If These Wings Could Fly

If These Wings Could Fly by Kyrie McCauley follows Leighton, a teenage girl living in a troubled home in a small town. Struggling with family secrets and an abusive father, she finds solace in the local bird sanctuary. As she learns to navigate her own path, Leighton discovers the power of friendship, hope, and personal strength.

Cover

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Title Page

In the dedication of "If These Wings Could Fly," the author pays tribute to significant figures in their life. The dedication begins with heartfelt words directed to the author's little brother, Jackson, characterizing him as a star that illuminates their universe, humorously noting his greater height. The mention of Kayleigh and Katharyn highlights the essence of companionship in confronting darkness, symbolized by their shared act of wielding flashlights together, portraying unity and bravery.

There is also a poignant dedication to survivors of domestic violence, showing deep empathy for those who have endured such challenging experiences and acknowledging those who remain trapped in these circumstances. The words convey a message of hope and resilience, suggesting that while current struggles might appear daunting, they do not signify the conclusion of one's journey. Instead, the author encourages survivors that there is more to come, urging them to embrace the notion that the continuation and direction of their story lie in their own hands.

The dedication is infused with sincerity and warmth, setting a tone of solidarity and empowerment for readers. It establishes a connection among the author, their loved ones, and the broader community of survivors, fostering a shared understanding of adversity and the strength it takes to rise above it. The closing lines encapsulate the theme of new beginnings, honoring the courage it takes to seek freedom and healing. This dedication serves not only as a personal note but also as an inspiring message to anyone facing similar struggles, encouraging them to envision a future filled with possibility.

Overall, the dedication beautifully encapsulates themes of love, bravery, and the enduring quest for healing, painting a hopeful picture for both personal growth and collective resilience in the face of adversity.

Chapter 6

In Chapter 6 of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the story begins on a routine Monday morning. The characters make their way down the street toward the bus stop, passing by Mrs. Stieg's house, as they do every day. But today, something catches the protagonist’s eye as they approach Mrs. Stieg’s garden. In the far corner of the yard, a bush that had once been thriving now lies in ruins. This is no simple damage, like the incident where a bush had been broken in the past. Instead, the bush has been completely obliterated, leaving behind nothing but disturbed soil and scattered red petals. These petals, once vibrant, are now the only evidence of a violent force having passed through, and they hint at an intense and purposeful destruction. The sight immediately evokes a sense of disturbance, a feeling that something out of the ordinary has occurred.

The protagonist cannot help but share the discovery with Campbell, hoping for some sort of explanation, or at least a reaction. But Campbell’s response is almost dismissive, shrugging off the significance of the event as if it means little to him. However, as the protagonist watches him, there is a brief moment of hesitation. The protagonist notices a flicker of something deeper in Campbell’s eyes—something that can only be described as pride. This brief glimmer of pride feels entirely out of place given the wreckage they’ve just witnessed. It seems as though Campbell’s reaction doesn’t match the gravity of the situation, and this inconsistency raises suspicions in the protagonist’s mind. The feeling grows stronger as the protagonist begins to wonder whether Campbell could have been responsible for the destruction of the bush. With the suspicion settling in, the protagonist contemplates looking at Campbell’s bike for signs of the red petals that could act as confirmation of their theory.

Despite the growing impulse to investigate further, the protagonist resists the urge to confront Campbell directly. They wrestle with their thoughts and emotions, but

ultimately, they choose not to inspect the bike, leaving their suspicions unspoken. This decision is pivotal, as it reveals much about the complexity of their relationship. The protagonist’s reluctance to probe deeper suggests an underlying tension—one where trust is both present and fragile. The hesitation to confront Campbell directly signifies that there are boundaries in their friendship, boundaries that are not easily crossed. The protagonist understands the unspoken rules of their relationship and recognizes that some things might be better left unsaid, even if doubts linger in their mind. This unspoken understanding, however, leaves a sense of unease hanging in the air, suggesting that something deeper is at play.

The chapter delicately crafts a mood of unease and quiet conflict, where every small action and reaction carries weight. The imagery of the destroyed garden serves as a powerful metaphor for the troubled dynamics between the protagonist and Campbell. Just as the bush has been destroyed beyond recognition, the trust between the characters has been fractured in a way that may never fully heal. The scattered red petals are a vivid reminder of the destruction that lies beneath the surface of their friendship—small yet significant signs of something more complicated and darker than they are willing to acknowledge. The protagonist's decision to hold back from a direct confrontation with Campbell reflects the broader theme of the novel: how relationships can be tested by the smallest of actions, and how doubts, once planted, can grow into something more powerful.

Through this moment, the author subtly explores the fragility of trust and the complexities of friendship. By choosing not to engage with Campbell on the issue, the protagonist shows the reader how easy it is for unresolved issues to fester beneath the surface. The tension between loyalty and suspicion is palpable, and it becomes clear that the protagonist’s relationship with Campbell is not as straightforward as it once seemed. In fact, the chapter sets the stage for further exploration of how even the most seemingly innocent interactions can carry the potential for conflict. It’s not just about the destruction of a bush, but about how that act of destruction reveals the cracks in their relationship. The chapter paints a picture of a relationship that is quietly unraveling, with each small, seemingly insignificant moment contributing to the larger

unraveling of trust between the two characters.

Chapter Twenty

In Chapter Twenty of "If These Wings Could Fly," the excitement of a crowded football stadium envelops the characters, specifically focusing on Leighton, Juniper, and their parents. Arriving late, the family parks along the road due to the packed lot and makes their way to the game. Juniper eagerly begs for funnel cakes, and after Mom grants her wish for just one treat, they find a spot to watch the game from the sidelines.

Sofia, a cheerleader, notices Leighton and rushes over, excited to see her. They exchange pleasantries, and Sofia asks Leighton for help tracking player number thirty-six, Liam McNamara, whom she is particularly interested in. Leighton agrees but is inwardly annoyed at being roped into covering the game. As the game progresses, Leighton encounters Campell, who joins her to help track Liam.

Following a few moments together, they part as Leighton makes her way up into the stands. From there, she spots Amelia, who warmly welcomes her to join. The two share the experience of watching the game, with Amelia cheerfully rooting for Liam. Leighton finds herself caught up in the thrill, feeling a rush when Liam scores a touchdown. Around them, the McNamara family cheers for Liam, highlighting the importance of familial support.

Suddenly, the atmosphere changes when Leighton notices her parents engaged in a tense conversation with Mr. Dillard, which hints at underlying family issues, particularly concerning her father's struggles with his construction business and past regrets about football. The dynamic proves uncomfortable, especially as comments about her father's knee injury surface.

Just as the tension becomes palpable, Bill DiMarco, an acquaintance of the family, arrives to break the ice. His presence temporarily alleviates the strain, but the discomfort remains largely unaddressed. Mom's efforts to steer the family away from

the conversation only trigger further anxiety in Leighton. The chapter ultimately captures the contrast between public celebration and private turmoil, as the family navigates the complexities of their relationships against the backdrop of a lively football game.

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 begins with the narrator reflecting on the difficult and often strained relationship they have with Campbell, characterized by frequent emotional tension and a lack of open communication. One significant aspect of their interactions is Campbell’s tendency to demand complete silence when he is upset, a habit that only increases the distance between them. The narrator has, over time, developed a subtle skill for provoking Campbell’s anger, often finding the perfect words to escalate his mild irritation into full-blown outrage. This ability to trigger such intense reactions speaks to the underlying dysfunction in their relationship, where frustration is rarely addressed constructively. Beneath the surface of these outward expressions of conflict lies a deeper, internal struggle within the narrator. They are burdened by a flood of unspoken words, a torrent of emotions and thoughts that remain locked inside, unable to be voiced. The weight of these suppressed emotions grows heavier by the day, as the narrator continues to bottle up their feelings, each unexpressed thought becoming like a painful object lodged deep within, intensifying the sense of frustration and emotional anguish.

The metaphor of words as sharp, painful objects vividly illustrates the narrator's internal struggle. Each suppressed word is imagined as contorting and twisting inside, creating an unbearable feeling of emotional agony. This growing emotional tension is compounded by the narrator’s overwhelming sense of being trapped by their own silence, unable to release the pressure that builds from holding so much inside. The imagery deepens as the narrator imagines that if they could somehow be opened up, all the words they have kept hidden would spill out in a flood of emotion. The thought of being so overwhelmed by their unsaid thoughts is likened to the image of a whale that has swallowed too much debris, an image that evokes both the physical and emotional consequences of holding on to too much. The whale becomes a powerful

metaphor for the narrator’s inner turmoil, symbolizing the heaviness of silence and the toll it takes on one’s mental and emotional well-being. The narrator feels as though they are carrying the refuse of their own repressed thoughts, which is slowly suffocating them, much like the debris inside the whale.

As the chapter progresses, the narrator’s internal battle becomes even more pronounced, reflecting a struggle not just with Campbell but with the act of communication itself. The inability to express their true feelings has caused a profound disconnect, both within themselves and in their relationship with Campbell. The emotional burden of silence grows more apparent as the narrator grapples with the consequences of not being able to communicate their pain. This chapter underscores how the act of holding in one's thoughts can erode a person’s emotional well-being, as the narrator continues to suppress their feelings in an effort to avoid conflict. The tension between wanting to speak out and the fear of the potential fallout creates a painful paradox. They long to voice their feelings and seek understanding but are paralyzed by the fear of confrontation and rejection. This ongoing internal conflict only deepens their sense of isolation, as they feel cut off not only from Campbell but also from their own emotions. The chapter poignantly explores the emotional costs of silence, illustrating how the inability to communicate can lead to emotional suffering and unresolved pain, which ultimately builds a barrier between individuals. It becomes clear that without the ability to articulate their true emotions, the narrator is left with a sense of alienation that grows stronger with each passing day. Through this painful reflection, the chapter calls attention to the crucial role that open communication plays in maintaining healthy relationships and mental well-being, emphasizing that the silence between people can be just as damaging, if not more so, than the conflict itself.

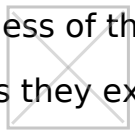
Chapter 22

Chapter 22 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist, Leighton, reflecting on the sunset as she makes her way to Liam's house. The vibrant colors of the sunset contrast with the imperfections of Auburn, a town that holds both beauty and flaws in equal measure. The red glow of the sun brings to mind a chaotic moment with her sister, Juniper, when highlighters were used on the pages of *The Bell Jar*. This juxtaposition of bright hues against dark words symbolizes the complex, often conflicting emotions Leighton feels. Upon her arrival at Liam’s house, her mother teases her about needing a tutor, specifically in art, which leads to playful banter between them. Leighton then shows her mother her latest still-life project, which elicits a laugh, and in a tender moment, she kisses her mother goodbye, feeling a mix of affection and a sense of longing for something more.

Upon entering Liam’s home, Leighton is warmly greeted by his sister, Fiona, who seems relieved to see her, particularly as a shield from Liam’s usual antics. Their easy camaraderie sets the tone for the visit, with Fiona playfully commenting on Liam’s hobbies and teasing him about his quirks. As the door opens, Mrs. McNamara, Liam’s mother, enters, filling the room with a sense of warmth and comfort. She shares her experiences of teaching in a small, predominantly white town and speaks passionately about the importance of inclusivity in education. These conversations subtly highlight the different dynamics of their families while revealing the shared experiences of growing up in a small community. The openness of Liam’s family contrasts with Leighton’s often complicated home life, giving her a brief respite from her usual struggles.

Liam’s arrival brings a wave of energy, and his charming presence leaves Leighton feeling both comfortable and unsure of where their relationship stands. They banter casually while picking out snacks, and Liam’s laid-back nature continues to break down

Leighton’s walls, slowly easing her reservations. As they move to Liam's room, the space is filled with creative works: art, graphic novels, and glimpses of Liam’s personal aspirations. Amidst the playful exchanges, they begin discussing deeper topics, such as their future dreams and the fears that come with them, particularly regarding their small-town life. Leighton starts to see Liam not just as a friend, but as someone with whom she could potentially share more than just surface-level interactions. Despite the lightheartedness of their conversation, there’s an undeniable connection that grows stronger as they explore their shared ambitions and anxieties.



As the evening progresses, their close proximity while working on art leads to playful, flirty moments, further heightening the chemistry between them. However, the arrival of Fiona interrupts the atmosphere, reminding them both of the boundaries that exist within their friendship. The interruption gives way to a more reflective tone as the reality of their relationship settles in. Before they part ways, Liam expresses a desire to spend more time together beyond the confines of school and their current routine. Leighton, torn between her sense of responsibility and the excitement of a spontaneous connection, agrees to join him for a bonfire, a decision that adds to the thrill of breaking away from her usual routine. Despite the internal tug-of-war between ambition and enjoyment, she feels a spark of exhilaration, wondering what this moment could lead to.

As she returns home, a swirl of emotions floods her mind. There’s a sense of excitement about venturing into something new, but also a feeling of guilt, as if she’s stepping away from her usual obligations and expectations. In bed that night, she feels the weight of her choices—how they blend youthful exploration with the responsibilities that weigh heavily on her. The chapter ends with Leighton caught in a delicate balance between family obligations, the thrill of teenage life, and the desire to forge her own path, setting the stage for the emotional complexities that will follow.

Chapter 54

Chapter 54 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with Leighton walking into her home, feeling a heavy tension in the air. Upon entering, she finds her family gathered in the living room, all seemingly engaged in a casual movie night. Her parents, along with Campbell and Juniper, are together, and while the scene might appear normal at first glance, Leighton is sharply aware of the strain between her parents. The sight of her mother and father cozying up together triggers a deep sense of discomfort, reinforcing the emotional distance that has been growing in their relationship. When her mother invites her to join them, Leighton is already filled with unease, and the conversation quickly shifts to the news of the canceled cable, which only exacerbates her father's apparent guilt. This subtle exchange highlights the emotional complexities in their home, where even simple gestures carry layers of unresolved tension.

Seeking to return some semblance of normalcy, Leighton offers to make popcorn, a small but meaningful gesture of attempting to reconnect with her family. In the kitchen, she finds her father, and they briefly talk about an upcoming football game where Liam, her boyfriend, will be playing. However, their conversation remains stiff, with Leighton struggling to bridge the growing emotional distance between them. While her father acknowledges the pressures surrounding the game, his response is distant, reflecting a deeper dissatisfaction with his life. His subdued tone speaks volumes about his internal struggles and disappointments, particularly about his work and the weight of his unresolved feelings. The brief exchange highlights the emotional isolation that Leighton feels, as she longs to connect with her father, but is met with emotional barriers that seem increasingly difficult to overcome. Their strained conversation underscores the challenges of maintaining family unity in the face of unspoken pain.

After the conversation, Leighton retreats to the quiet of her room, seeking solace from the chaos and tension of the evening. Her peace is interrupted by Joe, a bird who has become a strange but constant presence in her life. Rather than waiting for him to leave, Leighton opens her window to invite him in, signaling her willingness to engage with the world in whatever small, comforting way she can. As she watches him, Joe drops a small, rusted key onto her floor, an object that adds to her growing collection of trinkets from the bird. The act of receiving this small gift, though odd, feels significant to Leighton. It is as if the bird, in his peculiar way, offers a form of connection and meaning in a world that often feels cold and disconnected. This simple interaction with Joe becomes a way for Leighton to find some semblance of control and grounding, even amidst the emotional chaos surrounding her.

Leighton’s thoughts then turn to the crows that dominate the skies over Auburn, and she feels a deep, unexpected connection to them. The sight of these birds, filling the air and casting their shadow over the town, becomes symbolic of the resilience she herself longs to embody. Despite their overwhelming numbers, the crows are unyielding in their persistence, just as Leighton desires to be in the face of her own struggles. The crows, often seen as a nuisance by others, represent a quiet defiance, continuing to thrive in an environment that might seem inhospitable. Leighton, in turn, sees in them a reflection of herself—someone whose pain and struggles are overlooked or dismissed by those around her. Yet, despite the challenges she faces, she continues to endure, much like the crows that have taken over the town. This realization becomes a turning point for Leighton, as she embraces the symbolism of the crows, understanding that there is strength in resilience and a quiet power in enduring despite the odds. This connection with the crows, in their unwavering persistence, provides Leighton with a moment of clarity, helping her realize that, just as they persist, so too can she, even when it feels like everything else is falling apart.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton taking a hard look at her academic performance. She's proud of her perfect 100 in AP English, but other subjects don't seem to reflect the same level of success. Particularly disheartening is her C in Art I, a grade she never anticipated. Art was meant to be a break from the academic pressures she'd been facing, a subject that would allow her to focus on her other interests, such as her work at the school newspaper and her college applications. However, this C brings disappointment, as she expected the class to offer a bit of relief instead of causing additional stress. The emotional weight of this grade follows her through the school halls as she tries to shake off her frustration. She longs for a mental escape, a space where she can indulge in her love for reading and music, two passions that help her clear her mind.

Leighton's journey through the hallways is interrupted when she runs into Liam, a fellow student who notices her frustration. In their exchange, Liam teases her about her grades, breaking through some of the tension she's feeling. Their conversation reveals the beginnings of a friendship, with Liam offering to help her improve her art skills. Leighton is initially resistant, doubting her ability to succeed in a subject she had seen as easy. But Liam's offer, wrapped in humor and good-natured teasing, begins to soften her stance. She finds herself intrigued by the idea of spending time with him outside of school, even if the tutoring session is presented as nothing more than a casual academic offer. As they chat, Leighton starts to feel the spark of a deeper connection with him, though she's not entirely ready to admit it.

Their playful banter continues, and the conversation shifts when Liam invites Leighton to a football game that evening. The event includes a bonfire afterward, something that fills Leighton with anxiety. She isn't the type to enjoy large parties or social gatherings, often preferring the quieter moments spent alone or with close friends.

Yet, Liam’s enthusiasm is infectious, and despite her reservations, she feels a pull to join in. A part of her wants to experience the excitement of the evening, to step outside her comfort zone and embrace the spontaneity of the situation. But the hesitation remains, as she grapples with the pressure to remain true to herself while considering what stepping out of her familiar world might mean for her relationships with others.

Leighton decides to decline Liam’s invitation and boards the bus to head home, her mind spinning with uncertainty. Her friend Campbell notices her mood and presses her about Liam, teasing her about her budding connection with him. The conversation then shifts to her academic future, particularly her dream of attending New York University. Campbell’s protective nature shines through as she expresses concern about Leighton’s grades, highlighting their shared fears about the future. Leighton begins to feel the weight of these worries, as the pressure to live up to her own ambitions starts to mount. She wonders whether her current path, which feels safe and predictable, is the best one for her future. At the same time, she contemplates what it would mean to take risks—whether in her academic pursuits or in her personal life.

The chapter ends with Leighton lost in thought, weighing the possibilities of her future and wondering which path to take. The themes of ambition, friendship, and personal growth are explored deeply, as Leighton faces the reality of her own fears and aspirations. Her internal struggle between staying in her comfort zone and pushing herself to take chances is something that many readers will relate to, especially those navigating the complexities of young adulthood. The chapter invites reflection on the difficult choices that come with pursuing personal goals while also dealing with the expectations of others. Leighton’s story is a poignant reminder of the courage required to move forward, whether in academics, relationships, or life itself. The narrative masterfully captures the tension between what feels safe and what might lead to a more fulfilling and transformative future.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist preparing to visit her friend Liam, who is helping her with art homework. The day begins with her mother casually mentioning that Liam called, which sends the protagonist into a mix of emotions—amused by the idea of having a “boyfriend” yet focused on preparing for the visit. As she heads to the bathroom, her younger sister Juniper, ever curious and a little envious, begins applying lip gloss and questions her relationship with Liam. This playful sibling interaction highlights a distinct contrast between the sisters: Juniper is still innocent and naive, while the protagonist, though still young, exhibits a more mature understanding of the world and relationships. This sets the stage for a family dynamic that blends innocence with the growing complexities of adolescence.

As the protagonist continues to get ready, her other sister, Campbell, enters the room and continues to probe, asking whether Liam is simply a friend. The protagonist reassures her, emphasizing that Liam is a nice person, which seems to alleviate some of Campbell’s protective concerns. This brief but meaningful exchange exemplifies the protective nature of siblings—Campbell’s concern for her sister’s well-being reflects a sense of care and responsibility, which is often seen in close-knit families. While Campbell’s questions may seem simple on the surface, they reveal a deeper emotional bond and a desire to ensure that her sister is not hurt. These moments give insight into the protagonist’s familial relationships, showing how trust and love are intricately woven into everyday interactions between siblings.

The emotional depth of the chapter is further illustrated as the protagonist makes a "pinkie promise" to Campbell to be careful while spending time with Liam. This small but significant gesture symbolizes the trust and emotional closeness between the sisters. Campbell, in a more introspective moment, expresses her guilt for being harsh with Juniper earlier, which sparks a larger conversation about the fairness of life and

the consequences of their actions. Campbell’s realization about the implications of her behavior adds a layer of complexity to the chapter, highlighting the introspection and moral growth that children experience as they navigate their relationships with those around them. These reflections on guilt and fairness show the growing emotional depth of the characters, revealing the internal conflicts that arise from navigating familial dynamics and personal responsibility.

Later in the chapter, the protagonist challenges Campbell’s belief in karma, suggesting that life may not always be as simple as a system of rewards and punishments. This conversation adds a philosophical dimension to the chapter, with the protagonist questioning whether good deeds always lead to good outcomes or if life is governed by more complicated forces. Campbell’s firm belief in a just world is met with her sister’s more skeptical perspective, which sparks a debate about morality, fairness, and the nature of justice. This discussion invites the reader to think about how we view the world’s moral fabric, particularly when it comes to the fairness of life and the consequences of our actions. Through this exchange, the chapter highlights the complexities of navigating moral questions during adolescence, when the world seems to shift from the simple rules of childhood to a more nuanced understanding of right and wrong.

