrounding the narrator.

Amid the preparations, a poignant moment arises when the narrator discovers two newspaper clippings: one featuring her essay and another detailing a domestic violence arrest. This discovery evokes a strong emotional response from her mother, who reflects on past trauma. The clippings symbolize a turning point, acknowledging the narrator’s courage and the community’s reckoning with previously hidden issues. The note accompanying the article signifies validation and support, reinforcing the chapter’s underlying theme of confronting difficult truths.

As they drive through the town, the overwhelming presence of crows symbolizes an ominous and transformative atmosphere. The birds dominate the landscape, metaphorically representing the town’s struggles and the impending change. The visual description of the darkening sky and the looming clouds intensifies the apocalyptic mood, underscoring the gravity of the situation as the community prepares to address the challenges ahead. This setting frames the chapter’s tension between despair and hope.

The chapter culminates in a vibrant social scene at the school gymnasium, where the narrator and Sofia shine in their retro-inspired outfits. The interaction with Liam introduces a hopeful subplot; his acceptance into an art program promises new opportunities and personal growth. Their affectionate exchange and Liam’s playful

Superman shirt contrast with the earlier darkness, symbolizing resilience and optimism. The chapter closes on a note of empowerment, emphasizing the importance of truth-telling and the potential for renewal within the town and its inhabitants.

Chapter Sixty-Six

In Chapter Sixty-Six of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist and Liam experience an abrupt disruption at the Winter Formal when Brody confronts them with a harsh rumor about the protagonist’s family. Despite Brody’s antagonistic behavior, Amelia, the student council president, intervenes and successfully removes him from the dance, preserving the atmosphere for the others. This moment reveals underlying tensions within their social circle and highlights the protective bonds forming between the characters, showcasing Amelia’s unexpected assertiveness and the protagonist’s gratitude.

Seeking refuge from the chaos, the protagonist and Liam retreat to the school newsroom, a private, dimly lit space that contrasts sharply with the noisy gym. Their interaction here is intimate and tender, emphasizing their deepening relationship through playful affection and shared moments away from public scrutiny. The quiet setting allows them to connect on a personal level, blending vulnerability with lightheartedness, as they navigate the balance between youthful romance and the pressures surrounding them.

The chapter shifts as the protagonist checks her email, introducing a moment of suspense and intrigue. An ornithologist’s email reveals a thermal-imaging map showing an unusually high concentration of crows centered near the protagonist’s home. This unexpected detail injects a mysterious element into the narrative, hinting at potential symbolic or plot significance tied to the crow imagery and the protagonist’s personal history. The discovery unsettles both characters, adding depth and complexity to the unfolding story.

The chapter concludes on an uplifting note when the protagonist opens another email, this time an acceptance letter from NYU. This moment of triumph balances the earlier tension, illustrating the protagonist’s academic achievements and future possibilities.

The jubilant reaction from Liam underscores their strong emotional connection and shared excitement. Overall, the chapter weaves together themes of conflict, intimacy, mystery, and hope, advancing character development while setting the stage for upcoming challenges and opportunities.

Chapter Sixty-Seven

In this chapter, the narrator chooses to leave early, even before the traditional New Year’s Eve fireworks, highlighting the emotional difficulty holidays present for her. She reflects on the unique traditions she shares with Campbell and Juniper, particularly their annual rooftop gathering to watch fireworks over Auburn. Despite the emotional weight of the season, she is determined not to miss this moment. The scene shifts to a quiet, intimate moment as they park near her home, setting a tone of closeness and anticipation between her and Liam.

The atmosphere is vividly described with natural imagery, emphasizing the presence of crows and the clarity of the night sky filled with stars. These elements create a sense of stillness and focus, as if the world narrows down solely to the two characters. The unsettled crows and the expansive starry sky serve as a backdrop that intensifies the emotional connection and the significance of this shared moment between them.

Amid this serene setting, the narrator experiences a spontaneous and heartfelt confession of love. The words come naturally and swiftly, symbolizing a release of emotions that had been held back. Liam’s warm response and affectionate gestures reinforce the mutual feelings and deepen their bond. Their exchange is tender and genuine, capturing a pivotal emotional turning point in their relationship.