The chapter skillfully weaves together themes of sibling relationships, growing up, and grappling with larger questions about fairness and morality. The protagonist’s relationship with her siblings is portrayed in a way that is both lighthearted and deeply reflective, offering insight into the way family dynamics shape our understanding of the world. Through their interactions, the characters explore themes of trust, responsibility, and emotional growth, which are universal experiences that resonate with readers of all ages. As the protagonist navigates her connection with Liam, her family’s influence plays a significant role in her understanding of herself and the relationships around her. The humor and lighthearted moments contrast beautifully with the underlying emotional depth, making the chapter a poignant exploration of family and growth.

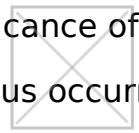
Chapter 34

Chapter 34 opens with the narrator hastily descending the stairs, deliberately avoiding the sight of the recently repaired window. Instead, their attention is diverted to the coffee table, where the vase has been placed back at its center, provoking a complex swirl of emotions. They instinctively reach for the vase and head outside to discard it in the garbage bin, feeling the rain drench them as they bury the broken vase in the bag that holds its shattered pieces from the previous night. This simple action becomes symbolic, the rain washing over them as they dispose of a reminder of the past, one that continues to haunt their thoughts. The act of throwing the vase away, while small, feels significant, representing a desire to remove remnants of the past that have become painful to carry.

As the narrator attempts to move on from the emotional weight of the vase, a crow caws loudly from the front yard, drawing their gaze upward. The tree outside is oddly full of black birds, which stirs a strange sense of nostalgia, reminding them of the first day of school when excitement had filled the air. The vivid memory of the leaves and the feelings of hope that came with the season shift to something more unsettling as the narrator approaches the tree. There, they notice Joe perched on a low branch, his talons clutching a slip of paper, and as they get closer, they read Juniper’s handwriting on the note: “Dear Joe, please help us.” This message sends a cold shiver down their spine, and their instinctive reaction is to back away, their eyes filling with tears. The scene is eerie, the connection between Juniper’s plea and the presence of the crow leaving the narrator deeply unsettled and wondering about the unspoken communication unfolding before them.

Joe flutters down beside the narrator, who is still transfixed by Juniper’s note, feeling a strange sense of urgency as the crow then hops to the ground. The narrator watches as Joe nudges something in the grass, their curiosity growing. As they lean closer to

see what Joe is doing, the crow picks up a shiny object with its beak and drops it at their feet. It’s their father’s wedding band, an item typically kept in his wallet while he’s at work. This discovery is a shocking revelation, causing the narrator to recall their father’s lost wallet, a memory that resurfaces with a new understanding. The realization dawns that Juniper had not been searching the truck as initially thought; instead, she had been looking for the wallet, which she had found or perhaps even taken. The significance of this moment grows, as the connection between Juniper, Joe, and the mysterious occurrences in their lives deepens.



Holding the wedding ring in their hand, the narrator reflects on recent conversations with the ornithologist they had interviewed, learning that crows are incredibly intelligent creatures capable of understanding concepts like reciprocity and retribution. Crows are known to give gifts and hold grudges, and the narrator begins to wonder whether the crows in their yard might have some awareness of the dynamics in their household. Could Joe have found the wallet where it had been lost, or had the crow stolen it initially? This possibility raises unsettling questions about the role of these birds in their lives, and the narrator is left with a sense of wonder and unease. The enigmatic presence of Joe and the other crows lingers in the narrator’s mind, suggesting that their connection to the family runs deeper than mere coincidence. As the chapter closes, the narrator is left contemplating the strange, almost mystical bond between the crows and their household, wondering what the birds might know or understand about the hidden truths of their lives.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 centers on the newfound excitement in the Auburn Wolves' community as the team celebrates an undefeated season for the first time in nearly two decades. The protagonist’s friend, Sofia, who is a reporter, is eager to interview the protagonist’s father about the team's achievements. This leads the protagonist to accompany Liam’s family to a game, where the shift from their quiet, music-filled car ride to the vibrant celebration after the Wolves’ victory highlights the immense energy and enthusiasm in the air. The joy from the game extends beyond just the team’s success, as it pulls the protagonist and her friends into a shared moment of celebration, revealing how moments of collective pride can unite people. This experience marks a turning point for the protagonist as she finds herself swept up in the infectious excitement that surrounds the Auburn Wolves, emphasizing the connection between personal and communal joy.

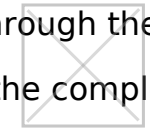
Following the game, the group gathers in Liam’s basement, which provides a comforting and intimate space away from the chaos of the world outside. As Fiona shows off her dance moves in a makeshift studio, the group’s conversation shifts to more personal matters, like the dynamics of relationships in middle school. The pressures of appearance and social acceptance come to the forefront, reflecting the insecurities that often plague young people. Fiona brushes off a boy’s compliment, demonstrating how teenage attraction can often be shallow or fleeting, while at the same time underscoring the complexity of young relationships. Fiona’s insistence on enjoying the winter formal as a group illustrates a theme of solidarity among friends during adolescence, showcasing how social circles can change as romantic interests come into play. The girls’ conversation highlights the evolving nature of friendship, as they navigate the turbulent landscape of adolescence, where relationships are constantly in flux and often defined by external pressures.

Liam’s playful and supportive nature becomes more evident during a critique of *Portrait of an Old Crow*, a drawing of a crow named Joe. He encourages the protagonist to loosen up, pointing out how often people are too hard on themselves and encouraging her to embrace her imperfections. In this light, Liam reveals an unexpected depth, using the drawing as a conversation starter to discuss themes of acceptance and vulnerability. Their playful exchange, with Liam’s terrible singing that elicits laughter, demonstrates the ease between them and their growing comfort with each other. Through these moments, the protagonist begins to shed some of her insecurities, learning from Liam's ability to laugh at himself and embrace the silliness of life. The conversation also subtly highlights the contrast between how they approach life—Liam with a laid-back and carefree attitude, while the protagonist grapples with her worries and self-doubt. This dynamic deepens their connection, allowing the protagonist to consider letting go of her reservations and embracing new experiences with Liam.

As the chapter progresses, a pivotal moment unfolds when Liam, encouraged by the laughter they’ve shared, finally gathers the courage to ask the protagonist to be his girlfriend. This question, though simple, holds significant weight for both of them, marking a step toward a deeper emotional connection. The protagonist, initially teasing Liam about dating, finally admits her own feelings, affirming her desire to take their relationship to the next level. This moment of vulnerability between them reflects the uncertainty and excitement that comes with first love, where each new step feels monumental and charged with emotion. The upcoming winter formal, once a distant thought, now becomes a symbol of their growing bond, representing not just a fun event but a key moment in their evolving relationship. It signals a shift in how they view each other and their connection, suggesting the start of something real and meaningful.

Ultimately, this chapter beautifully encapsulates the complexities of youth, companionship, and the mixed emotions surrounding first love. Through lighthearted moments, playful banter, and deeper conversations, the chapter explores the nuances of growing up, where friendship and romance blend, and where personal growth is

intertwined with the joys and challenges of adolescence. The protagonist’s relationship with Liam evolves through shared experiences, highlighting how these formative years are defined by both lighthearted fun and moments of emotional significance. The juxtaposition of carefree fun and the deeper emotional undercurrents of first love paints an authentic portrait of adolescence, where each new experience—whether joyous or uncertain—helps shape one’s understanding of themselves and their relationships. Through these experiences, the protagonist learns more about love, friendship, and the complexities of balancing one’s desires with the realities of growing up.



Chapter 42

Chapter 42 opens with a peaceful winter morning, the world outside blanketed in fresh snow. The narrator wakes up to a sunlit room, the cold winter air softened by the warmth inside, and feels comforted as they snuggle with their siblings, Campbell and Juniper, under a cozy dragonfly quilt. The beauty of the untouched snow outside provides a sense of calm, but the absence of the usual crows in their yard catches the narrator’s attention. This quiet morning contrasts sharply with the sight across the street, where Mrs. Stieg’s yard is swarming with the birds. The absence of the crows, typically so present in their lives, adds an air of mystery to the day, signaling that something might be subtly amiss in the world around them.

Carefully, the narrator slips out of bed, trying not to disturb the sleeping girls. In the kitchen, they find their mother, who is peacefully pouring herself a cup of tea, exuding warmth and tranquility that promises a calm day ahead. There is a quiet comfort in this shared moment, one that is not rushed but full of small, intimate gestures. Campbell and Juniper soon join, still caught in a sleepy haze but bubbling with excitement about the snow outside. The atmosphere in the house is peaceful, yet there is an undercurrent of energy as the sisters prepare for the adventure the day promises. A brief discussion about breakfast follows, but Juniper’s enthusiasm for the snow takes over, and she insists on going outside as soon as possible.

The narrator heads to the attic to fetch winter clothing, stepping over the familiar chaos of the space. Amid the jumble of forgotten items, they stumble upon a box filled with their mother’s old high school memorabilia—yearbooks, letters, and notes that paint a picture of her life before becoming the mother they know. Hidden within this box is *Amethyst*, a literary magazine from twenty years ago, of which their mother had been the editor-in-chief. The magazine’s pages reveal a side of their mother they hadn’t known—her passion for poetry, with several of her works published in its pages.

This discovery sparks something in the narrator, who is struck by the thought that their mother once had dreams of literary pursuits, a world so different from the motherly role she now occupies.

Inspired by the discovery, the narrator leaves a note inside the magazine, encouraging their mother to write again. The note is a small, tender gesture to rekindle a part of their mother's past, a quiet nudge to rediscover her creative spirit. After leaving the note, the narrator returns to the kitchen to find the atmosphere still filled with warmth, with Juniper now happily wearing matching gloves and hats, ready for their snowy adventure. The simple joys of the day unfold as they prepare to enjoy the snow together, the bond between them strengthened by these small, shared moments.

After a brief discussion, the narrator asks their mother for permission to invite Liam over. She agrees without hesitation, a reassuring sign that their routine remains intact, despite the changes and challenges they face. The conversation turns to Liam's impending arrival, and playful banter begins about the inevitable snowball fight, further emphasizing the ease and lightheartedness that permeates their interactions. This playful exchange reveals a growing connection between the narrator and Liam, symbolizing the innocence of new relationships and the happiness they bring. In these moments, the narrator feels the simplicity of joy, the excitement of their relationship blooming amidst the chaos and comfort of family life.

The chapter beautifully captures the warmth of familial bonds, the nostalgic connection to the past, and the thrill of new relationships. The day, full of promise and possibilities, serves as a gentle reminder of the simple joys that can be found in the most ordinary moments. The snow outside acts as a backdrop to these intimate connections, providing a canvas for the narrator to explore their own desires and the world of relationships that continues to unfold around them. As the chapter comes to a close, the warmth of the family's love and the promise of new beginnings leave the narrator with a sense of peace and anticipation for what the future holds.

Chapter 48

Chapter 48 begins with the world still wrapped in the quiet of early morning, the rain softly pattering against the window. I awake long before the sun rises, my mind a blank canvas, suspended between the realms of sleep and wakefulness. In this space, I feel untethered, like a solitary being adrift in the stillness of the dark. As I lie there, suspended in time, a sense of connection slowly reasserts itself—reminding me that I am not alone. Liam’s arm around my ribs and his large hand gripping mine are the first anchors to reality, his warm breath tickling my neck as I find comfort in the intimate closeness. The quiet simplicity of this moment, in which we are simply together, brings peace, and the troubling past becomes a distant memory that no longer matters. In his embrace, the complexities of the world fade, and all I desire is to remain in this tender closeness.

Despite the comfort of Liam’s presence, sleep evades me in a way it hasn’t in a long time. For the first time in ages, I lie in deep slumber without the interruption of nightmares or the unsettling sounds that usually accompany my rest. Yet, even with this newfound stillness, sleep seems to drift just beyond my reach. In the quiet of Liam’s room, I try to recall the way the shadows twist and stretch when light filters through the blinds, but it’s as if my mind is unwilling to fully succumb to the peace I crave. It feels as though I’m teetering on the edge of rest, but never quite crossing into it. Sleep, which I’ve yearned for, seems almost like a fleeting dream—so close yet unattainable, slipping through my grasp whenever I think I’ve found it.

The unexpected realization that we are not entirely alone stirs me from the comfort of Liam's embrace. Slipping gently from his arms, I rise quietly, my bare feet making little sound on the cool hardwood floor. My eyes instinctively dart towards the window, where a figure sits motionless in the tree outside. Joe, the ever-present raven, remains perched as still as a statue, staring out into the street like a sentinel, keeping watch

over the quiet world. The darkness cloaks him, and it is hard to tell how long he has been there—whether moments or hours. As I stand there, transfixed by his unwavering stillness, my thoughts turn to the notion that he may have been silently watching over us throughout the night. And just as the thought crosses my mind, Joe shifts ever so slightly, his head tilting to reveal the gleam of his black eye, his sharp beak catching the faintest glimmer of the streetlight. His presence feels both strange and familiar, like a protector from another world, guarding us against unseen forces.

I whisper softly, “Good night, Joe,” as I pull the shade closed, severing the link between his world and mine. His silent watchfulness, a constant presence in the shadows, lingers in my thoughts even as the window blocks my view of him. The world outside seems distant now, the silence of the night both soothing and unsettling in its own way. And yet, the quiet companionship of Liam beside me is a grounding force, offering a sense of calm amidst the uncertainty of the world around us. The connection I feel to the outside world, to Joe’s silent guardianship, and to Liam's presence by my side, all weave together into a comforting tapestry. Even in the midst of an unpredictable and often frightening world, these small moments of peace and connection become my anchor, reminding me that I am not alone. The night may be uncertain, but here, with Liam and the silent watch of Joe, I find a semblance of security, an unwavering reassurance that the world will continue to turn, even if it sometimes feels like it is on the edge of chaos.

Chapter 64

Chapter 64 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with a charged atmosphere as the protagonist and a younger figure stand outside a small house, bathed in the red and blue flashing lights of police cars. The cold, biting air seems to seep into their bones, but despite this, the narrator grips the smaller hand tightly, an unspoken promise of protection. Both are dressed in flannel pajamas, barely sufficient to shield them from the harsh winter chill, which only heightens the feeling of vulnerability that hangs in the air. This physical discomfort mirrors the emotional strain they are under, adding a layer of tension to the already fraught scene. The arrival of Officer Bill DiMarco brings with it a wave of anxiety, as the protagonist is left wondering whether their father will be allowed to go free again, as he has in the past. However, this time, the outcome is different—Officer DiMarco makes a decisive move, arresting their father and placing him in handcuffs. His actions are carried out with a disturbing detachment, as though he has no personal connection to the man being apprehended, reinforcing the gravity of the moment and the emotional distance between them.

While Officer DiMarco moves to escort their father to the police car, another officer arrives quickly, taking the mother aside to explain the process for obtaining an emergency protection order. Due to the holiday season, the formal court hearing for this order may be delayed, but the officer assures the family that a temporary order can be issued in the meantime, offering a temporary shield from their father's return. This temporary protection order is of immense importance, as it will legally bar their father from entering the house and will require him to surrender his firearm within 24 hours if he is released. The significance of this order cannot be overstated—it represents a crucial step in the effort to reclaim their safety. As the officers continue their work, Officer DiMarco approaches the narrator and, with sincerity, expresses his sympathy for their difficult situation. He mentions the essay that the narrator had

written, one that he found deeply painful to read, reflecting the emotional weight of their family's struggles. The narrator, emotionally drained and fatigued from years of tension, responds with frustration, expressing weariness with the hollow apologies offered by adults who have failed to protect her family in the past.

The mother, however, remains resolute, her determination to protect her children unwavering in the face of the tumultuous events unfolding. Officer DiMarco reassures her that he will personally ensure the physical copy of the protection order is delivered to their home, allowing them to move forward with a sense of security. The weight of the night's events slowly begins to lift as the family feels, for the first time in what feels like forever, a glimmer of safety. This moment marks a shift for the narrator, who begins to feel a sense of empowerment that had been absent for so long. The relief that follows the arrest and the protection order signifies a turning point, a small but significant victory over the constant fear that has dominated their lives. For the first time, they have been heard, and a sense of control is beginning to emerge, however fragile. The narrator reflects on this newfound sense of security with a combination of hope and disbelief, realizing that this moment might be the first real opportunity to escape the grip of fear that has kept them tethered to an unsafe environment for so long. While the future remains uncertain and there are still many challenges ahead, this night symbolizes a shift toward something more positive, where the possibility of safety is no longer just a distant dream, but a real and attainable goal. The chapter encapsulates both the emotional exhaustion and the quiet empowerment that comes with moments of change, providing a sense of closure to the immediate danger and a hopeful outlook for what lies ahead.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 opens with the protagonist, seeking solace after a taxing and frustrating day filled with the pressures of a literature exam. She finds herself in the newsroom, hoping to escape the weight of her academic responsibilities, when she is greeted by her close friend, Sofia. Sofia, ever perceptive, immediately senses the tension in the protagonist’s mood and tries to lighten the atmosphere with her playful banter. Their conversation is full of teasing, as the protagonist chides Sofia for slacking off and procrastinating on work, despite her friend's lighthearted response about their shared romantic interests. The camaraderie between the two girls is palpable, and it offers the protagonist a brief reprieve from her internal turmoil. The warmth of their friendship becomes a much-needed refuge, reminding her that, despite the chaos in her life, some things—like the comfort of a supportive friend—remain steady.

As the protagonist attempts to refocus on contacting an ornithologist for research, her attention is pulled away by Sofia’s exuberant chatter about an upcoming winter formal. Initially uninterested, the protagonist expresses her disconnection from the event, especially since it falls on New Year’s Eve, a time when the pressures of underage drinking and social expectations heighten her unease. Sofia, with her characteristic excitement, continues to describe the event in vivid detail, focusing on the allure of the “eighties” theme and mentioning that Liam, a boy the protagonist has secretly admired, might be the one to ask her to the dance. Despite her initial reluctance, the protagonist finds herself intrigued by the idea, a spark of curiosity ignited by Sofia’s enthusiasm. The idea of attending the formal gradually shifts from a distant and unappealing event to something that feels oddly appealing, even though she remains unsure about embracing the concept fully. Sofia’s playful insistence that the protagonist should agree if Liam asks her creates a mixture of excitement and uncertainty, highlighting the subtle complexity of adolescent emotions—where desire

for connection intertwines with apprehension about stepping out of one’s comfort zone.

The protagonist’s reluctance to embrace the idea of the formal is further challenged when she agrees to let Sofia accompany her to meet the ornithologist for practice with interview skills. As they travel together, their conversation takes on a deeper, more reflective tone, as they discuss the delicate balance of adolescence—between growing up and staying true to oneself. The protagonist, still unsure of how to approach romantic engagements and social pressures, begins to realize how much her hesitations stem from a fear of change. Sofia’s carefree attitude about the dance and her insistence that the protagonist should say “yes” if Liam asks her serve as a contrast to the protagonist’s internal conflict, revealing the contrasting ways that each girl approaches the challenges of growing up. While the protagonist feels the weight of expectations and responsibilities, Sofia’s lighthearted perspective offers a different way of looking at the world—one that is less burdened by self-doubt. This conversation not only deepens their friendship but also underscores the tension between youthful desire and the realities of self-perception, creating a rich exploration of how people navigate the complexities of adolescence.

After finally making the call to the ornithologist, the protagonist is left reflecting on the unexpected excitement of the winter formal, which she had initially dismissed as irrelevant. As she begins to entertain the possibility of Liam asking her to the dance, she feels a sense of hope, a feeling she hasn’t allowed herself to experience in a while. However, this new feeling of excitement is tempered by her anxiety about an essay contest looming ahead, which represents a challenge she is struggling to face. This juxtaposition of youthful joy and the burden of academic pressure creates a complex emotional landscape for the protagonist. She feels torn between the fleeting happiness of potential romance and the heavy responsibility of her academic life, which she feels compelled to prioritize. The chapter captures the essence of adolescent uncertainty, where hope and joy coexist with fear and self-doubt. The protagonist’s inner turmoil, oscillating between her desires and her obligations, paints a vivid picture of the emotional complexity that defines her journey through adolescence. As she faces

these challenges, she is forced to navigate the delicate balance between friendship, personal growth, and the weight of expectations, all while questioning what truly matters in her evolving world.

Chapter 33

Chapter 33 delves deeply into the enduring impact of words, particularly those spoken in moments of anger or malice. The narrative focuses on how certain words can resonate far beyond the moment they are spoken, leaving emotional scars that last long after the initial hurt. Words like "ice queen" are described as carrying an invisible weight, creating a burden that lingers with the person being insulted. This metaphor suggests a sense of being tethered, unable to fully move on or escape the sting of the words. On the other hand, the word "brat" is dismissed with far less emotional investment, likened to a raindrop that simply rolls off without leaving a lasting impact. This stark contrast highlights how different words are processed emotionally, with some sliding off while others burrow deep within, creating lasting damage. The narrator’s reflection emphasizes how we often internalize words depending on their intent and the emotional context in which they are delivered.

The author then compares the impact of a few other insults, emphasizing the deeper significance of words like "bitch" and "cunt." The term "bitch" is likened to a painful splinter, something that can cause initial pain but can be removed with time and effort. Though difficult, it can eventually be dealt with and forgotten. However, the word "cunt" is described as much more damaging, compared to a festering disease that remains inside, a constant reminder of the abuse and contempt behind it. This word is particularly potent in the narrator’s memory because of the history tied to it, especially the association with their mother, who was also subjected to similar verbal abuse. The sense of degradation that this word evokes is not just personal but deeply historical, affecting the narrator’s sense of identity and their view of their place in the world. Unlike other insults, this word lingers, shaping the narrator's self-perception in a way that no other term has, leaving them feeling objectified and depersonalized, as if their humanity is stripped away with each utterance.