The chapter closes with a playful yet meaningful exchange about promises, underscoring a mix of vulnerability and cautious optimism. The narrator’s repeated phrase, “No promises,” adds complexity to the moment, suggesting both hope and uncertainty about the future. The stars and crows silently witness this intimate scene, reinforcing the blend of beauty, tension, and possibility that defines the chapter’s essence.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

The chapter opens with the narrator standing on the edge of a sidewalk, watching Liam drive away into the night. A sense of hope briefly blooms as she allows herself to imagine a future where promises replace uncertainty, and the idea of returning home to Liam brings a genuine smile. This fleeting moment of optimism is sharply contrasted by the sudden eruption of fireworks in the sky, signaling the beginning of New Year's celebrations, yet the narrator is drawn back to the present by an unsettling darkness surrounding her home.

Upon arriving at her house, the narrator notices that all the windows are open and the house is unusually dark for the hour. A palpable tension rises when she realizes she is not alone; a shadowy figure waits silently inside. The presence of this figure is deeply disturbing, as it signifies a violation of a protection order. The narrator's initial hopeful thoughts are quickly overshadowed by fear and uncertainty, as she contemplates the safety of her children and the unsettling reality of the intruder's return.

The house’s darkness symbolizes the narrator’s inner turmoil and the danger lurking within what should be a safe space. Despite the threat, she hesitates to flee, concerned for the well-being of the girls who might be frightened or harmed. The chapter captures a moment of intense vulnerability, where the narrator confronts the harsh intrusion of past fears into what she had momentarily envisioned as a hopeful future. The tension between hope and fear is palpable throughout this encounter.

The chapter closes with the narrator standing at her doorstep, facing the ominous figure in the dark. She reflects on the hope she briefly embraced and wonders what it would feel like to come home without fear. This poignant ending underscores the central theme of the chapter: the struggle between the desire for safety and happiness and the harsh reality of trauma and threat. The chapter leaves readers with a powerful sense of unresolved tension and the longing for a future free from fear.

Chapter Sixty-Nine

The chapter opens in a tense, darkened house where the power has been deliberately cut off as a form of punishment. The narrator is upstairs with two children, Campbell and Juniper, enveloped in silence and fear. The atmosphere is heavy with anxiety, underscored by the ominous absence of light and warmth. The narrator’s internal panic contrasts with the stillness around them, highlighting a desperate need for escape and safety. Thoughts race about finding a phone or a weapon, reflecting the looming threat they face and the urgency to protect the children.

Downstairs, an unsettling confrontation unfolds. The narrator cautiously approaches their mother, who is seated in the dark living room alongside an armed man. The presence of the gun immediately escalates the danger. The narrator’s slow, deliberate retreat underscores the precariousness of the situation. Meanwhile, the children’s subtle movements upstairs heighten the tension, as the narrator silently urges them to remain hidden. The palpable fear of impending violence permeates the scene, emphasizing the fragile balance between survival and disaster.

The mother’s intervention introduces a complex dynamic. She positions herself between the narrator and the armed man, attempting to shield her child while negotiating the threat. Her calm, measured actions contrast with the narrator’s immobilizing fear, demonstrating a protective resolve born of maternal love. This moment reveals deep emotional undercurrents, as memories of comfort and security clash with the present danger. The mother’s insistence that the narrator retreat upstairs is both an act of care and a grim acknowledgment of the peril they face.

In the final moments, the narrator grapples with conflicting impulses—the instinct to flee versus the gravitational pull of love and memory. The chapter closes on a poignant note of vulnerability and strength, with the narrator recognizing the irrationality of their fear yet feeling unable to resist it. The mother’s presence offers a

fragile anchor amid chaos, embodying both the emotional core and the physical reality of their situation. This blend of tension, love, and uncertainty encapsulates the chapter’s powerful exploration of fear, protection, and the bonds that hold us together in crisis.

Chapter Seventy

The chapter opens with an immediate sensory detail—the smell of smoke—creating an atmosphere of tension and confusion. Despite the presence of gunfire and fireworks, the protagonist, Leighton, notices the unusual smell, which hints at danger beyond the expected chaos. The setting is a noisy town where such sounds blend into the background, yet the protagonist’s acute awareness distinguishes this moment as significant. The scene quickly becomes intimate and urgent as Leighton is pushed back against the stairs, with his mother anxiously checking if he is injured, highlighting the personal stakes amid the external turmoil.

The narrative then shifts focus to the damaged environment, describing a wall wounded by gunfire and metaphorically bleeding, emphasizing the violence that has invaded their home. While a man nearby reacts with panic, desperately searching for keys, he neglects the physical damage around him, underscoring a sense of disarray and desperation. This juxtaposition between the physical harm to the house and the frantic human response builds a layered tension, illustrating how the characters are caught between protecting themselves and managing the immediate crisis.

A striking moment occurs with the arrival of Joe, a crow that enters through an open window. Joe’s presence carries symbolic weight, reminiscent of the Morrigan, a figure associated with fate and prophecy. The crow’s actions—knocking over a vase and revealing hidden objects including keys—introduce a glimmer of hope and guidance amid chaos. The scattered tokens left for Juniper, including pennies and paper clips, add a layer of personal history and emotional depth, connecting the characters to past events and relationships. This scene balances the threatening atmosphere with a moment of clarity and revelation.

The chapter concludes with Joe seizing the keys and flying away, signifying a turning point. The keys, hidden and then revealed, represent potential escape or resolution,

while the crow’s departure suggests a call to action or a shift in fate. The fireworks illuminating the scene further enhance this moment of illumination, both literal and metaphorical. Overall, the chapter masterfully blends elements of danger, symbolism, and emotional resonance, setting the stage for what lies ahead while maintaining a vivid and immersive narrative style.

Chapter Seventy-One

In this poignant chapter, the narrator reflects on a harrowing night marked by violence and survival. The narrative opens with a chilling acknowledgment of an alternate reality where another version of Leighton Barnes does not live to see the dawn. This parallel universe serves as a stark contrast to the narrator's own experience, where a bullet narrowly misses causing fatal harm. The tension is palpable as the narrator feels the closeness of death, sensing the wild, caged emotion within still beating strong despite the threat.

The chapter delves into the physical and symbolic impact of violence as the bullet grazes the narrator’s ribs and embeds itself in the walls of their home. This house is portrayed as a vessel of anger, housing not just the physical remnants of aggression—broken glass, shattered vases, cracked plaster—but also the intangible weight of rage that has been embedded into its very structure. The imagery conveys a living, breathing entity shaped by pain and fear, emphasizing the deep scars left by the violent presence it conceals.

As the narrative progresses, the house itself seems to resist damage, with the bullet falling out and the wall repairing itself as if animated by a dark magic. This supernatural element adds a layer of complexity, suggesting that the environment is complicit in perpetuating the cycle of violence. The house’s ability to “fix” the violence inflicted upon it symbolizes an unyielding force that traps the inhabitants in a state of ongoing danger and unrest, highlighting the persistent threat they face.

Ultimately, the chapter closes on a note of unresolved tension, underscoring that the night—and the danger within it—has not ended. The narrator’s realization that safety remains elusive, whether from the violent individual, the haunted house, or its mysterious power, leaves the reader with a lingering sense of unease. This ending reinforces the chapter’s themes of survival, the omnipresence of violence, and the

haunting persistence of trauma within both the physical and emotional landscapes.

Chapter Seventy-Two

In Chapter Seventy-Two, tension escalates rapidly as the protagonist, urged by their mother, confronts a perilous situation involving Leighton, who is still holding a gun and appears trapped without his keys. The urgency to escape is complicated by the presence of smoke and fire originating from the protagonist’s room, threatening the safety of the girls, Campbell and Juniper. The scene conveys a sense of exhaustion and disbelief as the protagonist crawls upstairs, symbolizing the overwhelming pressure of the moment and the fragile passage of time amid chaos.

Upon entering the burning room, the protagonist discovers the lantern spilled and flames spreading to the curtains and quilt, with smoke filling the space. The girls are trapped inside a locked armoire, their distress palpable through coughing and sobbing. Desperation mounts as the protagonist’s fingers bleed from frantic attempts to open the door, until a rusted key, previously thought lost, is retrieved and used to free them. The girls emerge physically unharmed but emotionally shaken, while the protagonist’s bloodied hands reflect the damage inflicted on the home itself.

The danger intensifies as the locked door is repeatedly slammed, signaling the presence of an intruder and trapping the group inside the smoke-filled room. Forced to flee onto the roof, the family navigates through billowing smoke and fire, with the threat of the intruder looming. The protagonist senses an instinctual call to move higher, driven by fear and an almost supernatural awareness. A chaos of crows descends, driving the intruder back into the burning house and symbolizing a protective force that temporarily contains the danger.