The cruel pleasure that the aggressor derives from using such a word further exacerbates its impact. The speaker’s abuser takes satisfaction in the emotional harm caused by the insult, which highlights the sadistic nature of verbal abuse. This malicious intent is made clear as the abuser’s pride in the power of their words becomes apparent. The effect of this cruelty doesn’t disappear once the words are spoken; instead, the insult is internalized and continues to fester within the victim, leaving a lingering emotional wound that cannot easily be healed. The impact of the word becomes something that the narrator carries with them, affecting their thoughts and actions long after the encounter. The power of language in this context is revealed to be not just in the words themselves but in the way they are weaponized to cause lasting harm. The term "cunt" becomes a symbol of emotional violence, demonstrating how deeply words can penetrate the psyche, shaping how one sees themselves and their worth.

Ultimately, **Chapter 33** explores the psychological scars left by harmful words, focusing on how insults can strip away a person’s dignity and sense of self. The narrator’s experience underscores how deeply verbal abuse can affect someone, transforming them from a whole person into an object of disdain. The chapter poignantly illustrates how words, when used maliciously, can leave lasting scars on one's emotional health, affecting not only the immediate relationship but also the person’s view of themselves. The narrator’s reflection on their own experience with these damaging words serves as a reminder of the power of language to both build and destroy. The emotional toll of verbal abuse is explored in depth, shedding light on how words can carry a weight that far exceeds their literal meaning. The trauma caused by insults like these doesn’t just affect the individual in the moment but can shape their entire worldview and alter their sense of identity. The exploration of how words define and confine individuals is a sobering look at the long-term impact of emotional violence, encouraging readers to consider the weight of their own words and the lasting effects they may have on others.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 begins by presenting a snapshot of the narrator's life, where normalcy is interwoven with the challenges she faces. After her father falls asleep, Leighton, along with her friend Sofia, heads to the mall for a much-needed distraction and some fun. The girls are on a mission to find the perfect dresses for an upcoming eighties-themed dance, where neon colors are in full swing. While Sofia slips into each dress with ease, Leighton finds herself struggling to feel comfortable in the bold colors and styles that are popular at the moment. These outfits, meant to represent a fun and carefree experience, end up highlighting Leighton’s discomfort with her appearance. Her insecurities grow as she compares herself to Sofia, who seems to embody everything Leighton feels she is not. This dynamic of friendship and self-image sets the stage for the chapter’s exploration of Leighton’s internal struggles, reminding readers of the complex nature of teenage years.

The mood begins to shift when Sofia hands Leighton a beautiful black dress, its cut perfect and the fabric simple yet elegant. The dress, paired with pockets—a detail that Leighton loves—instantly sparks excitement in her, making her feel for a moment like she is living out a typical high school experience. The feeling of being part of something so ordinary and joyful brings a wave of relief and a sense of belonging, something Leighton has been yearning for. However, that sense of joy is quickly tempered when she sees the price tag, which is far beyond her budget. This moment of financial reality forces Leighton to consider her options and the weight of her current situation. As she debates the possibility of buying the dress, a conversation unfolds between the two friends, delving into priorities, family finances, and the limitations that come with not having much money. Sofia, understanding Leighton’s predicament, encourages her to live in the moment and to not let money stand in the way of enjoying the dance and the memories they could create. It is through Sofia’s

encouragement that Leighton begins to see the situation in a different light, understanding that sometimes the experience is more important than the cost.

The trip takes another turn when the girls discover a Tiffany Blue bike on clearance at a sporting goods store. Leighton finds herself caught in a dilemma, torn between spending her savings on the dress or investing in the bike. The decision weighs heavily on her, as she recognizes that the bike is something her younger sister, Campbell, would greatly appreciate. Ultimately, the choice is clear: the bike, which symbolizes both practicality and love, takes precedence. Leighton, eager to give her sister something special, decides to sacrifice the dress for now. With the decision made, the girls head home, where Sofia helps Leighton present the bike to Campbell in a surprising and heartfelt way. The gesture, though small, carries great significance, as Campbell's reaction shows just how much thought and care went into the gift. This moment captures the essence of sibling love, showcasing the simple joys of giving and receiving and how much such moments can mean to young people navigating complicated emotions and familial bonds.

The chapter concludes with Leighton finding herself alone with a pile of old dresses in her armoire. None of them fit her anymore, a realization that underscores her growth and the passage of time. It is in this moment of quiet reflection that Campbell bursts in with a bag containing the dress Leighton had tried on earlier, an unexpected but playful intervention. In a humorous and lighthearted exchange, Campbell hands over the dress with the stipulation that Leighton must wear it to the dance, or their friendship will be at risk. This playful ultimatum serves as a reminder of the importance of friendship and the small, sometimes trivial, things that can hold deep meaning in relationships. The chapter expertly captures the essence of adolescence, where moments of humor and play intertwine with deeper emotional reflections. Leighton's journey of self-acceptance, familial love, and friendship all come together in this chapter, presenting a rich tapestry of experiences that shape her world. Through these seemingly small yet significant moments, readers are reminded of the complexities of growing up and how each choice, no matter how trivial it may seem, plays a role in shaping one's sense of identity and connection to others.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

In Chapter Fifty-Nine of "If These Wings Could Fly," the protagonist, Leighton, grapples with her emotional turmoil following a troubling weekend. Liam, visibly distressed, picks her up for school and expresses his worry about her well-being, suggesting that she may need help. Despite her acknowledgment of his concerns, Leighton deflects, apologizing for missing Liam’s big game and expressing relief at his loss, hinting at her own inner chaos.

The chapter captures the symbolic significance of the crows that have covered their hometown, representing the pervasive darkness and uncertainty Leighton feels as she drives to school. Upon arrival, she bypasses her classes and heads straight to the newspaper office, where she seeks solace in writing. Sofia, her supportive friend, instinctively arrives to check on her. While Leighton reassures her that she is merely angry, she emphasizes her urgent need to write an essay due that day.

As Leighton types on her beloved old computer, she reflects on her complex relationship with Auburn, realizing her narrative had lacked a crucial aspect: herself. This epiphany transforms her perspective; she recognizes that Auburn embodies not only her grandfather’s legacy or her father's anger but also the unwavering support from friends and family, including Sofia, Fiona, and Liam. The community is rich with depth, exemplified by moments of kindness and resilience that she had previously overlooked.

With this new understanding, Leighton's writing flows easily, capturing the essence of her town. The chapter closes on a powerful note: while she may criticize and sometimes hate Auburn, she is undeniably part of its fabric. This realization becomes her driving force, allowing her to confront the complexities of her identity and emotional experiences, leading to a breakthrough in her writing process. As she writes, she commits to expressing her truth, asserting her place within the narrative of her

life.

Chapter 67

Chapter 67 of *If These Wings Could Fly* delves into a profoundly intimate and emotional moment as the protagonist, Leighton, requests that Liam take her home before the fireworks begin. The holiday season has always been difficult for her, filled with discomfort and lingering emotions that have made her feel disconnected. In response to these challenges, she and her siblings, Campbell and Juniper, created their own set of meaningful traditions, small but significant rituals that help them navigate the complexity of family dynamics. Every New Year's Eve, they climb to the roof to watch the fireworks together, a ritual that holds deep meaning for them despite the holiday’s bittersweet undertones. This tradition serves as a quiet rebellion against the usual chaos, offering a sense of control and connection amidst a world that feels constantly uncertain. Despite the discomfort of the holiday season, she is unwilling to abandon this small but powerful ritual that has become a cornerstone of their bond.

As Leighton and Liam park near the end of her road, the mood shifts into something more personal. Liam steps out of the car to open her door with a warmth that contrasts with the chill in the night air. His gesture is simple, yet it carries a depth of affection that makes the moment feel special. They share a brief but meaningful kiss, one that deepens their connection even as they are surrounded by the sounds of Auburn’s trees and the restless cawing of crows in the distance. These crows, with their eerie, echoing cries, seem to add an extra layer of tension to the otherwise serene moment. But the night sky, vast and filled with stars, envelops them in a sense of intimacy that overshadows everything else. The clarity of the heavens above feels like an extension of their bond, something eternal and unspoken, connecting them to both the present moment and a larger, more enduring love. It is a brief but significant pause in time, where the outside world falls away, and they are the only two people who matter.

Caught up in the transcendent beauty of the moment, Leighton suddenly finds herself overcome by an intense wave of emotion. Without thinking, she blurts out, “I love you,” the words coming out as if they’ve been waiting for just the right moment to be expressed. This heartfelt confession is met with Liam’s immediate embrace, his arms wrapping around her as if to reassure her that the feeling is mutual. His response, though simple, is enough to solidify the depth of their bond, and he teases her lightly, asking her to share something new with him. Leighton, with a playful glint in her eye, teases back, making no promises, yet the connection between them continues to grow with each shared glance, smile, and kiss. Their love, while new, feels profound and all-encompassing, as if it has been building for years in the quiet moments they’ve shared. Their playful exchange adds an element of lightheartedness to an otherwise emotionally charged scene, highlighting the balance between joy and gravity in their relationship.

As Liam holds her close, his warmth seems to wrap around her like a protective shield against the cold air that lingers around them. It’s a moment of raw simplicity, yet it feels loaded with meaning. The stars above seem to gaze down at them, silent witnesses to the happiness that fills the space between them. The trees around them, alive with the restless movement of crows, seem to fade into the background as the couple finds a kind of peace in each other’s arms. The quiet solitude of this moment stands in stark contrast to the noise of the world beyond them, making it feel even more sacred and profound. As they stand together, it becomes clear that their love, though still in its early stages, is already marked by a deep sense of understanding and trust. The chapter beautifully encapsulates the raw, vulnerable nature of their connection, showing how small, intimate moments can hold the most significant meaning. The night sky, the fireworks, and the crows all fade into the background, leaving only the two of them in a world that feels entirely their own. Their love, simple yet profound, becomes a reminder that despite the chaos around them, moments of peace, connection, and love can be found even in the most unexpected places.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 begins with Leighton abruptly waking up to the sound of a door slamming against the wall, followed by the harsh voice of a man in her home. Her dream of lightning splitting the tree in their front yard is shattered by this sudden, jarring disruption, dragging her from a peaceful slumber into the chaos that defines her reality. The man’s voice, harsh and commanding, insists that the household chores need to be corrected immediately, disrupting her younger sisters, Juniper and Campbell, and creating a tense atmosphere. Leighton’s protective instincts kick in as she pleads with him to spare the girls, but his response is one of anger and frustration, revealing a deeply ingrained pattern of emotional violence that has become all too familiar. Leighton, unable to escape the tension in the room, silently seethes with rage, feeling helpless as her mother stands by, mouthing apologetically, but unable to intervene. The chapter immediately sets the stage for the overwhelming sense of powerlessness and fear that Leighton has come to accept as part of her everyday life.

In an attempt to gain some control over the situation, Leighton pushes past the man and takes Juniper into the living room, where they sit quietly, anxiously waiting for the next round of orders. The bright lights that flood the house feel stark and unforgiving, amplifying the already oppressive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. When the man returns, his actions grow more erratic and aggressive as he tosses their folded towels onto the floor, demanding that the girls show him the correct way to fold them. The underlying tension is palpable as Leighton’s heart sinks, knowing that no matter how hard they try, it will never be enough. Juniper, who is clearly upset by the constant failure to meet his harsh expectations, becomes visibly distressed, her quiet sobs filling the room. Leighton tries to keep her composure, but the man's anger soon shifts to her, and he calls her vile names before throwing a vase against the wall, as though to punctuate his cruel words. This eruption of aggression shocks Leighton, but she

resolutely holds back her tears, determined to maintain her composure, even as every word and action from the man chips away at her emotional stability. As she meticulously folds the towels, trying to prove that she is capable, Leighton suppresses the emotional turmoil threatening to overwhelm her, trying to meet his impossible standards, all while battling the intense internal conflict that comes with living in such a toxic environment.

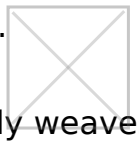
After the others retreat upstairs, Leighton is left behind to clean up the shards of glass from the broken vase, her mind swirling with thoughts of the chaos that dominates her home. She methodically turns off the lights in the house, each click of the switch amplifying the silence that follows the explosion of emotions. As she glances into the bathroom mirror, the empty shelves once filled with towels serve as a striking visual reminder of the emptiness in her life. The absence of the towels symbolizes the absence of peace and security in her world, reinforcing her feelings of instability. Exhausted and emotionally drained, Leighton decides to study for an important calculus exam, trying to find an escape in her studies, but her focus slips as the weight of her home life drifts back into her thoughts. The paradox of her situation becomes clearer as she wrestles with the desire to escape from her troubled home life, yet fears what would happen to her younger sisters if she were to leave. The chapter concludes with Leighton staring into the early light of the morning, overwhelmed with a sense of dread about the unchangeable world around her. Her internal struggle becomes a powerful symbol of the tension between the yearning for freedom and the crushing sense of responsibility she feels toward her sisters. The emotions of helplessness, exhaustion, and fear create a vivid portrayal of the complexity of her world, leaving readers to reflect on the impact of a difficult home life on a person’s sense of identity and their ability to hope for a better future.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - December 31

Auburn, Pennsylvania, serves as the backdrop for Chapter 64 of *If These Wings Could Fly*, where the chapter is set on December 31, bringing with it a reflection on both human and natural life. The first striking detail presented is the crow population, which at the time is recorded at 84,784. This figure, while specific, carries with it far more significance than just a number; it stands as a representation of the thriving natural world coexisting with the rhythms of human existence. The crow population in Auburn is not merely a statistical fact; it is a symbol of the ongoing vitality of nature, which continues to persist and grow, despite the human preoccupation with the passing of time. As the year winds down and the new one is poised to begin, the presence of these crows acts as a powerful reminder of the unbroken cycles of life. In contrast to the human tendency to celebrate milestones, nature proceeds with its own steady pace, unaffected by the personal significance humans attach to dates and events. The mention of crows, creatures often imbued with symbolic meanings of intelligence, transformation, and even mystery, enriches the narrative, encouraging readers to reflect on the deeper connections between the natural world and the world humans occupy.

Although this chapter is concise, it effectively invites reflection on the broader implications of the crow population in Auburn. The crow, a species known for its high intelligence and complex social structure, serves as the perfect focal point for exploring the dynamics of the local ecosystem. With their ability to adapt to urban and rural environments alike, crows symbolize resilience and adaptability—traits that allow them to thrive despite changing conditions. The growing number of crows in Auburn could signal a variety of things: changes in the local ecosystem, an increase in available resources, or even a shift in the balance between humans and wildlife. The crows' presence, ever-expanding, is also a reminder of the forces of nature that persist

beyond human control. As the new year approaches, the stark contrast between human celebration and the quiet, enduring continuity of the natural world becomes clear. While people celebrate the passage of time, nature continues on its path, indifferent to the milestones humans obsess over. This sense of continuity in nature offers a subtle comfort, suggesting that, regardless of the challenges people face, the natural world remains a constant, providing a sense of stability and connection to something larger.



The chapter subtly weaves the crow population into a larger meditation on time, change, and human life. While humans mark the end of one year and the beginning of another with rituals, celebrations, and reflection, nature marches on without such fanfare. The growing number of crows serves as a metaphor for the cycles of life and the resilience of nature, constantly adapting to the environment and human influence. The fact that the crows continue to grow in number in Auburn reflects an underlying message about the persistence of life, no matter the circumstances. They are a symbol of life’s enduring strength and adaptability in the face of change. Their presence also draws attention to the intricacies of the local ecosystem, where small changes—such as shifts in the availability of resources—can lead to large-scale transformations in the population of a species. The chapter’s emphasis on the crow population calls attention to the delicate balance between humans and nature, inviting readers to consider how human actions, traditions, and seasons are intertwined with the natural world. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for larger discussions about environmental sustainability, human impact, and the importance of understanding the natural forces that shape life in towns like Auburn. The ever-growing crow population is not just a statistic but a lens through which readers are invited to reflect on their own relationship with the natural world and the passing of time. As the year turns, the crows remain a reminder that, even in moments of transition, life’s cycles continue relentlessly, bringing with them both beauty and complexity.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - December 14

Auburn, Pennsylvania, sets the stage for a significant chapter on December 14, offering a glimpse into the intricate connection between the community and the natural world. The opening moment focuses on the crow population, an impressive figure of 64,759 that immediately grabs attention and sets the tone for the unfolding narrative. The use of bold and italics to highlight this statistic not only draws the reader’s eye but also emphasizes its symbolic importance within the context of the story. The number of crows seems to suggest more than just a population count; it creates an eerie and foreboding atmosphere, hinting at the complexity of what’s to come. The sheer size of the crow population draws a parallel to the complexity and hidden depths within the town of Auburn itself. The birds, in their vast numbers, embody a mysterious force of nature, prompting readers to think about what these creatures represent—whether they are harbingers of change, symbols of community, or a reflection of something darker that’s about to unfold.

The structure of the chapter is minimal yet impactful, using simple observations to set the scene and invite reflection. The date, December 14, is not just a detail; it’s a moment in time that anchors the story, while the crow population adds both a natural and symbolic layer to the narrative. Their presence in such large numbers evokes questions about what these birds might signify beyond the ordinary—perhaps they’re not just a local wildlife statistic, but a metaphor for something greater. The transition into winter, suggested by the date and the crows’ increasing presence, could serve as a metaphor for change, transformation, or even a foreboding of the cold emotional landscape of the town. The imagery of crows taking over the skies creates a sense of unease and impending disruption, reflecting an emotional undercurrent in the town that’s about to surface. This seemingly ordinary aspect of nature becomes a tool for foreshadowing, suggesting that, just as the birds crowd the sky, so too will the events

of the town become crowded with meaning and consequence. The town, in its quiet surface, may be hiding the complexity of its own transformation, much like the hidden depth of the crow population.

In this short but rich chapter, the symbolism of the crow population is used to engage the reader and spark curiosity about the connection between nature and human life. The large number of crows is presented in a way that invites the reader to look deeper, asking whether they represent a threat, a change, or something else entirely. The seemingly mundane presence of these birds in the town contrasts with their deeper significance, creating a juxtaposition that hints at broader themes of transformation and the hidden forces at play within the community. This minimalistic approach, focusing solely on the detail of the crows, allows for maximum impact, encouraging readers to reflect on the connection between the natural world and the town’s own struggles and secrets. By setting the stage with this simple yet profound observation, the chapter sets in motion a series of themes that will likely resonate throughout the rest of the book. The crows' presence becomes a metaphor not only for nature’s persistent power but also for the way that small details, often overlooked, can have a profound effect on the larger narrative. As the story unfolds, this seemingly insignificant detail may become a central point of focus, carrying with it the weight of symbolism and foreshadowing that will come to define the trajectory of the plot. This initial chapter lays a strong foundation, hinting at the themes of change, nature’s power, and the interconnectedness of life, while building an atmosphere of intrigue and anticipation for what is to come.

Chapter 44

Chapter 44 unfolds with an intense surge of emotional tension as Leighton is suddenly awoken by her mother’s distressed cry in the middle of the night. Instinctively, she rushes to her younger sisters, Cammy and Juniper, who are huddled together, whispering in fear that something terrible is happening to their mother. Driven by the urgency of the situation, Leighton quickly instructs the girls to hide in the armoire, telling them to remain silent and stay safe. Despite her own growing anxiety, she forces herself to leave them alone in the dark, knowing that their safety depends on their staying out of sight. The fear of what might happen next weighs heavily on her, but she knows she must protect her sisters while she faces the chaos unfolding downstairs.

Leighton moves cautiously down the stairs, each step filled with hesitation. When she reaches the bottom step, she freezes, her heart pounding as she listens to the unsettling sounds coming from the kitchen. Her mother’s desperate plea for release echoes through the house, a cry that cuts through the tension like a sharp blade. Leighton’s mind races, and she finds herself trapped between wanting to protect her mother and fearing the consequences of getting involved. In the darkness of the house, she tries to make herself as invisible as possible, hoping that her presence will go unnoticed. The weight of the situation presses heavily on her, and she struggles to suppress the urge to intervene, hoping that staying out of sight will keep her mother safe, even though it feels like a betrayal.

The atmosphere remains thick with dread as Leighton remains frozen, her thoughts filled with uncertainty. She notices a crack in the wall, growing larger as she tries to push against it, symbolizing the deepening fracture in their family. As the situation in the kitchen becomes clearer, Leighton realizes her mother has been crying, although she hasn’t shown it directly. This realization deepens the emotional complexity of the

moment, and Leighton is consumed by the tension of the scene. Her mother, despite her visible distress, is still trying to maintain control, trying to manage the volatile situation with the man wielding the knife. The conflict intensifies, and Leighton feels a growing sense of helplessness as she watches her family torn apart by violence.

Unable to remain passive any longer, Leighton summons all of her courage and rushes into the kitchen, desperately urging her mother to leave with her. The scene erupts into a physical confrontation, with the man resisting violently, making it clear that any attempt to leave would be met with resistance. Leighton is caught in the midst of this chaos, her mother's protective instinct guiding her as she shields Leighton from the man's wrath. Overwhelmed by the terror of the moment, Leighton flees back to the armoire, tears choking her throat as she hides, feeling helpless in the face of the violence that has enveloped her family. The overwhelming weight of the situation presses down on her as she struggles to process the horror unfolding before her eyes.

After what feels like an eternity, the man finally leaves, and a heavy silence falls over the house. Leighton emerges from the armoire, her body trembling with exhaustion and relief. Though shaken by the events that have just transpired, there is a small flicker of hope in her heart. The calm that follows the storm feels fragile, and Leighton knows that, though the immediate danger has passed, the emotional toll of the night will stay with her for much longer. This chapter marks a pivotal moment of vulnerability and resilience for Leighton, as she navigates the complexities of familial love and violence, finding strength in the face of overwhelming fear.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of *If These Wings Could Fly* immerses readers in the complexities of family relationships and societal expectations. The narrator reflects on her sister, Campbell Grace Barnes, a deeply introspective and thoughtful individual who tends to keep her emotions and thoughts hidden. Campbell finds an unusual sense of freedom in riding her bicycle, a simple activity that allows her to escape the pressures of their busy home life. She treasures the quiet independence that comes with biking, enjoying the solace it provides away from the responsibilities and expectations imposed on her. However, her carefree existence takes a turn when she accidentally destroys Mrs. Stieg's garden while racing with her friends. This unintentional act of mischief becomes a focal point for conflict, raising questions about responsibility and the consequences of their actions.

Mrs. Stieg, a widowed elderly neighbor, confronts the narrator shortly after the incident. Her tone is harsh and reprimanding, signaling her disapproval of Campbell's actions, but it also carries a more subtle undertone of criticism. She implies that Campbell, as a young woman, should be associating with other girls, not spending her time with boys. The disapproving remarks seem to reflect an outdated view on gender roles and societal expectations. While Campbell attempts to explain the situation, claiming that the destruction of the garden was purely accidental due to racing down a hill, Mrs. Stieg's perspective doesn't allow room for such explanations. Her view seems rooted in a belief that young women should be more controlled in their behavior, reinforcing rigid societal norms. The tension between the two characters is palpable, and the narrator becomes increasingly aware of the deep generational divide between Campbell's modern thinking and Mrs. Stieg's old-fashioned values.

The following morning, the sisters visit Mrs. Stieg's house to apologize and help restore the damaged garden. As they work to repair the roses, they are met with the painful

reality of thorns, which draw blood from their hands. This physical pain is symbolic of the emotional and psychological toll they are experiencing as they navigate the adult world's complex expectations. The thorns represent not just the literal injuries sustained while trying to fix what was broken, but also the metaphorical challenges of reconciling their actions with the judgments of others. The task of repairing the garden becomes a symbol for the difficulty of restoring something that was disrupted, not only in the garden but also in the relationship between the sisters and their neighbor. As they struggle to mend the flowers, the girls are forced to confront the deeper issues at play—how their actions are perceived by others and how they fit into the broader social constructs of what is deemed appropriate for young women.

As the girls complete the task, Mrs. Stieg continues to impose her traditional beliefs upon them. She criticizes the behavior of modern youth, claiming that women's primary role is to support their husbands, a perspective that is both outdated and restrictive. For Campbell, this remark strikes a nerve, as it triggers a strong sense of defiance. She responds angrily, refusing to accept such limiting views and expressing her frustration with the narrow definition of womanhood that Mrs. Stieg espouses. The anger that Campbell feels is not just about the confrontation with Mrs. Stieg, but about the larger societal forces that dictate how young women should behave. Mrs. Stieg's shock at Campbell's outburst highlights the deep cultural divide between the generations, with younger individuals increasingly rejecting the outdated roles that society has long assigned to women. Campbell's defiance becomes a pivotal moment in the chapter, symbolizing her rejection of the rigid, traditional views that limit her potential and her desire to carve out a more autonomous path for herself.

The chapter ends with the narrator reflecting on the societal pressures placed upon women, symbolized by the wilting roses in their home. The roses, which were once vibrant and full of life, now reflect the withering of traditional ideals that have been forced upon them. The wilting flowers become a powerful metaphor for the damage caused by these outdated perceptions of womanhood, which no longer resonate with the narrator or Campbell. Overwhelmed by these pressures, the narrator makes the

decision to discard the roses, rejecting the harmful ideals they represent. By throwing the flowers away, she symbolically frees herself from the constraints of gender roles and the expectation that women must conform to prescribed societal norms. This act of discarding the roses signifies her willingness to confront the complexities of womanhood in an honest and resilient way, without being confined by the limiting beliefs of older generations. The narrator’s rejection of these ideals serves as a personal declaration of independence, a statement that she will navigate her own identity without being shackled by societal expectations.

The themes of rebellion, identity, and the pursuit of personal agency are skillfully interwoven throughout this chapter, offering a poignant commentary on the struggles young women face when confronted with traditional societal expectations. As the chapter unfolds, it reveals the internal conflict between conformity and autonomy, as well as the growing tension between the old and new ways of thinking. The narrator and Campbell’s journey is one of self-discovery and defiance against the forces that seek to define them. Their actions, whether intentional or unintentional, serve as catalysts for change, as they grapple with the complexities of their identities and the societal pressures that seek to shape them. The chapter ultimately underscores the importance of challenging restrictive roles and embracing the freedom to define one’s own path in life.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 opens with the protagonist being gently awakened by the inviting aroma of coffee. Her mother is standing by her bedside, holding two mugs, offering a rare and peaceful moment to start the day. Despite the early hour, their conversation flows with ease as they chat about the protagonist’s college choices, especially New York University, a school she is eager to attend, even though it goes against her father’s wishes. The warmth of the moment underscores the mother-daughter connection, as the mother senses her daughter’s dreams and aspirations, providing support while offering both humor and advice. Their exchange reveals a deep understanding between them, grounded in love and the shared desire to see the protagonist succeed.

As the day progresses, the protagonist rushes to dress and join her siblings, Campbell and Juniper, for breakfast. The playful atmosphere at the table reflects a sense of normalcy, yet the protagonist feels slightly detached, as if she's in a different world, one where everything is shifting. Her mother’s spontaneous decision to skip school and take the family on a trip to New York City catches everyone by surprise, as such a move is highly uncharacteristic of her. With a twinkle in her eye, the mother reveals her intention to let her daughter experience the city firsthand, reinforcing the notion that New York could indeed be her future home, provided she’s accepted into NYU. This surprising gesture adds to the sense of possibility, while subtly hinting at the challenges that lay ahead as the protagonist contemplates her future away from home.

During the trip, the family reflects on "Apple Days," a time in their past filled with memories of apple picking and baking, evoking nostalgia and longing for simpler, carefree moments. As they share these memories, the protagonist is struck by the changes in their lives, particularly how their father’s absence has deeply altered their family dynamic. This shift in their family structure is felt more poignantly as they

journey to New York City, where the excitement of exploring new possibilities begins to feel bittersweet. The protagonist, caught between the warmth of family memories and the pull of her future, is left contemplating how much her life is about to change. The trip to the city represents both a moment of connection with her family and a glimpse into the independence she’s striving for, creating a mix of emotions as she faces the looming reality of leaving home.

Upon arriving in New York City, the excitement intensifies as they visit iconic landmarks such as NYU and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The taxi ride through the city is filled with anticipation, and they even indulge in classic street food, making memories that blend cliché with a sense of perfection. These moments allow the protagonist to reconnect with her family, yet there's an undercurrent of tension as she contemplates her future. The city, with its vast possibilities, symbolizes her dreams, but it also magnifies her fear of leaving her family behind. The protagonist is caught in the space between nostalgia for her childhood and the undeniable call of adulthood, a feeling that intensifies as she grows more aware of how different her life will be if she decides to pursue her college dreams.

The quiet of Central Park offers a moment of respite from the whirlwind of the day, and as they share an apple, the protagonist’s mind drifts back to the apple she’s holding, which turns out to be bruised. This small setback serves as a metaphor for her conflicted feelings about leaving home—her dreams are ripe, but there are hidden imperfections she can't ignore. The park’s peacefulness contrasts with her inner turmoil, and the sight of three crows perched on a nearby branch triggers a sense of nostalgia, reminding her of the past and the things she might leave behind. This chapter masterfully weaves together the bittersweet realities of growing up, where moments of connection with family are intertwined with the anxieties and uncertainties of impending change. The protagonist’s journey is a delicate balance between embracing new opportunities and honoring the bonds that have shaped her identity. Through her reflections, the reader is reminded of the challenges young adults face when they stand at the threshold of independence, uncertain about the future yet bound by the weight of familial ties.

Chapter 46

Chapter 46 begins with Leighton waking up early, feeling a dull stomachache that weighs on her. Her family surrounds her—her mom and sisters—but her attention is drawn outside where the absence of her father's truck indicates that he likely stayed at his workplace, a trailer used by Barnes Construction. This realization brings with it a mix of emotions, as her father’s absence typically suggests that the operations at the construction site are sluggish, especially during the colder winter months. Though the warmth of home and the familiarity of her family provide some comfort, a heavy sadness settles over Leighton, one that she can't fully understand or articulate. The morning’s usual rhythm, though comforting, doesn't entirely erase the ache she feels deep inside.

Her mom, looking exhausted, prepares coffee with a kind of quiet routine that feels distant now. The two of them engage in a game—a game they once played together with joy—mixing idioms and metaphors, an activity that once united them but now feels hollow. Leighton can sense the distance between them, and as they speak, the real issue becomes clear: the looming need for a restraining order against her father, who has become a source of genuine fear and danger. This underlying truth sparks an argument, as Leighton passionately insists that action must be taken for the family's safety. Yet, her mom hesitates, unwilling to move too quickly due to the long-standing marriage that she doesn’t want to disrupt. Despite acknowledging the tensions at home, her mom continues to cling to the hope that things might improve, which only frustrates Leighton further.

Feeling the weight of responsibility for her younger sisters, Leighton reaches a breaking point. She knows she can’t remain at home in this emotionally charged atmosphere, so she decides to leave, seeking solace with a friend instead. Her decision to distance herself is met with resistance, as her mom continues to cling to the fragile

hope of family unity, even as it slips further away. The tension between them escalates, leaving Leighton feeling trapped and misunderstood. With no other choice, she packs her things, fully aware that she needs to take a step back to preserve her emotional well-being. It is not an easy decision, but one that Leighton knows is necessary for her peace of mind and for the safety of her sisters.

Later, Leighton meets up with her friend Liam, who offers her a place to stay over the weekend. His offer provides a temporary sense of relief, as he understands the turmoil she is going through. As they drive to school, Leighton finds herself opening up to him about the increasingly volatile situation at home. Liam listens with empathy, offering support, but Leighton can't help but feel a sense of frustration. While Liam's understanding is comforting, she knows that he cannot fully comprehend the gravity of the instability she faces on a daily basis. The disconnect between them, though unintentional, highlights the deep-rooted issues that have plagued Leighton's life for so long.

At school, Leighton retreats to the newsroom, hoping to find some distraction and solace in the familiar surroundings. She begins researching protection orders, her mind heavy with doubt and fear as she reads about the various legal steps involved. The more she reads, the more the weight of the situation presses down on her. She grapples with the fear that her father's reputation—his well-known position in the community—might overshadow her own truth. She wonders how she could possibly navigate a system that often protects the guilty and silences those who need to be heard. This realization brings with it a deep sense of vulnerability, as Leighton faces the uncomfortable truth that many women in similar situations have to battle both personal trauma and societal judgment. It is a harsh, overwhelming thought that stirs in her, but it is one that she must confront as she searches for a way to protect herself and her sisters.

The chapter delves deeply into the emotional complexity of family life, particularly when trauma and instability become daily realities. The tensions between Leighton and her mother, the need for protection against a dangerous family member, and the

sense of helplessness that comes with trying to protect younger siblings, all paint a vivid picture of the turmoil Leighton faces. Her desire for safety and peace is overshadowed by the obstacles she faces in achieving it, but her journey of self-discovery and determination is only just beginning. This chapter captures not only the overwhelming burden of living in a chaotic and unsafe environment but also the strength required to confront it head-on, all while trying to maintain a sense of normalcy and care for those she loves most.

Chapter 23

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of *If These Wings Could Fly* follows Leighton as she experiences an uncomfortable and unexpected situation after a mix-up with her locker assignment places her in the junior hallway. This moment triggers a wave of longing, especially for the senior privileges she had eagerly anticipated, particularly the access to the Senior Wall—a social space where seniors gather to express themselves and connect with one another. For Leighton, this represents a symbol of freedom and belonging that she's never fully experienced. However, as she navigates through the day, she can't ignore the gap between her hopes and her reality. Her home life, marked by turbulence and instability, has often forced her to prioritize keeping things together rather than fully embracing the typical high school experiences. As Leighton reflects on what she's missed, her thoughts become tinged with the realization that the normalcy others take for granted has always seemed just out of reach for her.

Leighton's day takes an unexpected turn when she runs into Liam McNamara, a senior who's well-known for his charm, popularity, and leadership role as the student council vice president and a football player. In an awkward moment, Liam mistakenly assumes that Leighton is someone named Lyla, a girl he refers to as his cheerleader partner. The misidentification sets the stage for an uncomfortable interaction that highlights the differences between their social worlds. While Liam approaches the situation with his usual confidence, Leighton's sharp, witty response serves as a reminder of her emotional distance and internal struggles. The conversation reveals much about their contrasting ways of navigating high school life: Liam, who is accustomed to being at the center of attention, and Leighton, who feels disconnected from this world. Despite his attempt to smooth over the awkward moment, Leighton's response is colored by the weight of her difficult home life, which complicates her ability to engage freely with others.

Their interaction continues as they begin to bond over their shared class in Advanced Placement English, a subject that offers them some common ground despite their differences. Liam’s views on the class, as well as his candid opinions about literature, provide a refreshing contrast to the usual small talk that Leighton is used to. For a brief moment, she finds herself connecting with him in a way she hadn’t expected, drawn in by his sincerity. However, as their conversation deepens, Leighton finds herself becoming more distracted by her personal thoughts. The weight of her troubled home life begins to intrude once again, and her initial enjoyment of the conversation starts to fade. She becomes acutely aware of the emotional turmoil she carries, and the easy banter between her and Liam takes on a heavier tone. As her internal conflict intensifies, Leighton abruptly asks for her book back, signaling that the casual conversation has crossed into an uncomfortable territory for her.

Leighton quickly ends the interaction and walks away, overcome with a wave of anxiety that forces her to retreat from the situation. Her hasty exit highlights her ongoing internal struggle to maintain control over her emotions while navigating social situations that require a level of openness she’s not yet ready to offer. The chapter’s ending underscores Leighton’s desire for normalcy, a desire that she finds difficult to achieve due to the emotional weight of her past. The repetition of the word "normal" serves as a powerful reminder of her internal battle to reconcile the idealized version of high school life with the harsh reality she lives every day. For Leighton, this battle is not just about surviving high school but about trying to make sense of her identity in the face of a troubled home life and the emotional scars that still haunt her. The complexity of her journey is mirrored in the difficulty she faces in finding peace within herself and her relationships with others.

Chapter 58

Chapter 58 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with an atmosphere of quiet reflection after a tumultuous night. Although the protagonist's mother has managed to restore their home to some semblance of normalcy, it's clear that both the emotional and physical scars of the recent events linger. The sense of discomfort is tangible, and the weekend feels long and oppressive, marked by silence and an unspoken tension. Despite the home's restoration, their father continues to assert control, holding onto the phone and keys, effectively restricting the family's freedom. This control leaves the protagonist feeling trapped, unable to act, and reluctant to challenge the situation, amplifying the powerlessness that defines their current existence. The chapter paints a picture of an emotionally stifling environment where even simple acts of resistance feel out of reach, adding to the sense of isolation and helplessness that pervades the household.

As the protagonist engages in writing a crow-themed column, the narrative shifts toward a more reflective tone, delving into Celtic mythology and the symbolism of the Morrigan, the goddess of fate and death, often depicted as a crow. This mythological figure serves as a powerful backdrop, mirroring the protagonist's growing sense of foreboding and anxiety. The presence of crows outside their window, blocking out the sun in a dark, chaotic swarm, serves as a stark visual metaphor for the emotional turmoil the protagonist feels. The crows' ominous presence is compounded by the local government's decision to address the crow situation, hinting at an impending change in the town. This decision reflects the town's discomfort with the natural world, positioning the crows as a symbol of the town's broader issues. The growing tension in Auburn is signaled through this intervention, underscoring how the seemingly innocuous can take on deeper, more symbolic meaning. As the crows' days in the town are numbered, so too are the days of the current equilibrium, suggesting that change

is on the horizon, both for the protagonist and their community.

A moment of distraction shifts the narrative as a gust of wind scatters papers across the desk, leading to the discovery of a pink flyer about a scholarship contest with a fast-approaching deadline. This flyer acts as a symbolic turning point, representing the duality of pride—pride that hides uncomfortable truths and fosters an atmosphere where silence becomes the default response to injustice. The protagonist reflects on how pride runs deep in Auburn, where the community's focus on maintaining appearances often leads to a lack of accountability. The citizens of Auburn prefer to avoid addressing difficult issues, operating under the belief that these matters are “none of our business.” This mindset, rooted in the desire to avoid conflict, stifles meaningful conversations and allows the problems within the community to fester. The protagonist's recognition of this social dynamic becomes a critical moment of self-awareness, where they acknowledge the role pride plays in perpetuating an environment where individuals feel disconnected from the reality of their surroundings. The growing realization of this toxic pride deepens the protagonist’s sense of frustration, as they witness how this mindset contributes to the silencing of those in need and the avoidance of necessary change.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist preparing to write a powerful thesis for their column: “It is not the crows that make Auburn ugly.” This statement encapsulates the central theme of the chapter, drawing a direct line between the town’s outward appearance and the deeper, more insidious issues that lie beneath the surface. The crows, in their symbolic form, are not the true source of Auburn’s problems; rather, it is the social environment that fosters denial, repression, and avoidance of difficult truths. By pinpointing this, the protagonist hints at the larger narrative to come—one that will explore the ugliness of the town's underlying social issues and the consequences of a community that refuses to confront its flaws. This revelation adds depth to the chapter, as it challenges the reader to rethink the way perception shapes reality and how the refusal to acknowledge uncomfortable truths can perpetuate an environment where change is not just difficult, but often impossible. The protagonist’s growing awareness of these dynamics sets the stage for a deeper exploration of their

own role in the unfolding narrative and the ways in which their actions may help uncover the truth about Auburn’s struggles.

Chapter 45

Chapter 45 begins with the narrator reminiscing about several painful episodes from their childhood, moments marked by both physical and emotional distress. These memories are vivid and impactful, starting with the incident at age four when the narrator stepped on a piece of sharp scrap metal, an early experience of pain that left a lasting impression. As they grow older, more painful moments arise, such as the fever that consumed them at seven years old, leaving them weak and vulnerable. Then, at age eleven, the emotional and physical turmoil tied to their first period becomes another marker of pain. While each of these incidents contributed to the narrator’s understanding of suffering, the real pain they now experience is directly linked to their mother’s anguish. The chapter paints a picture of how the source of pain evolves, showing that as childhood experiences shape one’s sense of vulnerability, adulthood brings its own deeper, more complicated emotional challenges, especially when tied to family relationships.

As the narrative shifts to the present, the mother is depicted as crouched, visibly distressed, and overwhelmed by confusion and suffering. Her physical posture reflects the emotional turmoil that she’s enduring, making it clear that the pain she’s experiencing is not only physical but also deeply psychological. The narrator’s instinct is to comfort her, a desire that manifests in the question, “Where does it hurt?” but the response, “Everywhere,” strikes a chord, underscoring the pervasive nature of the mother's suffering. Her words are filled with such despair that they resonate deeply with the narrator. The atmosphere in the scene becomes more intense, with the image of crows cawing in the background adding an eerie, almost ritualistic feel to the moment. The sounds seem to echo the heaviness of the mother’s anguish, enhancing the emotional weight of the scene. It is as though the environment itself reflects her internal state, intensifying the reader's sense of the mother’s pain and the depth of the

trauma she’s experiencing.

The emotional bond between the narrator and their mother becomes increasingly evident as the narrator attempts to console her, trying to reassure her that she is now safe, that “he” is gone. The "he" in this case refers to the abuser who had caused years of torment—both physical and emotional. Despite the removal of the abuser from their lives, the mother’s tears are not easily categorized as simple sorrow. Her tears fall without touching her cheeks, signifying a pain that runs deeper than the visible emotional wounds. The imagery of her tears, left unacknowledged and uncomforted, paints a picture of profound sorrow, one that cannot be easily resolved with words or assurances. The narrator, while trying to comfort her, is faced with the painful realization that safety does not always equate to healing, and that the scars left by years of abuse cannot be erased by mere presence or words of support. This realization brings a sense of helplessness, as the mother’s emotional pain seems to persist regardless of her current circumstances.

The complexity of the mother’s suffering becomes more apparent as the narrator learns that her pain is not simply a result of the abuse, but also from the absence of the abuser. Despite the torment he caused, the mother secretly longs for his return, revealing the intricate and often contradictory nature of emotional attachment in abusive relationships. This longing highlights the confusing reality that many abuse survivors face—where the very person who inflicted pain on them is also someone they desire, even after they’ve escaped the harm. The contradictory feelings of love and loss can coexist, creating emotional turmoil that is difficult to untangle. The mother’s whispered wish for the return of the abuser underscores the emotional dependency that can form in toxic relationships, where love, fear, and trauma become inextricably linked. This twist adds a layer of complexity to the narrative, illustrating that healing from abuse is not as simple as removing the abuser from the equation.

The chapter concludes with the narrator reflecting on their own pain, realizing that they, too, are hurting "everywhere." This self-awareness creates a powerful connection between the narrator and their mother, as they recognize that both are trapped in

cycles of pain, suffering from the same underlying trauma. This realization is significant, as it highlights how trauma can transcend generations, with the narrator now carrying the weight of their mother’s suffering as well as their own. The emotional connection between mother and child becomes a shared experience of hurt, one that is difficult to escape. The chapter ultimately conveys the idea that the effects of abuse are far-reaching, leaving scars not only on those directly involved but also on those who bear witness to it. The haunting echo of interconnected suffering lingers, emphasizing the emotional complexity of trauma and the difficulties of healing. Through this deep introspection, the chapter provides insight into the long-lasting impact of abuse, and the slow, painful process of both confronting and overcoming it.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 begins with Leighton standing by her bedroom window, observing the unsettling scene unfolding outside. The trees and rooftops surrounding her house are crowded with a large gathering of crows, their ominous presence thick in the morning air. Leighton watches as her brother returns home, the sight of him only adding to her unease. She hurries through her morning shower, hoping that the routine will bring some semblance of normalcy to the chaotic morning. However, this year feels different for Leighton; it marks her final year before she faces the immense pressure of not only securing her future but also taking responsibility for her younger sisters. The weight of needing to protect them and find a way to manage her family's complicated dynamics looms large, overshadowing the excitement and anticipation that usually come with senior year. The expectations she faces from both her home life and her academic responsibilities make the coming months feel especially heavy.