As the group reaches the highest point of the house, they face a new menace—a shadowy figure embodying rage and destruction, advancing through the smoke. Despite the imminent threat, the girls remain calm, their focus drawn to the approaching crows rather than the shadow. This moment highlights a juxtaposition of

fear and serenity, with the crows arriving as a beacon of hope and protection amid the engulfing fire and chaos. The chapter closes on this tense but hopeful note, emphasizing resilience and the mysterious forces at play in the family’s struggle for survival.

Chapter Seventy-Three

In Chapter Seventy-Three of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrator confronts a powerful internal conflict surrounding a fire that has ignited, both literally and metaphorically. While asserting that they did not physically start the blaze, the narrator admits to having nurtured a deep, dark desire for destruction. This fire symbolizes more than just a physical event; it embodies the intense emotions and suppressed fears that have long festered within them. The chapter explores the complexity of intention versus action, revealing how unspoken wishes and internal turmoil can manifest in unforeseen and destructive ways.

The narrator’s reflections reveal a profound sense of guilt intertwined with acknowledgment of personal responsibility. They confess to having “willed” and “dreamed” the fire into existence, suggesting that the destructive outcome was fueled by accumulated fear and resentment. This admission underscores the theme of inner conflict, where the narrator grapples with the consequences of harboring ill will. The fire becomes a metaphor for the emotional and psychological pressures that have built up over time, highlighting the destructive potential of unresolved anger and pain.

Despite the turmoil, the narrator shows no inclination to halt the fire once it has begun. This acceptance of the fire’s continuation suggests a complex mix of defiance and surrender. The narrator’s stance implies that the fire, while dangerous, also represents a form of release or transformation. It is as if the blaze offers a way to confront long-suppressed fears and emotions, even at the cost of destruction. This ambivalence adds depth to the narrative, illustrating the tension between destruction and the desire for change or catharsis.

Ultimately, this chapter delves into the human psyche’s darker corners, examining how buried emotions can ignite unforeseen consequences. The narrator’s candid admission and the vivid imagery of the fire serve as a metaphor for internal struggle

and the duality of human intent. Through this exploration, the chapter invites readers to consider the complexities of guilt, responsibility, and the transformative power of confronting one’s inner demons. It is a poignant reflection on how the fires we do not physically start can nevertheless consume us from within.

Chapter Seventy-Four

Chapter Seventy-Four opens with a vivid metaphor of falling, portraying it as a desperate leap taken in darkness amidst chaos. The narrator describes a scene where both the sky and the house are engulfed in flames, symbolizing an overwhelming crisis with no apparent refuge. This imagery sets a tense and urgent tone, emphasizing the inevitability of the fall and the perilous circumstances that force the characters into action.

Despite the dire situation, there is a glimmer of hope and trust. The narrator expresses a firm belief in Joe’s presence and the assurance that help is near, even as the ground beneath them collapses. This leap of faith highlights the tension between fear and trust, illustrating the characters’ reliance on external forces to save them from destruction. It underscores a moment of surrender to forces beyond their control.

The narrative then shifts to a surreal rescue, where crows—symbolic creatures—arrive to catch the falling characters. The birds’ actions of cawing, clawing, and covering them in feathers suggest a protective and nurturing intervention. This fantastical element introduces themes of salvation and transformation, as the characters are literally lifted away from danger by these enigmatic beings.

Finally, the chapter concludes with the characters being carried off by the crows, escaping the burning house and night. This departure from the immediate threat signifies a transition from destruction to safety, and possibly rebirth. The imagery of flight and feathers reinforces the chapter’s motif of escape and hope, leaving readers with a powerful impression of rescue amidst chaos.

Chapter Seventy-Five

In Chapter Seventy-Five, the narrative unfolds with a tense and urgent scene where the characters are abruptly set down on the opposite side of the road from a burning house. Campbell immediately dashes toward the fire, prompting a desperate reaction from Mom, who tries to stop her but fails. The narrator reveals a complex emotional conflict, admitting a harsh willingness to let Campbell burn, contrasting sharply with Campbell's unyielding determination to save someone trapped inside. This moment highlights the intense personal dynamics and the gravity of the situation as the fire rages on.