When Leighton steps into the kitchen, she is greeted by her mother, who is startled by her arrival, causing her to spill coffee on herself. The awkwardness of the moment is tangible, and although her mother tries to smile and greet Leighton warmly, the gesture feels forced and hollow. The warmth they once shared seems to have faded, replaced by a cold, strained atmosphere that Leighton cannot ignore. On the kitchen counter sits a chipped vase holding scarlet roses—an attempt at an apology from her brother, whose past actions have complicated the family dynamic even further. This small offering, meant to smooth over the tension, only adds to the confusion Leighton feels about the state of their home life. The contrast between the apparent gesture of reconciliation and the emotional distance between the family members creates an overwhelming sense of unease for Leighton. She struggles internally, caught between the desire to confront her mother about the unresolved issues at home and the urge to smooth over the tension, preserving the fragile peace they have left.

As Leighton attempts to navigate this difficult moment, she asks her mother about her brother’s recent behavior, hoping to gain some clarity. However, her mother quickly deflects the question and insists that they continue with the normal morning routine, an attempt to avoid addressing the underlying issues. Leighton recognizes this tactic, one that has been used in their household countless times to avoid difficult conversations. The attempt to maintain the appearance of normalcy only amplifies the tension that fills the house, and the emotional distance between them becomes even more apparent. Signs of distress are everywhere—disarray in the picture frames, an unspoken sense of dread hanging in the air—particularly during the quiet evenings when things should feel calm. The discomfort Leighton feels is palpable, and the weight of the situation becomes too much to bear, leaving her torn between pushing her mother for answers or retreating into silence to avoid further confrontation.

As the growing anxiety in the household intensifies, Leighton takes a moment to reflect on her identity and the version of herself she once saw in a photograph of a younger girl. The girl in the picture appears carefree, full of hope, a stark contrast to the person she has become under the strain of her current life. This moment of reflection leads Leighton to question her ability to forgive—both others and herself—amid the chaos of her family’s existence. Her sense of self feels fractured, and the weight of her past actions and the burdens of the present leave her uncertain about how to move forward. As Leighton prepares to send her sisters off to the bus stop, she resolves to face the remnants of their broken life, symbolized by the old, unused house phone that sits in their home. This phone, once a lifeline to the outside world, now represents the fragile connection they maintain to a world beyond their home. When the dial tone hums in the background, it reminds Leighton of the tenuous thread of communication that still exists within her family, even as the complexity of their relationships and the tension between them continue to grow. The chapter concludes with Leighton acknowledging the fragile balance of family life, love, and the ongoing fight for safety amidst the chaos they face.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - December 31

Auburn, Pennsylvania, provides a rich and thought-provoking setting in Chapter 68, with the spotlight placed on the local environment, particularly the remarkable crow population. As of the latest count, the town is home to 97,361 crows, a number that continues to climb year after year. This growing population is not merely a statistic but also a reflection of the changing dynamics within the local ecosystem. The presence of such a large number of crows suggests an ecological balance that is capable of sustaining a diverse range of wildlife. For Auburn, this significant increase in the crow population hints at broader environmental trends, serving as a symbol of both local habitat conditions and the complex relationships that exist within nature. The sheer volume of crows is not an isolated fact; rather, it invites reflection on how different species thrive in a shared space and what the growing presence of these birds means for the town’s ecosystem as a whole.

Crows, with their intelligence, adaptability, and complex social behaviors, serve as a fascinating lens through which to examine the ecological conditions of Auburn. Known for their ability to adjust to both natural and urban environments, crows have evolved to thrive in a variety of settings. Their increasing numbers could be a direct reflection of the environmental shifts taking place in Auburn, as changes in food availability, habitat conditions, and human activity all play a role in shaping the population dynamics. As omnivores, crows are highly adaptable, capable of foraging for food in both natural landscapes and urban settings, which positions them as ideal survivors in environments that may not be suitable for other species. The study of their population growth serves as a subtle indicator of the area’s ecological health, as it suggests that the environment can support a growing number of these resilient birds. At the same time, the presence of such a large avian population raises questions about how these changes impact other species and the natural balance of the environment.

The chapter also invites readers to consider the implications of this growing crow population within the context of Auburn’s small-town setting. With such a large number of crows inhabiting the area, it forces a conversation about how urban development and wildlife intersect. Auburn is not an isolated rural area; it is a town where human activity has inevitably shaped the environment. The crows’ thriving population may indicate the effectiveness of Auburn’s conservation efforts or highlight potential shifts in the balance of local ecosystems. The growing presence of these birds, while a sign of ecological resilience, also serves as a reminder of the consequences of urbanization, with species like crows adapting to increasingly human-dominated environments. This raises critical questions about biodiversity, as the community must navigate the challenges of maintaining a healthy, balanced ecosystem while accommodating both the wildlife that thrives within it and the people who call it home.

As the chapter unfolds, it continues to explore the complex relationship between urban development and wildlife in Auburn, setting the stage for larger discussions on conservation and the environmental future of small towns. The crow population, though fascinating and significant, is only one aspect of a much broader conversation about how humans interact with nature. The presence of these birds might serve as a symbol of the resilience of nature, but it also highlights the growing need for sustainable development practices that support both wildlife and human communities. Auburn, Pennsylvania, may seem like an ordinary town, but its ecosystem, filled with such an impressive crow population, is a reminder of the intricate and delicate balance that exists between nature and human society. The chapter ends with the reader contemplating the future of the town and its environment, recognizing that the challenges facing Auburn reflect broader issues of urbanization, conservation, and the ongoing interaction between humans and the natural world. Through the story of the crows, the chapter opens a window into the pressing environmental questions that shape not just Auburn but many other communities facing similar ecological challenges.

Chapter 65

Chapter 65 of *If These Wings Could Fly* introduces the preparations for a special New Year's Eve evening at Leighton's house. The atmosphere is filled with excitement as she and her friend Sofia get ready, dressed in striking outfits for the occasion. Leighton dons a black satin dress that perfectly complements her reddish hair, adding a touch of elegance to the moment. The light-hearted banter between the two friends highlights their close relationship, with Sofia humorously likening Leighton to a blend of Audrey Hepburn and Strawberry Shortcake, a playful remark that adds warmth and charm to their interaction. This exchange underscores the easygoing and supportive nature of their friendship, with each complimented by the other's playful teasing, a reflection of their deep bond and shared sense of humor.

As the girls are about to leave, they are greeted by a knock at the door, and Campbell enters, adding his own compliments to Leighton's look. His admiration adds another layer of affection to the moment, reinforcing the sense of love and camaraderie surrounding Leighton. Their preparations are met with the supportive presence of Leighton's mother, who watches them with a mixture of nostalgia and pride. She reflects on her own past as she observes her daughter and Sofia, seeing them prepare for their night out. Outside, the cold air serves as a stark reminder of the bleakness of their environment, where the town has been overtaken by crows. The crows' presence marks a foreboding end to the year, symbolizing deeper issues within their community. This eerie atmosphere contrasts with the warmth inside, where Sofia's car provides a brief sanctuary from the frigid weather, but the ominous presence of the crows remains a constant reminder of the larger troubles looming over their world.

When they arrive at the school, the mood shifts to one of excitement as Liam greets Leighton with enthusiasm, admiring her unexpected glamour. His quirky decision to wear a Superman t-shirt underneath his tuxedo showcases his fun-loving personality,

adding a lighthearted and unique touch to the evening. Their playful interaction, filled with teasing and laughter, reflects the easy chemistry between them. During their conversation, Liam shares the news of his acceptance into an art program, a piece of good news that boosts both his future prospects and his spirits. This moment of success brings a sense of hope and positivity, underscoring the potential for new beginnings in their lives. As the night unfolds, Leighton feels pride in her own writing as Liam quotes her work from a local newspaper article addressing the town's problems. The crows' overwhelming presence in the town becomes a symbol for deeper, unresolved issues, suggesting that the situation is more complex than it first appears. This thought-provoking exchange between the two provides a sense of clarity and reflection, urging Leighton to consider how her words can make an impact.

The chapter beautifully captures moments of friendship, love, and personal growth amidst a backdrop of uncertainty. As Leighton and Liam share a dance in the gym, lost in each other, the noise of the outside world seems to fade away. This moment becomes one of solace and joy, where they are able to find comfort in each other, despite the chaos surrounding them. Leighton's reflection on a past rainstorm offers a metaphor for the present moment, suggesting that even amidst life's unpredictable nature, there are moments of bliss and clarity. This perfect moment with Liam serves as a reminder of the beauty and simplicity that can be found even in the most uncertain of times. The chapter blends emotional depth with a sense of hope, illustrating how meaningful connections can offer a sense of peace and renewal amidst the challenges that life presents.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - September 28

Auburn, Pennsylvania, serves as the setting for this chapter of *If These Wings Could Fly* , dated September 28th. The main focus is on the local crow population, which is reported to be 22,367. This precise statistic is the cornerstone of the chapter, presented in a direct and matter-of-fact manner. The lack of any accompanying narrative or personal context surrounding this detail emphasizes the importance of this information on its own. This focus on numbers presents the crow population as a significant point of reference for the reader, setting a tone that suggests these numbers may carry more weight than first apparent. The simple, factual delivery of this data might hint at an environmental or ecological theme that will be explored in the story. With no additional context provided, readers are left to ponder the reasons behind such a specific figure and whether the crows will play a larger symbolic role in the unfolding narrative.

The inclusion of such an exact number, without elaboration or further detail, creates a sense of intrigue, prompting readers to consider why this particular statistic is emphasized. There is no direct explanation as to why the crow population is important, but the specificity of the number suggests it will hold relevance later in the story. It could indicate that the crows are a key component of the setting, either through their symbolic significance or as a representative element of Auburn itself. Perhaps the crows' presence will serve as a metaphor for something broader, such as the fragility of life or the inescapable connection between humans and the natural world. By keeping the focus squarely on the numerical aspect, the author allows the crow population to take on a deeper meaning as the story progresses, leaving room for speculation about what role they may play. The stark presentation of the statistic stands in contrast to what could be a richer, more complex understanding of nature's presence in the story.

Furthermore, the passage’s lack of narrative or personal reflection encourages readers to look for hidden layers of meaning. The raw factual nature of the statistic may serve to ground the story in an observational mode, where numbers and details carry weight more than emotions or personal experiences. This minimalistic approach could be setting the stage for a larger thematic exploration—one where the protagonist may come to understand the significance of the crows or other wildlife around them. With no immediate elaboration, the chapter stands as a simple, almost journalistic introduction that allows the crow population to take center stage. It forces readers to question not just the meaning of the number itself but what it might represent in the broader context of Auburn, the community, or the natural environment. Whether it reflects the state of the town, its residents, or something more abstract is left for the reader to explore as the story develops.

The chapter’s data-driven structure suggests that environmental themes may become central to the narrative, encouraging reflection on how nature influences the lives of those living within a specific locale. The precise number, stripped of any emotional appeal, serves to establish an objective lens through which the reader can examine the setting. It also subtly invites the reader to consider the broader relationship between humanity and the environment, perhaps hinting at the ecological pressures or significance of such a large population of crows. This shift from a more narrative-driven style to a data-centric one draws attention to the potential role of wildlife in the unfolding plot. The crows may symbolize a force of nature that remains constant in the backdrop of human lives, quietly impacting events in ways the characters may not yet fully understand. As such, the crow population is presented not just as a statistic, but as an element with potential thematic resonance, prompting the reader to look deeper into its implications.

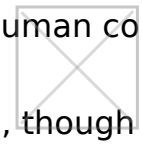
Auburn, Pennsylvania - September 3

Auburn, Pennsylvania, serves as the setting for the opening chapter, establishing a firm foundation in both time and place. The chapter is set on September 3, with the story drawing attention to a seemingly trivial yet significant statistic—the local crow population, recorded at 3,582. This number, though simple, carries weight and may symbolize something larger as the narrative progresses. The inclusion of this statistic offers readers an immediate connection to the town, while also subtly suggesting that the crow population could serve as a metaphor or symbol for future events. The mention of Auburn's crow population serves as a quiet invitation for the reader to question its deeper meaning and its relationship to the unfolding storyline.

The brevity of this introduction, however, doesn't undermine its importance. Every element within the opening passage, from the specific number of crows to the time and place of the setting, is deliberately chosen to establish an atmosphere. The crow population could represent larger ecological themes such as migration, environmental change, or even the delicate balance of nature within this small community. By highlighting the number of crows, the text hints that nature, in some form, will be intertwined with the narrative, suggesting a complex dynamic between the natural world and the people of Auburn. It’s an intriguing choice that establishes a backdrop for exploring deeper relationships—both among individuals and between humans and their environment. The reader is left curious about the role these crows will play in the larger narrative, with a quiet anticipation about how they might symbolize or influence events in the story.

While the scene initially seems to offer only a simple statistic, it becomes evident that these details are meant to provoke deeper thought about the town’s atmosphere. The starkness and specificity of the setting seem to mirror some unspoken tension or contrasts within Auburn, which may unfold as the story develops. The mention of the

crow population feels far from coincidental, as it sets up a series of questions regarding the relationship between the people and the natural world around them. The presence of the crows becomes more than just a number—it acts as a reminder of the underlying layers of meaning in the story, subtly suggesting that the town's natural life might be more attuned to change or disruption than it appears. The sudden focus on these creatures hints at a broader theme of observation and survival, both within nature and the human community.



This introduction, though minimal in length, does more than simply describe a setting—it evokes a mood and introduces an idea of interconnectedness. The stark image of the crows becomes symbolic of a potential turning point or shift, both in the community and perhaps in the larger story. The brief mention of the number of crows in Auburn also serves to set the tone, hinting at possible disruptions in the balance of life within the town. These birds, though initially appearing insignificant, could hold deeper symbolic weight as the narrative unfolds, leading the reader to consider themes such as migration, survival, and the unpredictable nature of both human and animal life. The suggestion that the crows are in some way central to the plot sparks curiosity, inviting readers to reflect on their possible significance throughout the course of the story.

Ultimately, the opening chapter of the book, through its brief yet carefully selected details, sets the stage for the broader narrative. The crow population, while seemingly a minor statistic, is imbued with potential meaning and serves as a metaphor for deeper thematic explorations. The mention of Auburn, Pennsylvania, and the focus on this small yet specific detail fosters an early connection between the reader and the story's setting, while also building a sense of intrigue. The quiet presence of the crows invites curiosity, and the reader is encouraged to ask how such an unassuming statistic might relate to the upcoming story. This clever use of symbolism and imagery serves to lay the groundwork for a more complex exploration of the relationships, tensions, and environmental factors that will play a role in the unfolding plot, leaving readers eager to dive deeper into the world of Auburn and its inhabitants.

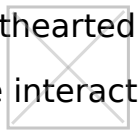
Chapter 15

Chapter 15 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with Juniper and the narrator spending a peaceful morning together in their backyard, with the crisp air of early autumn settling in. Despite the season's chill, the weather remains unseasonably warm, which leads to Campbell riding her bike outside, even though she’s still recovering from a recent mishap involving a rosebush. This accident nearly ended her biking season early, but her resilience shows as she continues to enjoy the ride. Meanwhile, the narrator is balancing multiple responsibilities, including calculus homework, research for the school newspaper, and frustration over an art elective that hasn't been going well. Juniper, on the other hand, finds solace in reading a book of fairy tales, escaping into a world of imagination while the narrator struggles with the pressures of their academic and extracurricular life.

As they sit in the backyard, the persistent cawing of crows around them becomes a constant source of irritation. The narrator mentions their ongoing research into the increase in crow populations in towns across the country, including a nearby town where an astonishing fifty thousand crows have been counted migrating from Canada. This fact catches Juniper's attention and sparks a discussion about the local crow population and its sudden rise. During the conversation, the narrator also reflects on the success of Auburn’s football team, something that feels peculiar to them, given the town’s focus on the sport. While the crows remain a constant distraction, the conversation shifts between curiosity about the local wildlife and the team's success, highlighting the contrast between nature's uncontrollable forces and the more structured aspects of the town’s life.

As more crows land nearby, the narrator impulsively decides to throw raisins at them, ignoring a local ordinance Juniper had mentioned in a recent paper. The rebellion against the rules brings a moment of joy to both of them, and they laugh together over

Juniper’s lost leather cuff bracelet, which she feels guilty about misplacing. The playful interaction transitions into a more serious conversation about how other towns have dealt with their crow populations, some even resorting to hunting practices to scare the birds away. This darker side of the situation makes Juniper uneasy, as she begins to question the safety of the local crows. The discussion of the crows' vulnerability introduces a sense of responsibility for the animals that hadn’t been present in their earlier, more lighthearted banter. It serves as a reminder of the complexities in their seemingly simple interactions with nature.



The mood lightens again when Juniper reveals that she has been writing letters to Joe, a crow she admires, leaving treats for him in hopes of receiving gifts in return. The narrator is initially skeptical, but Juniper’s earnestness convinces them to consider the possibility that Joe might actually be gifting her something. She proudly presents a shiny marble, claiming that it is a gift from Joe, which she believes is a sign of the crow's affection. Just as the moment is filled with wonder and childlike joy, Campbell enters and mocks the idea, trying to undermine the authenticity of Juniper's belief. However, Juniper remains unfazed, continuing to share her letters to Joe with the same confidence and hope she had when she first began this whimsical exchange. The playful mood lingers, even though there is an underlying tension between the sisters, as their interactions continue to reveal different perspectives on the world.

The chapter takes a sudden turn when Campbell’s bike is run over by a truck returning to the neighborhood. The narrator witnesses Campbell’s heartbreak and frustration as she stands motionless in the yard, facing the unexpected loss of her beloved bike. This loss signals a shift in the tone of the chapter, turning what had been a lighthearted and nostalgic scene into one of emotional weight and uncertainty. Campbell’s future in biking now seems uncertain, and the reality of this setback leaves her feeling helpless and vulnerable. The emotional impact of this event deepens the narrative, showcasing the fragility of youthful dreams and the way unforeseen circumstances can abruptly alter the course of one's plans. The playful atmosphere from earlier in the chapter fades, replaced by the rawness of disappointment and loss, marking a poignant

moment in the story.

The chapter highlights the contrast between the carefree moments spent in nature and the harsh realities that can quickly disrupt one's life. Through the lighthearted moments of connection with the crows and the more somber moments of loss, the narrative explores the complexities of life’s unpredictable nature. The characters, especially Juniper and Campbell, are shown navigating both the joy and pain that comes with growing up, providing readers with a deeply relatable experience. These emotional shifts are skillfully woven into the narrative, giving depth to the characters’ relationships with each other and the world around them.

Chapter 61

Chapter 61 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist, Leighton, being summoned out of her art class by Mrs. Riley to discuss an important matter in the newsroom. As Leighton enters the space, Mrs. Riley reveals that the council has decided to award her a scholarship of five thousand dollars in recognition of her essay. This announcement initially fills Leighton with joy, but her happiness quickly turns to confusion when Mrs. Riley informs her that the council has also decided not to publish her essay in the *Auburn Gazette*. Leighton’s excitement over the scholarship is soon overshadowed by questions about why her work, which was clearly deemed worthy of a financial reward, is considered unsuitable for public consumption. Mrs. Riley, attempting to clarify, explains that while the council acknowledges the quality of Leighton’s essay, they have labeled it a “liability.” This term, used in reference to something that could cause harm or legal trouble, leaves Leighton questioning who stands to be hurt by the essay’s publication.

Leighton’s mind begins to race as she wonders how the essay could affect her, her family, or the community at large. Mrs. Riley, sensing her confusion, suggests that the potential danger extends to both Leighton and her family, indicating that the town's interests are also at stake. The council’s hesitation to publish the essay adds an unsettling layer to the situation, as it becomes clear that the decision is not just about the content of her work but the consequences of making it public. Leighton’s concerns deepen as she ponders the broader implications of this decision. The more she thinks about it, the more she realizes that the town’s collective interests might be influencing this seemingly personal matter. As Leighton contemplates the council's motivations, she notices Joe, a character connected to her in some way, sitting outside, a silent witness to her turmoil. His presence, though unspoken, amplifies her discomfort, intensifying the unease that has already begun to settle in her mind.

In an effort to resolve the situation, Leighton proposes a solution: she suggests that the council publish her essay anonymously. This idea, she believes, would relieve her of the perceived liability while still allowing her message to be heard. Mrs. Riley, however, hesitates at the suggestion, expressing doubt about whether the council would agree to such a compromise. Leighton, undeterred, argues that by publishing anonymously, the liability would shift to the council, absolving her of any risk. She points out that if the council continues to refuse her request, it would only reveal that their concern for her safety is less about protecting her and more about safeguarding their own interests. Leighton’s unwavering insistence shows her determination to have her work recognized, despite the council’s reluctance and the personal cost it may carry. Her resilience is evident as she fights for the value of her words and the opportunity to make an impact, even when others seem hesitant to support her.

Further, Leighton shares her plan to use her essay for other college applications, regardless of whether it is published in the *Auburn Gazette*. She explains that the recognition of her work doesn’t need to come from the council, as long as it can help her future prospects. This forward-thinking approach shows Leighton’s strength and determination to keep moving forward despite the challenges. Mrs. Riley, seeing Leighton’s drive, agrees to approach the council on her behalf, offering a glimmer of hope that the situation might be resolved in Leighton’s favor. Yet, despite this small reassurance, as the conversation ends, Leighton looks back out the window and notices that Joe has disappeared. His absence highlights the emotional isolation Leighton feels in this moment—surrounded by people, yet still alone in her struggle. This moment of solitude, underscored by the emptiness left by Joe's disappearance, intensifies Leighton’s sense of being disconnected from those around her, further emphasizing the internal battle she faces as she navigates the complexities of her situation. The chapter, through its quiet moments and intense reflections, underscores the emotional weight of Leighton’s journey as she grapples with the pressure to be both seen and heard in a world that seems reluctant to acknowledge her.

Chapter 66

Chapter 66:

“I HEARD YOUR DAD TRIED TO kill your mom.”

And there goes that perfect moment.

Liam and I turn to face Brody, who is grinning at me.

The police blotter.

Liam takes a step toward him, and I grab his arm. “Let’s go,” I say.

“Leighton.” Liam’s arm is tight and tense under my fingers.

“Let’s just leave.”

“But they haven’t even announced the Winter Formal Ice King and Queen,” Brody says. “I hear you two are the favorites.”

“Jesus, Brody, how much of a jackass can you be?” Liam asks.

“Ignore him,” I say. “C’mon.”

“Brody, you have to leave,” says a voice behind me. It’s Amelia. Perfect hair, perfect dress . . . perfectly cold glare in her eyes as she faces Brody. “As student council president, I’m telling you to leave the dance.”

“Whatever,” he says. “Lame-ass dance anyway.”

“Go,” she says again. Just like at the football game, I’m surprised by how forceful her voice is for someone so small.

Brody flips her off before turning away, but he does leave the gym.

“Thank you, Amelia.” My hand falls onto her arm. I’m so grateful, I don’t even know how to say it.

“Don’t let him ruin your night,” Amelia says. “Oh, damn, someone’s putting the basketball nets down. They’re going to wreck my balloon arch. I’ve gotta go.”

She waves goodbye.

Sofia is on the other side of the gym, already yelling at the kid who is lowering the basketball nets and gesturing wildly at the balloons. I laugh, but when I turn back to Liam, he’s still angry.

“Wanna get out of here?” I ask.

“Really? Where do you want to go?”

“New York City,” I say. “California. The moon.”

Finally, he laughs.

“First, the newsroom. I need to check my email.”

“Lead the way,” he says.

The newsroom is pitch-black, and we stumble our way through it, unwilling to turn on lights and attract a teacher’s attention.

“It’s gonna take a little while to warm up,” I whisper, turning on my dinosaur computer.

“Mmmhmm. Did you bring me here under false pretenses, Barnes?” Liam asks, his hands finding me in the dark.

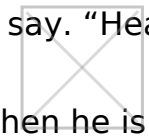
“Maybe,” I giggle. The computer starts up, and I click on the email icon.

“You know, this takes a while to open, too,” I tell him.

He turns me in his arms and lifts me up onto my desk. He kisses me slowly, his hands tangling in the teased curls of my eighties-styled hair. I laugh when he fails for the fourth time to move my hair. “What exactly are you trying to do?” I ask, my eyes on the ceiling.

“Kiss your neck. It’s like a lion’s mane.”

“I am woman,” I say. “Hear me roar.”



He laughs, and then he is kissing me again. I can feel his smile against my lips, and there’s no place in the world I’d rather be than in the school newsroom, making out with Liam McNamara.

The rustle of my dress sends a chill across my skin. I’m glad we are alone. This feels like how really well-written words make me feel. Not like an article for the paper or an essay for lit class. More like a sonnet. My legs are parentheses around his waist. When I sigh against his neck, it’s an apostrophe—in the possessive. And every word of it is familiar already—I’ve been memorizing them for months. Liam’s arms come around me and pull me in tighter, he kisses me deeper, and I wonder where this is going—

My email dings.

He pulls back, tilts his head. “Probably not the place.”

“Definitely not the place.”

I hop off the desk and turn to check my email. I scroll through the dozens of junk emails and college emails that have cluttered my inbox in the last week. And then one catches my eyes: Early Admission Application Update.

“It’s from NYU,” I say.

“You don’t think?”

“I don’t know,” I whisper, and we both turn to look at the screen.

“Oh, look. This one’s from my ornithologist.”

I click on that email first.

“Wimp,” Liam whispers, his hands trying in vain to gather up my wild hair so he can look over my shoulder. I read the first email out loud.

“‘As promised, I’ve enclosed the second thermal-imaging map of the crow roosting habits in Auburn, Pennsylvania . . .’” I trail off and open the attachment. Like the first thermal map he sent me a few weeks ago, another brilliantly colored map fills the screen. Yellow and orange on the outskirts of town, where there are fewer crows. Red and maroon where their concentration is higher. But this map looks different from the first. There’s a lot more dark red, and now there is one patch of black—the highest concentration—and the entire thing is shaped like a storm, with an epicenter where the most crows have gathered.

I look at the street outlines on the map, and my breath catches. The black spot falls almost perfectly over my home.

“Liam . . .” I click to enlarge the map. “What the hell do you think that means?”

“Leighton.”

“It’s strange, right?”

“Leighton,” he says again. “You opened the other one.”

He’s right. I clicked the wrong button. Instead of enlarging the map, I closed it.

And opened the email from NYU.

“Lay-TON!” Liam shouts. He lifts me up in my shiny black dress and spins me around.

I got in.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with Leighton sitting in a lunch booth with Liam McNamara, who is seated beside her friend Sofia. Their conversation starts off casually, with Liam making a lighthearted comment about the cold tater tots on Leighton's tray. However, as their chat continues, it becomes clear that Leighton has been concealing something from Sofia, and the tension of her secret is palpable. The unease grows as Leighton feels the pressure of being caught in a lie, realizing that her attempt to keep things hidden may not be successful. Despite her discomfort, the situation becomes a turning point in their interaction, where the stakes of honesty and trust come into play.

Liam, in his usual candid manner, brings up Brody, a classmate who has been rude to Leighton in class, mentioning that a confrontation might be necessary. Leighton appreciates Liam's straightforward support, as she typically avoids confrontations and has not spoken to Brody since she turned him down. His willingness to stand by her in this situation contrasts sharply with her usual avoidance of conflict. As the conversation shifts, Liam casually asks Leighton out on a date, an unexpected move that flusters both her and Sofia. The awkwardness is palpable, and Leighton declines, explaining that her focus must remain on her college applications and the overwhelming homework demands that have come to define her priorities. This rejection, though politely stated, reveals the tension between her desires and her responsibilities, showing the strain of balancing personal life with academic and familial obligations.

Despite turning Liam down, Leighton can’t help but feel a growing attraction toward him, drawn in by his directness and kindness. His attention feels refreshing compared to the chaos of her home life, where her responsibilities weigh heavily on her. As their conversation progresses, Liam offers her unexpected compliments, suggesting that he

sees something special in her that others might overlook. This attention unsettles Leighton, as she tries to resist the pull of affection, reminding herself that she doesn't have the time for a romantic relationship. Her priority, in her mind, should be focused on her future—her college applications and ensuring her sisters' safety at home. Yet, as Liam continues to express admiration, the conflict between her desire for connection and the overwhelming pressures of her reality deepens.

Liam's reaction to her rejection adds another layer to the encounter, as he adopts a melodramatic, heartbroken persona, which Sofia finds amusing. Leighton, too, struggles to suppress her laughter, recognizing the playful nature of the situation despite her inner conflict. The interaction leaves her with mixed feelings, as she becomes acutely aware of the chemistry between them, something both exciting and unsettling at the same time. Liam's playful exit only amplifies her awareness of their connection, leaving her to question what it might mean for her future, especially as she grapples with the weight of her existing responsibilities. The flirtation she feels could lead to joy, yet it is shadowed by the harsh reality of her life, where stability is not guaranteed.

Afterward, Sofia hints that she believes Liam genuinely likes Leighton, which makes her uneasy. Although she enjoys their interactions and the way Liam makes her feel, she mentally scolds herself for allowing any emotional attachment to form. The looming responsibility of her family obligations weighs heavily on her, reminding her that she has little time to stabilize her home life to ensure her sisters' safety. With less than a year to make sure everything is secure, the idea of a relationship feels like a complication—one that could lead to heartbreak rather than happiness. This internal conflict underscores Leighton's emotional turmoil, as she reflects on the past—particularly a picture in her living room that commemorates a failed "ever after." This imagery serves as a reminder of the complexities of love, reinforcing the narrator's reluctance to get involved emotionally. It hints at the painful inevitability of heartbreak, even as she is drawn to the excitement that Liam brings into her life.

This chapter captures Leighton’s struggle with the conflicting desires of romance and responsibility, showcasing the complexities of growing up and trying to balance personal happiness with familial duties. It emphasizes the difficulty of navigating emotions, especially when external pressures—like her family’s needs—complicate the possibilities of a carefree life. As Leighton contemplates her feelings for Liam, she is also forced to face the weight of her future and the sacrifices she may need to make in order to protect the ones she loves. The tension between her longing for connection and the weight of her responsibilities offers readers a relatable, poignant reflection on the challenges of young adulthood.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 of *If These Wings Could Fly* unfolds on a busy Saturday morning at the Auburn Diner, where the comforting scent of pancakes fills the air and families come together for breakfast. The protagonist reflects on her family's deep-rooted history in Auburn, particularly the legacy of her grandfather's construction business, which helped shape the town's skyline and even built their home. While this legacy is significant, it also prompts the protagonist to consider the contradictions in people's lives—how they outwardly project stability and success, while privately they may carry inner turmoil or unspoken truths. This duality between public appearance and private reality becomes a key theme in the chapter, suggesting that the seemingly perfect lives of the protagonist's family may be hiding something darker beneath the surface.

As the family waits eagerly for their meal, the waitress, Christine, greets them with warmth, creating a momentary sense of camaraderie that contrasts sharply with the tension within the family. Christine's casual suggestion for a girls' night out is quickly rejected by the father, Jesse Barnes, who has been increasingly isolating his wife from her friends and social circles. This refusal highlights the growing strain in their relationship, pointing to a pattern of control and suppression from Jesse. His behavior subtly manipulates the family dynamic, establishing a sense of dominance over his wife, and suggesting that his outward geniality masks a more possessive and oppressive reality. The chapter portrays the emotional divide within the family, where outward warmth and closeness are overshadowed by the underlying issues of control and emotional distance.

The arrival of Officer DiMarco, a long-lost friend of Jesse's, momentarily lightens the atmosphere, offering a brief reprieve from the family's ongoing struggles. However, this brief moment of normalcy is shattered when Jesse is confronted with the news of losing a major bid for a library renovation contract, an event that adds further tension

to the already fraught situation. Despite Jesse's attempt to downplay the setback with a nonchalant attitude, the tension between him and his wife becomes undeniable. His attempt to show support by placing a hand on her shoulder is more telling than comforting, revealing the strained nature of their relationship. This seemingly simple gesture exposes the power imbalance and control he exerts, casting a shadow over their interactions and amplifying the emotional distance between them.

The children, including the narrator, watch their parents play out their roles in the public eye, nodding and smiling in response to their father's words, though their minds are elsewhere. The facade of a happy family begins to crumble for the protagonist as the meal, once a comforting routine, turns sour and heavy. The narrator's internal conflict intensifies, and the chapter closes on a powerful moment of emotional release. Overcome by the tension and sorrow masked by the breakfast, the protagonist rushes to the restroom, vomiting not just the food, but the painful emotions that have been festering inside. This moment marks a poignant turning point, as the protagonist's quiet rebellion against the family's oppressive dynamic is expressed in an outward, visceral way. The stark contrast between the morning's public display of normalcy and the private pain the protagonist experiences encapsulates the core struggle of the chapter, highlighting the emotional toll of suppressing one's true feelings in the face of familial expectations.

This chapter underscores the themes of familial control, societal expectations, and the tension between outward appearances and internal realities. Through subtle yet powerful moments, the narrative reveals how the protagonist grapples with the emotional weight of her family's dynamics. The use of ordinary settings, like the diner, and simple gestures, such as Jesse's hand on his wife's shoulder, transforms these everyday moments into symbols of deeper emotional conflict. The chapter serves as a poignant exploration of the complexities of family life, where love, control, and suppression intertwine in a way that ultimately leaves the protagonist seeking a moment of escape, both physically and emotionally. This exploration of inner turmoil against the backdrop of a seemingly normal family highlights the challenges of navigating personal identity and autonomy within the confines of a controlling and

emotionally distant family structure.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of *If These Wings Could Fly* immerses the narrator in the heavy tension of her home, specifically within the confines of her room as she tries to focus on a calculus assignment. Despite her intent to concentrate, her anxiety steadily rises, anticipating her father's next outburst, a recurring pattern in their household. The quietness of the atmosphere heightens her sense of dread, prompting her to leave her room, a mixture of fear and curiosity driving her to eavesdrop on the unfolding tension. She realizes that the dread of anticipating the conflict often weighs heavier than the conflict itself, and she wishes for the turmoil to begin, believing that only after it passes can she reclaim a fleeting sense of safety.

From her window, she watches her father handling a trash bag in the yard, an act that stirs an even deeper unease within her. His truck, proudly displaying "BARNES CONSTRUCTION" on its side, symbolizes the family pride, but the narrator knows the hidden truth behind it. Her father’s shattered dreams of football glory, destroyed by a career-ending injury, left him bitter and resigned to a life where he became a local legend, known for his unrealized potential and overwhelming disappointment. The facade of his business, built on the notion of family success, contrasts sharply with the reality of his unfulfilled ambitions and the anger that now defines his life. His inability to cope with his past continues to manifest in his everyday actions, affecting those around him.

The truck, now dirty with crow droppings, becomes a powerful symbol of the narrator’s chaotic life. What seems like a minor inconvenience—a mess on the truck—actually represents the larger issues at play. The father’s anger, evident in the careless way he disposes of the trash, adds to the local gossip and deepens the narrator's underlying fear of her home life. The presence of her mother, who quietly tries to keep order amidst the chaos, only intensifies the narrator’s feelings of powerlessness. The

mother's attempts to maintain normalcy are overshadowed by the reality of their dysfunctional household, leaving the narrator feeling trapped in a cycle of anger, guilt, and fear. This imagery of a once-proud truck covered in bird droppings reflects the decay of the family’s dreams and the emotional toll taken by unresolved frustration.

As the evening progresses, the tension in the house escalates, triggered by a seemingly insignificant event: a dish slipping from her mother’s hands. This small accident sets off her father’s rage, resulting in shattered glass scattered across the floor. In an attempt to protect her mother, the narrator steps in, but this only draws her father's fury. He storms out of the house, leaving the family to pick up the pieces of the latest eruption of anger. The incident highlights the volatile nature of their home life, where small moments quickly spiral into chaos. The narrator’s attempt to defend her mother reflects the deep division in the family, where anger is a constant, and her actions only add fuel to the fire.

After the explosion of anger subsides, the narrator helps her mother clean up the broken glass, but the atmosphere remains thick with disquiet. Her mother’s lament that things weren’t always this way serves as a stark contrast to the narrator’s perception of their reality. To her, the anger has always been a part of their lives, an unshakable presence that looms over their family. The chapter ends with the narrator reflecting on her father’s rage, wondering if he needs them to be present in order to feel justified in his anger. This thought reveals the painful truth that the narrator is forced to confront—their existence is somehow tied to the turmoil, and they remain entangled in the cycle of his unresolved bitterness and frustration. The chapter poignantly explores the emotional strain of living in a household governed by unpredictable anger, capturing the emotional toll it takes on the narrator’s sense of safety and identity.

Chapter 68

Chapter 68 of *If These Wings Could Fly* presents the protagonist in a poignant moment of reflection, standing alone on the edge of the sidewalk as she watches Liam's red taillights fade into the darkness. This fleeting sight sparks within her a vision of a hopeful future, one filled with promises of happiness and togetherness. For a brief moment, she allows herself to imagine a life shared with Liam, free of the obstacles and struggles that have defined her past. The image of their future together contrasts sharply with the tension that lingers in her reality, a tension that only heightens as she approaches her home. Despite the warm and loving vision of the life they could build, a nagging sense of discomfort begins to creep back in as she turns toward the house, signaling the harsh shift from hope to the heavy reality of her situation. Though the sight of Liam's disappearing taillights initially fills her with joy, this joy is quickly interrupted by the explosion of fireworks in the sky, marking the arrival of the New Year. The fireworks, bright and loud, symbolize both celebration and the underlying chaos that still governs her life, making the contrast between what is possible and what is real all the more pronounced.

As she nears her home, a sense of dread fills the air, a tangible weight that pulls at her chest. The darkness that envelopes the house seems to swallow her whole, and she immediately notices the strange and unsettling sight of the windows wide open, something that doesn't sit right with her. The house, which should feel like a sanctuary, now feels alien and ominous. When she steps onto the front step, the quiet stillness of the night is broken by the overwhelming sense that someone else is inside, their presence impossible to ignore. Her heart begins to pound in her chest, and her worst fears seem to materialize as she sees the shadow of a man lurking in the foyer. This figure, standing in stark contrast to the warmth and safety she longs for, is someone she knows all too well—someone who has already broken a protection order

meant to keep him away. The realization strikes her like a lightning bolt, and with it comes the crushing awareness that her safety, and the safety of her sisters, is hanging in the balance. Fear tightens its grip on her, and the instinct to run flickers in her mind, but the weight of her responsibility pulls her back. The thought of abandoning her sisters, leaving them exposed to this man’s potential danger, makes the idea of running seem impossible. The protagonist’s heart races as she stands frozen, unsure of the best course of action, caught between her instincts to protect her loved ones and the paralyzing fear of the unknown threat inside.

As the door creaks open, the figure standing inside comes into full view, and everything the protagonist has feared is suddenly real. The man’s presence, amplified by the darkness around him, feeds into her growing panic. What should have been a moment of relief—a return to the safety of her home—has turned into a nightmare. The house, which she once believed could offer her peace, is now a suffocating reminder of everything that is wrong in her life. The love and safety she once associated with this place have been replaced by the haunting reality of the dangers lurking within. In that moment, the future she had briefly imagined with Liam seems impossibly far away. The simplicity of the life she wanted, filled with warmth, connection, and safety, is overshadowed by the brutality of her current situation. The optimism she had once held onto, the belief that things could be better, fades as she faces the overwhelming danger inside her own home. This chapter perfectly encapsulates the tension between hope and fear, illustrating how easily dreams of a better life can be shattered by the harsh realities that the protagonist must confront. The internal battle between the desire to escape to a brighter future and the need to protect those she loves becomes the central theme of the chapter. As the protagonist grapples with the intensity of the moment, the reader is left questioning what will happen next, torn between the protagonist’s hope for a future of safety and her immediate need to confront the terrifying presence in her life.

Chapter 57

Chapter 57 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with a heavy atmosphere as Erin and her family return from a trip, only to find their home in utter disarray. The moment they step inside, it becomes apparent that something has gone terribly wrong during their absence. The house itself seems to reflect the chaos within: furniture is overturned, walls are damaged, and a picture that once symbolized a joyful homecoming is now shattered on the floor. The destruction serves as a stark visual representation of the tension and turmoil that has been brewing in the household, particularly centered around Erin's father, who is immediately confrontational. There is no attempt at reconciliation or even an apology from him, but rather a barrage of accusations aimed directly at Erin, blaming her for causing embarrassment. The emotional weight of the moment presses down on the family, as Erin finds herself caught in a whirlwind of anger, confusion, and hurt, with no escape in sight.

The confrontation intensifies when Erin's mother, who has typically been passive in these situations, surprises everyone by showing a rare moment of anger. She confronts her husband about his actions, questioning why he abandoned the family during their outing and allowed things to spiral so out of control. Her voice, though steady, reveals a deep sense of frustration and betrayal, reflecting the emotional toll that this ongoing struggle has had on her. Erin's father responds by expressing his feelings of hopelessness, describing his failure to provide for the family in their small-town life. His inability to secure steady work has become a constant source of resentment, and the weight of these unaddressed issues manifests in an explosive outburst of violence. When he kicks over a chair, sending debris flying across the room, it is clear that the physical violence is just a manifestation of the deeper emotional instability within him. This physical act of aggression escalates the situation, signaling that the family is caught in a cycle of unresolved anger and frustration that is

pushing them all further into conflict.

As the argument grows more intense, the father's aggression escalates, and he corners Erin's mother against the wall. His threatening demeanor creates a sense of fear and helplessness that consumes the room. Erin, unable to stay in the chaos any longer, retreats upstairs, her heart pounding as she listens to the confrontation unfold from a distance. She feels trapped, powerless to intervene, and helpless as she watches the situation spiral further out of control. In a final display of dominance, the father seizes the car keys and taunts Erin's mother to retrieve them, further reinforcing the control he holds over the family. This moment solidifies the emotional and physical power imbalance that defines their relationship, leaving Erin's mother to stand in stunned silence, unable to react in the way she might have hoped. The father's actions, however, are not just about asserting control over the immediate situation; they are indicative of the larger pattern of manipulation and emotional abuse that has taken hold in their family dynamic.

The chapter closes with a poignant moment of shared silence, as Erin, her siblings, and their mother retreat to the safety of the bed, huddling together. Despite the chaos and emotional wreckage of the evening, they find a brief moment of solace in their unity. The weight of the father's behavior lingers, but in this shared moment, they find comfort in each other's presence. This quiet unity stands in stark contrast to the turmoil they have just endured, highlighting the complexities of familial loyalty and the emotional bond that, despite everything, still connects them. The silence is not just a result of exhaustion but also a reflection of the emotional numbness that has settled over the family, as they each process the trauma in their own way. This chapter poignantly underscores the psychological toll of domestic strife, the deep emotional conflict it generates, and the difficult challenge of holding onto familial loyalty in the face of overwhelming emotional abuse. It also suggests that despite the pervasive darkness, there may still be a glimmer of hope within the bonds that tie them together, a subtle nod to the possibility of healing amidst the turmoil.