The narrator follows Campbell into the smoke-filled house, discovering an unconscious person lying on the floor. Campbell struggles to pull the heavy figure toward the exit, all while choking on the thick smoke. Despite the danger, Campbell refuses to leave, driven by a powerful sense of duty and compassion. The narrator, overwhelmed by the suffocating environment, urges Campbell to abandon the rescue, but ultimately joins in pulling the unconscious individual out, demonstrating the shared resolve among the characters amid the life-threatening crisis.

Upon reaching safety, the group—now including Mom and Juniper—works together to drag the rescued person across the street, away from the collapsing structure. The tension escalates as the house begins to shudder and collapse behind them. The vivid description of the house folding in on itself underscores the destructive power of the fire and the narrow escape from disaster. This moment solidifies the chapter's themes of survival, sacrifice, and the fragile boundary between life and death.

The chapter concludes with the house's collapse, a dramatic and final event that symbolizes the end of a perilous ordeal. The intense emotions, physical danger, and quick decisions made by the characters emphasize their resilience and interconnectedness. Through this harrowing episode, the narrative explores themes of

guilt, courage, and redemption, leaving readers with a profound sense of the stakes involved and the strength required to confront such dire circumstances.

Chapter Seventy-Six

In this chapter, the characters find themselves huddled together in the street, vulnerable and uncertain after a traumatic event. Emergency medical technicians attend to their injuries while a police officer conducts an inquiry. Mrs. Stieg offers comfort by distributing blankets and preparing coffee, creating a small moment of warmth amid the chaos. The narrator reveals a close brush with violence, marked physically by a bullet graze on her side, underscoring the tangible danger they have just escaped.

The arrival of Bill DiMarco introduces a grim legal reality to the scene. He speaks of arrest warrants and charges stemming from the violation of protective orders, endangerment of children, and the discharge of a firearm, making incarceration an inevitable outcome. Despite this, the narrator distances herself from the legal consequences to confront the ruins of the house, symbolizing the aftermath of the violence they endured. This moment highlights the tension between immediate survival and the broader implications of justice.

Reflecting on the events, the narrator contemplates the shadow of violence that has long loomed over them—a legacy of anger and an inheritance of fear. The imagery evokes a sense of haunting and the persistent threat that once nearly consumed them. However, there is a resolute determination that this time, the destructive force represented by the house will not triumph. Instead, its destruction marks a turning point, suggesting a break from the cycle of violence.

The chapter closes with a powerful metaphor, likening the ashes of the house to the dark wings of a crow. This imagery conveys both the ominous nature of their past and the potential for transformation through destruction. The narrative captures a moment of profound reckoning and the fragile hope of emerging from darkness, emphasizing resilience in the face of inherited trauma and imminent danger.

Chapter Seventy-Seven

The chapter opens with a vivid dawn scene where the rise of the sun is accompanied by the awakening of crows in the yard and surrounding trees. This natural spectacle captures the attention of the narrator and their companions, Campbell and Juniper, as a gray bird among the black crows takes flight. The imagery of thousands, then tens of thousands, of crows ascending into the crimson sky creates a powerful visual metaphor reminiscent of phoenixes rising from flames, symbolizing renewal and transformation.

As the birds soar, the narrator reflects on the significance of this moment, describing it as the dawn of a new day and a new year. This transition is likened to emerging from a nightmare and awakening to a fresh world, emphasizing themes of hope, rebirth, and the possibility of change. The sunrise and the flight of the crows together evoke a sense of liberation and the start of something profoundly different and promising.

The emotional core of the chapter is deepened through the physical and symbolic connection between the narrator and their companions. Campbell and Juniper stand beside the narrator, each taking a hand, which brings a palpable sense of comfort and grounding. This gesture symbolizes unity, support, and the feeling of being anchored after a period of uncertainty or turmoil, highlighting the importance of relationships in the journey toward healing and stability.

Concluding the chapter, the narrator experiences an internal shift—a settling of the restless, winged feeling within their chest, now silent and safe. This moment encapsulates the theme of finding peace and belonging, culminating in the affirmation that they are home. The chapter closes on a note of calm and resolution, reinforcing the idea that despite past struggles, there is a place and a moment where one can finally rest and feel secure.