Chapter 60

Chapter 60 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton and Liam revisiting a place from their past, a spot where they once skipped school to escape the pressures of their lives. The cold weather forces them to stay inside the car, but they find comfort in each other's presence, sitting on the hood while gazing up at the starry sky. Despite the chill, they feel a sense of protection from the towering trees around them, which provide a shield from the world outside. This intimate moment comes after a period of silence in Auburn, following the town's disappointing football loss and its withdrawal from the usual festive excitement. The scene highlights the peaceful solace they find in each other, offering a brief respite from the chaos and uncertainty that surrounds their lives. It is during this time of quiet that they are able to reconnect and share their thoughts, allowing them to feel a sense of calm amid the turmoil.

As Leighton leans against Liam, her desire to share her inner thoughts becomes clear, and she opens up about submitting an essay for a scholarship contest. She explains that the essay, which reflects her feelings about home and the complexities of their town, is something deeply personal. Leighton mentions that if she wins, her essay will be published in the *Auburn Gazette*, acknowledging the difficulties she faced and the complex figure from her past that she wrote about. This confession brings to the forefront Leighton's vulnerability, as she confronts the emotional weight of the piece she has written. Her willingness to share this part of herself with Liam signifies not only a deepening of their bond but also the burden of speaking out about her past. It highlights her ongoing struggle with both the external and internal forces that shape her life in Auburn, reinforcing the themes of self-expression and personal growth.

The conversation then shifts to Liam’s concerns for Leighton’s safety, particularly in light of the scrutiny her essay could invite. He worries about the potential fallout from the town’s reaction, as Auburn is a place where judgment can be swift, and privacy is

hard to come by. This discussion leads them to reflect on the challenges of growing up in such an environment, where expectations are often rigid and conformity is valued above individuality. Liam shares his own struggles with the town's perception of him, admitting that although he works hard and excels, he feels that Auburn's acceptance of him is conditional. This candid exchange reveals the pressures they both face in their small town, where identity can be easily shaped by outside expectations. It becomes clear that both Leighton and Liam grapple with the weight of these pressures, and their shared experiences highlight the complexity of navigating their lives in a town that offers little room for deviation from the norm.

The dialogue turns introspective as they discuss their own fears and personal struggles. Leighton opens up about the emotional toll of living with anxiety, explaining how it has shaped her daily life. She reveals that she feels burdened by a constant sense of caution, always on alert, and unable to fully embrace the freedom that others might take for granted. This vulnerable moment deepens the connection between them, as Liam listens attentively and offers words of encouragement. He expresses optimism about their future, suggesting that they have the potential to rise above the limitations of Auburn. This conversation highlights the strength of their bond and the mutual understanding they share, as both of them long for something greater than the confines of their town. Despite the fears that hold them back, Liam's words provide a sense of hope that their aspirations can stretch beyond the small town that has shaped them.

The mood shifts once again as the pair shares a lighter moment of playful banter, reminiscing about the early days of their connection. Liam recalls the moment he first noticed Leighton, not just for her appearance but for the unexpected bravery she displayed during a class discussion. This exchange brings a sense of joy and laughter, strengthening their connection and deepening their relationship. In this playful moment, the complexities of their past are briefly set aside, allowing them to enjoy the simplicity of the present. However, this moment also subtly hints at Leighton's struggles with self-acceptance and her complex feelings about love and fear. The chapter concludes with a sense of mutual understanding and emotional closeness

between Leighton and Liam, as they face the challenges and vulnerabilities that have shaped their lives. The strength of their connection amidst these struggles offers a hopeful glimpse into the future, showing that despite the weight of their fears, they are capable of finding solace in each other.

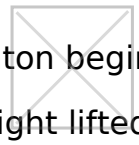
Chapter 35

Chapter 35 opens with Leighton feeling emotionally overwhelmed after a disturbing encounter with her father the previous night. Seeking solace, she hurries to Liam’s car, rain pouring down around her, adding to the weight of her distress. As she settles into the car, Liam greets her casually with a “Good morning, beautiful,” a simple phrase that triggers a flood of tears. Despite her best efforts to keep her emotions in check, the pain that has been building up inside her bursts free, leaving her vulnerable. She opens up to Liam, unable to hold back the anguish she has been carrying, her heart laid bare as she admits the depth of her suffering. This moment reveals the emotional toll of living in an environment filled with manipulation and abuse, as well as the rare comfort she finds in sharing her pain with someone who listens.

Liam, noticing the intensity of her distress, does not take her to school as planned. Instead, he pulls over, showing deep concern for her well-being, allowing her the space to talk. As Leighton struggles to articulate the years of emotional abuse she has endured at the hands of her father, her frustration grows. She feels trapped, unable to leave her toxic home, especially because her mother’s blind love for her father has kept her bound to that environment. The weight of these complex emotions prevents her from breaking free, leaving her feeling helpless and conflicted. This moment of vulnerability brings a sense of clarity, but also reinforces the painful reality that escape is not so simple. The emotional abuse Leighton endures is not just physical; it is psychological, leaving deep scars that prevent her from severing the ties to her family despite the ongoing harm.

As they sit together in the car, the pouring rain mirrors Leighton’s inner turmoil, symbolizing the overwhelming emotions she’s struggling to control. Liam urges her to distance herself from her home, telling her that she doesn’t deserve to live in such a toxic environment. While his words are filled with care and compassion, they clash

with Leighton’s reality. The attachment she feels to her family, especially her mother, makes leaving feel impossible, even though she knows it would be for the best. Her mother’s unwavering devotion to her father makes it difficult for Leighton to envision a life outside the confines of her home, even though the emotional toll is undeniable. This internal conflict deepens her feelings of entrapment, as she is torn between her need for safety and her loyalty to her family, especially her mother.



Eventually, Leighton begins to feel a sense of relief from having shared her pain with Liam, a small weight lifted from her shoulders. She thanks him, and together, they decide to return to school, though not immediately. Liam suggests staying away until after the first period, a suggestion that Leighton agrees to wholeheartedly. In these precious moments of vulnerability, they share a quiet understanding, both finding comfort in the brief respite from their individual struggles. The rain slows, a subtle shift that symbolizes a lighter mood, and the couple observes crows playing in the trees, a lighthearted moment that contrasts sharply with the heaviness of Leighton’s emotional battles. This brief moment of connection provides a welcome distraction, offering a brief taste of normalcy in the midst of her otherwise chaotic world.

When they finally arrive at school, they are late, and Leighton is reminded of the calculus exam waiting for her. As she rushes through the hallways, her thoughts briefly shift from her personal struggles to the pressures of her academic life. A flyer about a crow hunt catches her eye, an unsettling reminder that she is not the only one facing disturbing situations. The flyer represents another troubling reality she cannot escape, paralleling the discomfort of her emotional turmoil with the dark undertones of the world around her. The chapter concludes with a poignant exploration of Leighton’s complex emotions, illustrating the deep struggles she faces within her family while offering brief moments of solace through her connection with Liam. In this chapter, Leighton’s internal conflict between seeking freedom and remaining tied to her family is laid bare, providing a rich exploration of her emotional landscape amidst the harsh realities of her life.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of *If These Wings Could Fly* sets a powerful tone as the protagonist reflects on the tense and emotionally charged environment at home. The opening scene describes the stifling heat of a humid night, with the protagonist's window wide open, allowing the oppressive air to fill the room. Heavy clouds loom overhead, symbolizing a long-awaited storm, which represents not only the much-needed rain for the drought-stricken town but also the hope for change and forgiveness in the protagonist's life. The protagonist's mind is consumed by the chaotic state of her household, where the dominant presence of her father instills a sense of fear and anxiety. His volatile nature has cast a long shadow over the family, creating an atmosphere where peace and security are rare. The protagonist's thoughts shift to the growing weight of her responsibilities, as this year marks the final stretch of high school before she must focus on securing her future, all while taking on the role of protector for her two younger sisters.

The protagonist's internal conflict is made even more palpable as she sits with her two younger sisters, the sound of classic rock music blasting through the house, adding to the overwhelming chaos. With each passing beat, the volume seems to increase, mirroring the rising tension and disorder within the household. But the situation takes a dramatic turn when a loud crash is heard downstairs, causing the protagonist's heart to race with fear. In that moment, her protective instincts kick in, and she is filled with an overwhelming sense of dread about what might have happened to their mother. Her father's behavior, often unpredictable and rooted in his financial struggles, is the catalyst for these violent outbursts. The pressure of an unpaid mortgage and mounting energy bills only serve to fuel his rage, and the protagonist feels a deep, bone-chilling fear as she senses the potential danger that looms for her mother. The atmosphere becomes thick with terror, and the protagonist's helplessness becomes all the more

intense as she faces the reality of her powerless position.

The narrative shifts to the chilling confrontation between the father and mother, as the father physically shoves the mother against furniture in a fit of rage. The scene is harrowing, with the protagonist trying desperately to reassure her sisters that everything is fine, even though she is terrified. She feels her own fear and helplessness wash over her, knowing that her mother could be harmed, yet unsure of how to intervene without making the situation worse. As the violent tension continues, the protagonist realizes that she cannot remain passive any longer. Her attempt to keep the situation from escalating leads her to the decision to escape with her sisters, aware that the telephone line has been severed, preventing her from calling for help. In a desperate bid to protect her sisters, she climbs out the window and onto the roof, trying to frame the situation as an adventure to keep them calm. But despite her brave front, the protagonist's own fear is palpable, particularly as they cross the yard, which is eerily filled with crows. The ominous presence of the birds adds an extra layer of unease to an already tense moment, heightening the sense of foreboding as they move through the night.

Her journey to a neighbor's house is filled with mounting anxiety and fear of the unknown. The hope for assistance is dashed when she finds that no one is home, leaving her feeling isolated and more vulnerable than ever. With no other options, she reluctantly returns to the house, where she is met by her father, whose anger still simmers just beneath the surface. In a panic, she lies, telling him that she has called the police, understanding the risks of telling the truth in such a volatile situation. As her father storms off, leaving her momentarily safe, a fleeting sense of relief washes over the protagonist, but it's quickly tempered by the knowledge that this temporary reprieve may not last. Just as the tension peaks, rain finally begins to fall, bringing with it a sense of cleansing and renewal, as though the storm is washing away the darkness of their current circumstances. The rain symbolizes not only the literal change that is needed in the drought-stricken town but also the figurative change that the protagonist so desperately seeks in her own life. Despite the brief relief, the protagonist knows that the struggle is far from over, and the storm is merely a

temporary reprieve from the storm of emotions and fears that threaten to overwhelm her.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - September 2

Auburn, Pennsylvania, stands as the heart of the author’s reflection in *If These Wings Could Fly*, where gratitude and recognition are extended to those who have left an indelible mark on the author's life. Central to this heartfelt dedication is the younger brother, Jackson, whose presence is likened to that of a guiding star. This metaphor encapsulates not just his physical presence but also the emotional warmth he brings into the author’s world. Jackson is more than just a sibling; he is a symbol of comfort and strength. His height is humorously mentioned, adding a playful layer to their sibling relationship, a bond that is characterized by both deep affection and lighthearted teasing. Through this acknowledgment, the author emphasizes the importance of familial ties, particularly the unspoken support siblings provide, often becoming a constant source of emotional stability during both the highs and lows of life.

The dedication then shifts its focus to the unwavering support of friends Kayleigh and Katharyn, whose significance in the author's life is illustrated with equal depth. The imagery of standing together in the dark, each holding a flashlight, is symbolic of the emotional clarity they offer, even when the path ahead appears uncertain. This metaphor is a powerful representation of the kind of friends who remain grounded and offer guidance when times are tough. The flashlights in their hands are not just tools to illuminate a darkened path but also represent their ability to bring hope and light into challenging moments. The author underscores how essential friends like Kayleigh and Katharyn are in providing emotional shelter and strength, especially during periods of personal trial. It’s in the darkest moments that true friendships often reveal their significance, and the author’s dedication to these individuals highlights their invaluable role in overcoming life’s difficulties.

The final section of the dedication expands its reach to a much broader audience, addressing the survivors of domestic violence with both compassion and strength. The author, recognizing the immense challenges faced by survivors, conveys a deep sense of empathy while reminding them of their immense inner strength. The struggles survivors face are not overlooked; instead, they are acknowledged with dignity and respect, offering a message of empowerment. The author clearly articulates that the journey to recovery, though filled with obstacles, is not an end but rather a new beginning, one that is ripe with opportunities for personal growth and healing. Survivors are reminded that their pain does not define their future, and they hold the power to shape their own destinies. This message of self-empowerment is not merely an affirmation of survival but a powerful call to action for those who have experienced trauma. By embracing hope and recognizing their strength, survivors can move forward, transforming their lives and reclaiming their narrative. It’s a message that resonates deeply, encouraging readers to understand that they are not defined by their past, but by the courage they demonstrate in creating their future.

In totality, the dedication offers a rich tapestry of personal reflection, familial love, and solidarity with those who face adversity. The author’s words serve as a reminder that, while challenges can be overwhelming, they do not dictate one’s future. The narrative, rich with heartfelt anecdotes, is a comforting embrace to anyone going through tough times, ensuring readers that they are not alone in their struggles. With these intimate reflections woven throughout the text, the dedication emphasizes the universal themes of support, resilience, and hope. It’s not just a tribute to the people in the author’s life but also an invitation to the reader to take part in a journey of self-discovery, healing, and strength. The call to keep moving forward, regardless of the obstacles, is woven throughout the dedication, resonating with anyone who has ever faced hardship and giving them the strength to continue. Through the heartfelt dedication, the author invites readers to reflect on their own relationships and challenges, encouraging them to move forward with the same strength and resilience.

Chapter 51

Chapter 51 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton returning home to find her family gathered in the living room, where her father, burdened by guilt and stress, begins to apologize for his recent outburst. He attributes his actions to the overwhelming pressure of his failing business and his desire to protect his daughters from the harsh realities of his struggles. While his words are filled with remorse, the tension in the room is thick, as his apology doesn't seem to fully address the root of the problem. Leighton and her family are left to grapple with the lingering unease, unsure if the apology is genuine or simply a product of his guilt. The scene sets the tone for a family that is navigating the complexities of love, guilt, and the weight of unresolved issues. The protagonist's emotions are mixed as she listens to her father, unsure of how to reconcile his remorse with the damage caused by his behavior.

As the conversation progresses, Leighton's mother tries to offer support, suggesting that keeping the house in order might relieve her husband's stress. This suggestion implies that the family's actions, particularly their behavior within the household, might have contributed to his outbursts. However, this reasoning frustrates both Leighton and her sister, Campbell, as they realize that this focus on the house and their behavior fails to address the deeper issues at play. The notion that they are responsible for their father's emotional state only adds to their frustration, as they recognize that the problem lies not in their actions, but in their father's inability to manage his stress and emotions. This dynamic highlights the emotional burden that each family member carries, as they attempt to navigate the complicated terrain of love, responsibility, and blame. The tension grows as the family members silently acknowledge that their home is a place of conflict rather than sanctuary.

Later, the family conversation shifts as their father proposes adding more enjoyable activities to their family routine in an attempt to create positive memories despite

their financial struggles. He pleads with Leighton to be a part of this plan, hoping to rebuild some semblance of family harmony. Leighton, however, remains conflicted, agreeing to participate but unsure of her father's sincerity. She is torn between her desire to believe that he is truly trying to change and the nagging feeling that his actions might not match his words. As she contemplates this, the internal conflict intensifies, as she struggles to determine whether his efforts to bring the family together are motivated by genuine concern or simply an attempt to ease his guilt. Leighton's emotional complexity becomes evident, as she grapples with both her longing for a healthier family dynamic and her doubts about her father's intentions.

The chapter takes a poignant turn as Leighton and her mother seek solace on the front stoop, observing the birds that have gathered in the tree. This moment of peace contrasts sharply with the turmoil in their home, symbolizing the division between the chaos they live in and the calm that nature offers. While her mother insists that her father is not a monster, but simply a flawed person struggling with his demons, Leighton struggles to accept this view. She feels conflicted, as her father's actions, particularly his behavior and his humiliation, are too painful to overlook. The discussion highlights the emotional complexity of their situation, as Leighton finds it difficult to reconcile the love she feels for her father with the destructive impact of his behavior on the family. Her mother's attempt to justify his actions adds to the tension, as it suggests that love might not always be enough to overcome the harm caused by unresolved emotional issues.

As Leighton reflects on the broader dynamics of her family, she becomes more acutely aware of the fragility of their relationships. Even though love binds them together, the weight of unresolved conflicts and emotional baggage threatens to tear them apart. The tension surrounding their father's recent actions, including staying with Officer DiMarco, further complicates matters. Leighton views this with disdain, as it feels like another betrayal in a series of painful moments. As she contemplates the issues within her family, she is struck by the realization that their bonds are not as strong as they once seemed. The chapter closes with a moment of solidarity between Leighton and her mother, as they sit together, holding hands. This quiet gesture symbolizes a small

but significant attempt to find comfort amidst the chaos, offering a glimpse of hope for the possibility of healing within their family. The complexity of their relationships is evident, as they navigate the difficult terrain of love, guilt, and the struggle to rebuild trust.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - September 15

The provided text appears to be an excerpt from a book titled "If These Wings Could Fly." It includes specific details such as the location, date, and a statistic about the crow population in Auburn, Pennsylvania, dated September 15, with a recorded count of 16,980 crows.

1. **Summary**:
The chapter opens with a setting established in Auburn, Pennsylvania, on September 15. It presents a relatively straightforward piece of information regarding the crow population in the area, noting a significant figure of 16,980. This data serves to create a contextual backdrop for the narrative, highlighting the interaction of nature and human environment in a particular locale. The mention of an exact date and a specific numerical statistic adds a layer of realism and invites the reader to consider the implications of wildlife within their immediate surroundings in Auburn.

2. **Character/Setting Details**:
While this chapter does not delve deeply into any characters or an overarching storyline, it establishes a geographical and temporal context that might be pivotal for further content. The numerically dense detail concerning the crow population hints at the potential for discussing themes of nature, wildlife, or environmental observation later in the narrative.

In summary, while economical in its narrative, this excerpt sets the groundwork for themes that could emerge around nature, population dynamics, and possibly the relationship of individuals with their environment as the book progresses. Further chapters may provide depth to the context introduced here.

Chapter 63

Chapter 63 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with an unsettling scene as the protagonist wakes up early on Christmas Day, disturbed by the loud music of Axl Rose and the raised voices coming from downstairs. Despite the chilling atmosphere, the protagonist hesitantly moves toward their sisters' room and finds them huddled together, visibly frightened by the sounds of the argument downstairs. This moment of fear sets the stage for the chaotic events that follow, as the protagonist listens carefully, piecing together the situation—an angry father searching for his lost cell phone. The tension between them all is thick and palpable, and the protagonist’s unease intensifies when they make their way toward the window to see what’s happening outside, but then decides to act. Using a screw from Liam’s windowsill, they attempt to fix the broken lock on their door, feeling the heavy weight of the uncertainty and fear around them. Despite the nerves creeping in, the protagonist pushes through the fear and finally opens the door to join their mother and face the increasingly volatile situation in the kitchen, preparing for the inevitable confrontation with their father.

The father, visibly enraged, is holding a copy of the *Auburn Gazette*, where the protagonist’s essay, written with the intent of healing familial wounds, has been published anonymously. Although the essay was meant to provide insight and offer a constructive way forward for the family, their father interprets it as an attack on his authority and their family's reputation. His anger is directed squarely at the protagonist, as he accuses them of ruining their lives by airing their personal struggles in public. The father’s inability to see the essay as a means to fix what is broken deepens the rift, and his frustration only grows, further escalating the situation. With each passing moment, the daughters find themselves more and more caught in the crossfire of their father’s rage. The growing tension makes it clear that this is no longer

a simple family dispute, but a much larger threat to their safety. As their father's fury turns physical, assaulting their mother in a violent outburst, the protagonist is pushed to intervene in a desperate attempt to stop the violence. The act of stepping forward is one fueled by the instinct to protect, yet it only adds to the chaos of the moment as the family fights to defend themselves from their father's aggression.

As the chapter intensifies, the situation becomes increasingly fraught, with the protagonist realizing the full extent of their vulnerability. The violence, unpredictability, and desperation leave them feeling small and powerless, and the weight of their powerlessness is overwhelming. Just as it seems that there is no hope left, an unexpected and seemingly trivial event occurs: their father's lost cell phone falls onto the windowsill. This seemingly insignificant occurrence serves as a symbol of hope—an opening, a chance to escape or communicate and potentially seek help in a moment of desperation. The falling phone, almost imperceptible amidst the chaos, represents a flicker of possibility in an otherwise hopeless situation. For the protagonist, it offers a brief respite, an unexpected chance to find a way out of the tension and fear that has gripped them for so long. The chapter concludes with a poignant sense of fragile hope as the protagonist realizes that, while the situation remains dire, there is a way forward, even if it is uncertain. This brief moment hints that change might be possible, despite the chaos, offering a potential escape from the violence that has defined their family life up to this point. The chapter captures the raw emotion of family trauma, highlighting the desperate struggle for safety and the profound instinct to protect loved ones against overwhelming odds.

Chapter 69

Chapter 69 of *If These Wings Could Fly* is steeped in an atmosphere of tension and foreboding, as the house is plunged into darkness, the power abruptly cut off. The action unfolds with Leighton and her sisters, Juniper and Campbell, stuck in a dimly lit room, overwhelmed by a sense of fear and urgency that saturates the air. Despite the stillness, the panic within Leighton's chest is palpable, growing with each passing moment as she listens to muffled voices and heated arguments drifting up from downstairs. The conversations below only heighten the sense of impending danger, suggesting that something volatile and unpredictable is unfolding. The unknown nature of the situation weighs heavily on her, trapping her in a cycle of worry and uncertainty about what might happen next. Every minute feels drawn out, as Leighton battles the growing anxiety in her mind, torn between doing something and waiting for the inevitable clash to unfold.

As the tension in the air builds, Leighton quickly contemplates calling for help, but the presence of a gun becomes her immediate focus, pushing other thoughts aside. The sound of fireworks lighting up the night sky provides a fleeting distraction, briefly drawing her attention away from the escalating fear inside the house. However, the brief burst of light and noise from the fireworks does little to settle the growing chaos within her. Her thoughts quickly shift to her mother, realizing that finding her might offer some semblance of safety in the midst of the chaos. With every passing second, the sense of urgency within Leighton intensifies, and the idea of doing nothing feels increasingly unbearable. She knows that inaction only exacerbates the panic that already runs through her veins. Meanwhile, Campbell's desperate plea for reassurance underscores the reality of their dire situation. The fear shared between the three of them is undeniable—they are all keenly aware of the danger closing in, and there is no time left to waste.

When Leighton approaches the living room, she encounters the chilling sight of her mother positioned in front of the man holding the gun. His confrontational tone and threatening presence send a wave of fear through Leighton’s body, freezing her in place. The raw power of the moment leaves her paralyzed, with a terrifying sense of helplessness settling in. The looming threat of violence feels all too real as she realizes how dangerous their position is. As the intensity of the moment deepens, the creak of her bedroom door sends a shock of realization through Leighton—her sisters are now in immediate danger. The looming threat of violence has moved from the downstairs to her immediate environment, and she must act quickly to protect them. Her thoughts race, but every instinct seems to scream for her to take action, yet fear keeps her rooted to the spot.

In the midst of this escalating situation, her mother steps forward with calculated calmness, positioning herself as a barrier between Leighton and the gunman. The protective instinct her mother displays offers a moment of clarity for Leighton, temporarily calming her racing heartbeat. The reassurance her mother offers through whispered instructions to go upstairs brings a fleeting sense of hope, a chance for safety that Leighton cannot ignore. Yet, despite her mother's efforts to protect them, Leighton is torn between following her mother’s directive to move to safety and her own overwhelming need to stay close, to remain connected in a moment when everything feels out of control. The tension between these competing instincts—protection and the need for connection—creates an emotional conflict that Leighton cannot easily resolve. The chapter encapsulates a crescendo of emotions, from fear to love, and the instinctive drive to act in the face of an overwhelming, life-threatening situation. Leighton’s struggle in this chapter exemplifies the complexity of human relationships, especially when survival is on the line, and protective love becomes the driving force amid looming catastrophe.

Dedication

Dedication serves as a poignant and meaningful introduction in *If These Wings Could Fly*, setting the emotional tone for the entire work. The author begins by offering a heartfelt tribute to their younger brother, Jackson, drawing attention to his profound impact on their life. Jackson is metaphorically compared to a star whose bright presence illuminates the author's universe, evoking a sense of warmth and admiration. The author’s playful acknowledgment of Jackson’s tall stature further emphasizes his role as a guiding figure in their life, someone who stands tall not only physically but also emotionally, providing a steady source of support and light. The dedication to Jackson is not merely about familial affection; it is a celebration of the deep connection shared between siblings and how such bonds can provide strength in moments of uncertainty, offering stability and clarity when life becomes overwhelming.

Moving forward, the author extends their dedication to two more important individuals—Kayleigh and Katharyn—who hold significant places in the author's heart. The strength of their friendship is highlighted through shared experiences of confronting fears together, with a powerful image of standing side by side in the darkness, equipped with only flashlights to guide them. This visual representation of courage and solidarity emphasizes the importance of friendship during challenging times, underscoring how the presence of trusted companions can make seemingly insurmountable obstacles feel more manageable. By facing their fears together, Kayleigh, Katharyn, and the author form an unspoken bond of strength, where each individual draws upon the courage of the others. This imagery emphasizes that while fear is often an unavoidable part of life, the right friends can help transform those moments of vulnerability into opportunities for growth, providing the emotional strength needed to move forward. Through this dedication, the author honors their friends as more than mere companions—they are lifelines who provide the emotional

resilience necessary to face life's darkest moments.

The dedication then shifts to a broader and deeply impactful message directed at survivors of domestic violence. The author, with empathy and respect, acknowledges the immense strength and courage required to survive such trauma, offering a message of empowerment that serves as a reminder of the resilience within every individual. This part of the dedication conveys that the journey of a survivor is far from over and that what may appear to be an ending is actually the beginning of something new and transformative. The author’s words affirm that while the scars of the past may remain, the future is filled with possibilities for healing, growth, and renewal. By framing the dedication as a continuation of each survivor’s journey, the author offers a sense of hope that extends beyond the confines of the narrative, reminding survivors that their personal stories are still unfolding. The dedication becomes a call to action, urging those who have endured trauma to reclaim their narrative and move forward with renewed strength, hope, and the belief that their past does not define their future.

In weaving these personal reflections with a broader message of solidarity, hope, and resilience, the author’s dedication becomes a powerful testament to the importance of human connection. It illustrates that while each individual’s journey is unique, the shared experiences of love, friendship, and survival create an unbreakable bond among us all. This dedication serves as a reminder that, no matter the trials we face, we are never truly alone. The author’s tribute to Jackson, Kayleigh, Katharyn, and survivors of domestic violence connects deeply with readers, offering comfort, encouragement, and the reminder that through love, support, and courage, it is always possible to rise above adversity. The overarching message is clear: while the path may be difficult, there is always hope for healing, transformation, and a brighter future, making the dedication not only a tribute to loved ones but a universal message of empowerment for all. It highlights the importance of maintaining faith in oneself and others, knowing that every challenge can be met with resilience and determination. Ultimately, the dedication reaffirms that the journey of life is ongoing, and through connection, strength, and love, we can continue to move forward.

Chapter 49

Chapter 49 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton waking up in Liam's bed, a situation that fills her with a sense of unease due to the intimacy and closeness of the moment. The warmth of the morning contrasts with the discomfort she feels, heightened by the weight of their developing relationship. When she checks the window, she finds odd gifts left by Joe, tying the present moment back to her past. These gifts, although small, hold a deep significance for her, and she decides to collect them for Juniper, believing they may carry a deeper meaning. This connection between her past and present adds complexity to Leighton's emotional state, as she is forced to confront both her past with Joe and the budding feelings she has for Liam. It is in this space of uncertainty that Leighton tries to navigate her feelings, uncertain about where this relationship might lead and how it aligns with her own sense of self.

Leighton moves to the kitchen, where Liam eagerly tells her of his plans for a morning hike, his enthusiasm clearly evident. Despite her initial hesitation due to the cold weather, Liam's infectious energy and his suggestion of "crow research" as a reason to go on the hike shift her perspective. His playful teasing and thoughtful gestures, like offering her cozy clothes and preparing oatmeal, highlight the deepening connection between them. The idea of using the hike to learn more about crows, an interest of Leighton's, reveals Liam's attentiveness and effort to bond with her over shared interests. As Leighton hesitates but ultimately agrees to join him, there's a sense of mutual understanding beginning to form between them. Their shared moments of laughter and camaraderie emphasize the chemistry that's slowly developing in their relationship, even though Leighton still feels unsure about her emotional response to Liam's earlier confession of love.

On their hike, Leighton meets up with her friends, Amelia and Sofia, who are both excited about the upcoming art show. Sofia shares her artistic journey, discussing her

pieces for the exhibition, which gives Leighton a glimpse into her world and the creative energy that surrounds her. This conversation serves as a contrast to Leighton’s internal conflict, as her thoughts drift back to Liam’s declaration of love and what it means for their connection. As the hike continues, there are moments of lightheartedness, such as discussions about hot cocoa versus coffee, but beneath these casual exchanges, Leighton is struggling with the complexity of her feelings for Liam. Sofia, ever perceptive, presses Leighton about her emotional state, encouraging her to confront the depth of her feelings. It becomes evident that Leighton has not fully processed her emotions, and Sofia’s encouragement sparks a deeper reflection on the sincerity of Liam’s affection and her own fears about what it might mean to open herself up to love.

At a scenic lookout point, the group stops to enjoy the view, while Amelia and Liam engage in a conversation about student council business. Meanwhile, Sofia pushes Leighton further, inquiring about the events from the previous evening with Liam. Leighton admits to feeling overwhelmed and panicked by his confession of love, revealing just how conflicted she feels about the situation. Sofia listens intently, offering gentle encouragement, which helps Leighton gain a clearer perspective on her feelings. The conversation sparks a realization in Leighton about the consistency of Liam’s affection and the vulnerability that she needs to embrace in order to move forward. The chapter closes with an important metaphor, as the crows gather around the town, serving as a powerful image of the challenges and choices that lie ahead. Leighton reflects on the crows, symbolizing the need for patience and self-awareness, as she too must decide when to take control of her own feelings and relationships. The metaphor of the crows leaving when they choose mirrors Leighton’s growing understanding of love—something that cannot be forced or controlled but must unfold naturally. Through this metaphor, the chapter explores the complexity of relationships, self-identity, and the internal journey toward emotional growth.

Chapter 40

Chapter 40 opens with the protagonist grappling with an overwhelming sense of dread as she prepares to head home alone after school, knowing the inevitable confrontation with her father looms. Her mind races, consumed with anxiety over the potential tension awaiting her at home. She had planned to take refuge at the newspaper office to escape, but her hopes are dashed when she finds it unexpectedly closed. The sense of vulnerability intensifies as she makes her way through the school, knowing she has no safe space left to retreat to. Just as her fear begins to take over, Liam, her supportive boyfriend, arrives at her locker, offering a gesture of care that temporarily lifts her spirits. He gives her a phone, explaining that it could be useful in case of emergencies, which stirs both gratitude and trepidation within her. While the thoughtful gift shows his concern, the immediate thought of what her father might do if he discovers the phone creates a wave of anxiety, making her reluctant to accept the gift.

Despite Liam's insistence that she keep the phone hidden, the protagonist struggles with the idea, unable to shake the feeling that there is no truly safe place for it. The weight of her father’s potential reaction is too heavy to ignore, and she ultimately decides to return the phone to Liam, not willing to take the risk of causing further tension at home. This moment reveals the protagonist’s inner turmoil—while she longs for safety and protection, the fear of her home life makes it impossible for her to fully accept the kindness offered by Liam. She deeply desires safety but is trapped by the fear of her father's reactions, revealing the deep emotional conflict she faces. The scene highlights her complex relationship with fear, safety, and trust, demonstrating how her traumatic home life influences her decisions and her ability to embrace support from others.

The tension escalates further when the protagonist faces an uncomfortable encounter with Brody, a student who crosses the line with inappropriate comments and behavior. Brody’s invasion of her personal space triggers an immediate response, and without thinking, the protagonist throws a basketball, striking him in the face and creating chaos in the gym. The situation quickly spirals, with Coach Tenley intervening and imposing a detention on the protagonist despite her attempts to explain the context of Brody's behavior. In the midst of this, Liam steps in, defending her and confronting Brody, which offers some comfort but also intensifies the protagonist’s inner conflict. While grateful for Liam’s support, she feels uneasy about the way the situation unfolded. The feeling of being misunderstood and the internal struggle between standing up for herself and facing consequences leaves her questioning whether her reaction was too impulsive. The moment reflects the emotional complexity of being in a hostile environment, where every interaction can quickly escalate, and the protagonist must constantly navigate between asserting herself and avoiding further trouble.

After the tense incident, the protagonist and Liam share a quiet ride home, filled with silence that speaks volumes about the unspoken emotions between them. As she sits in the car, the protagonist reflects on the constant sense of helplessness that has taken hold of her, exacerbating her fear as she thinks about the dangerous environment waiting for her at home. Though she tries to reassure Liam that everything will be fine and that she has a plan in place, the reality of her situation weighs heavily on her. Her mind is consumed with the fear of returning to a home that feels more like a prison than a sanctuary, a place where she is forced to play a role that she doesn’t want to assume. The final moments of the chapter underscore the emotional tension that defines the protagonist’s life—wanting to escape but feeling trapped by the unrelenting grip of fear and the complexity of her circumstances. The chapter concludes with the protagonist stepping back into her home, her internal conflict still unresolved, carrying the heavy burden of uncertainty and the suffocating sense of entrapment that haunts her thoughts.

Through these emotional and physical challenges, the protagonist's journey emphasizes the crushing weight of fear, the constant internal struggle between desire for safety and the harsh realities of living in an unsafe environment. The narrative illustrates the profound effects of trauma on a young person’s life and how the scars left by abuse affect their ability to trust, seek help, and find peace. While the protagonist's interactions with Liam offer a fleeting sense of relief, the emotional turmoil of her home life continues to overshadow every aspect of her existence. The chapter serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience required to navigate an environment filled with constant danger and the complex emotional landscape that comes with trying to reconcile the desire for freedom with the reality of living in fear.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with a vivid description of the protagonist's bus ride, passing by the local football fields where young boys practice flag football under the watchful eyes of coaches and fathers. The scene serves as a reflection of the societal pressure placed on children to excel in sports, often overshadowing their individual interests and passions. The protagonist is reminded of the intense pressure to perform, which they've felt throughout their own life. Football, in particular, becomes a symbol of this overwhelming expectation. Their aversion to the sport is deeply rooted in their memories of a father whose obsession with football led to his downfall, casting a long shadow over their perception of it. The protagonist's resentment toward the game is not only a rejection of the sport itself but also a rejection of the emotional baggage associated with it.

As the protagonist continues their day, they read the *Auburn Gazette* and are struck by the pervasive coverage of the high school football team. What had once seemed like an insignificant topic to them now seems to dominate the local conversation. Despite their indifference to the sport, they begin to understand the growing importance of the team within the community. This realization is spurred in part by their friend Sofia, who is an enthusiastic supporter of the team. She passionately covers their games for the school newspaper, and her excitement about the sport sparks a curiosity in the protagonist. They begin to question the deeper appeal of the team and wonder what draws Sofia and the community so strongly to it. This shift in perspective invites the protagonist to explore something they had previously dismissed, causing them to rethink their stance on the game.

At home, the atmosphere offers a brief respite from the protagonist's internal conflict. They sit in the kitchen, working on homework while their family prepares dinner, the familiar scents of spaghetti and meatballs filling the air. Their father, having returned

from a long day of construction work, joins the family, and they sit down to share a meal together. This scene, filled with the warmth of family, provides a sense of normalcy amid the protagonist's earlier frustrations. As they engage in casual conversation, their younger sister, Juniper, shares her excitement about an upcoming history project, adding an air of optimism to the family dynamic. However, the mention of a visit to their grandmother, Nana, causes a subtle shift in the mood. The protagonist's unease surfaces, hinting at unresolved issues within their family relationships that they have yet to fully confront. This moment serves as a reminder of the complexities that lie beneath the surface of their seemingly peaceful family life.

The story takes a surprising turn when the protagonist suggests attending the football game that evening, an idea that catches their parents off guard. To their surprise, their parents agree to the outing, making it a family event. This marks a significant shift in the usual tension-filled atmosphere at home, suggesting that the protagonist's family is slowly starting to open up to new experiences together. As the protagonist prepares for the game, their sibling Campbell becomes involved in the process, helping the protagonist choose an outfit. Their playful banter about what to wear adds a lighthearted touch to the scene, and they share teasing comments about sports-themed apparel, a conversation that brings them closer. These small moments of support and humor reinforce the strong bond between the siblings, a reminder of the love and camaraderie that still exists despite the challenges they face as a family.

The chapter ends on a hopeful note as the protagonist dons the chosen outfit, reflecting a moment of connection to both their friends and family. The seemingly mundane act of getting ready for the football game takes on new significance as it represents a step toward bridging gaps and finding common ground with others. The protagonist's decision to participate in this outing, despite their ambivalence about the sport, signals their willingness to embrace new experiences and push past their previous reluctance. This chapter explores the complexity of family dynamics, friendship, and personal growth, all set against the backdrop of a small-town community that values the high school football team. Through subtle shifts in the

protagonist’s relationships and perceptions, the reader is shown how small decisions can lead to moments of connection, understanding, and growth, even in the midst of internal struggles.

In essence, this chapter paints a picture of a young person on the cusp of self-discovery, learning to navigate their feelings toward their family, friends, and the world around them. The tension between personal beliefs and the desire to belong is a common struggle, and the protagonist’s journey to reconcile these aspects of their life is relatable to many readers. The inclusion of everyday moments, like family dinners and sibling interactions, adds depth to the narrative, grounding it in the realities of daily life while also exploring the emotional complexity of adolescence.

Chapter 62

Chapter 62 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with a reflective moment about a house that has stood for generations, originally constructed by the speaker's paternal grandfather. This ancestral connection evokes questions about the true essence of the house itself—was it merely built from timber, nails, and bricks, or does it carry something deeper, something tied to the emotional weight of its creators? The speaker contemplates whether their grandfather's character, neither entirely evil nor wholly good, might still echo within the walls of the house. The implication is that the emotions, actions, and intentions of those who create things can often be embedded within the objects themselves, leaving traces that can shape the environments around them. The house, in this case, becomes more than just a building; it transforms into a symbol of family history and the emotional residues left by its inhabitants. The legacy of the grandfather, even in his absence, could still linger in the very fabric of the house, suggesting that the spaces we inhabit are often filled with the energy and emotions of those who came before us.

This reflection on the house and its ties to the past leads the speaker to consider the potential impact of their grandfather's anger on not just the home but possibly even the entire town. The idea that emotions can seep into the very foundation of a structure is further explored through the speaker's memory of Campbell's notion of "magic." In this context, the "magic" refers to the unsettling power that the house holds, much like a haunted structure in a ghost story, where the emotions and unresolved issues of previous occupants can manifest in tangible ways. This idea of the house being a vessel for the grandfather's anger lends an eerie quality to the environment, one that is filled with fear and tension. Instead of offering comfort or a sense of safety, the house, much like the grandfather, is protective of the anger and emotional pain that has been passed down, creating an atmosphere of oppression

rather than refuge. The contrast between the desire for the house to offer protection and its role in preserving the negative aspects of family history creates a deeper sense of unease, suggesting that sometimes the places we call home carry with them the emotional weight of generations, shaping our experiences without us even realizing it.

As the chapter progresses, the speaker explores the seductive idea of being free from the consequences of one’s actions, a concept that resonates deeply in a family environment weighed down by emotional turmoil. The speaker imagines what it would be like to live without guilt or responsibility, indulging in desires without fear of the repercussions. However, as the reflection deepens, it becomes clear that such freedom might come at a great cost—namely, the distortion of moral judgment and the blurring of lines between right and wrong. The exploration of this idea ties back to the house, which is not just a shelter but a vessel containing the legacies of past generations. The actions and choices of the grandfather and those before him seem to have left an indelible mark on the family and the home they live in. The haunting presence of the past is felt deeply within the walls of the house, where guilt, legacy, and unresolved emotional conflicts continue to shape the present. This connection between the house and the ancestral actions highlights how the emotional fabric of previous generations can seep into the lives of the living, influencing decisions, behavior, and even the way we perceive freedom and morality. The chapter, thus, opens up a complex dialogue about how the emotional weight of our ancestors, both in terms of guilt and legacy, can shape the way we view the world and ourselves, emphasizing the lasting impact of history on the spaces we inhabit and the choices we make.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 of *If These Wings Could Fly* explores the narrator’s reflections on the complexities of family dynamics, especially the emotional turmoil that arises from a father’s unpredictable outbursts. The opening of the chapter presents a metaphor that compares the house to a healed bone—once broken but now mended, though still bearing the scars of its past. This powerful metaphor sets the tone for the narrator's journey of grappling with her family’s dysfunction, where the emotional scars of their past, particularly the father’s outbursts, are still very much present in their daily lives. The house, like the narrator’s heart, has been patched up, yet the damage still lingers, manifesting in ways both seen and unseen.

The narrator then recalls a traumatic snow day from her childhood, when she was only eight years old. On this particular day, her mother, who was pregnant with Juniper, had to leave for work, and her father, weary from his labor, faced the burden of an overflowing trash bin that had been ignored for far too long. His frustration boiled over when he saw the mess, triggering an explosive outburst of anger. He violently threw the trash and, in his rage, broke a cabinet door. The intensity of the scene deeply impacted the narrator and her brother, Campbell, so much so that they sought refuge by hiding in a closet, terrified by their father’s unpredictable wrath. This moment represents the emotional chaos that often accompanies living with an unpredictable and angry parent, where safety and peace seem forever out of reach.

As their mother eventually finds them hiding and brings them back to the scene of the destruction, the once shattered cabinet door appears surprisingly intact, challenging the narrator’s memory of the event. This discrepancy leads the narrator to question her own perception of reality, a confusing and unsettling experience for a young child trying to make sense of a volatile environment. In a quiet moment, Campbell’s soft whisper of "magic" provides an odd comfort, as it hints at a shared acknowledgment of

the bizarre nature of their experiences. Their recognition of the surreal, the inconsistency between what they saw and what was presented, becomes a coping mechanism in their attempt to make sense of the chaos around them. It reveals how children are often forced to create their own explanations for the inexplicable events in their lives, using fantasy and wonder to shield themselves from the painful truth.

As time passes, the narrator observes that these violent outbursts become more frequent, signaling the cyclical nature of her father’s anger. Despite his repeated promises that he would change, his behavior remains consistent, reinforcing the painful realization that the cycle will not break. She comes to understand that love, in this context, does not prevent the violence but rather complicates the situation, making it harder to escape. The emotional bonds formed in such an environment create a complicated web of attachment that, while deeply painful, also makes leaving feel impossible. This cycle of abuse and emotional manipulation perpetuates a sense of entrapment that children often feel, believing that the only way to cope with the chaos is to stay and endure, hoping that love might eventually heal the wounds.

In hindsight, the narrator reflects on how the physical damage to their home—whether broken furniture, shattered windows, or ruined walls—was often “repaired” as if by magic, leaving behind no trace of the violence that had occurred. This "magical" repair symbolizes the denial that becomes a survival mechanism within such a household, as the family learns to avoid confronting the real issues at hand. This behavior, shaped by fear and emotional exhaustion, becomes a coping mechanism, allowing the family to maintain some semblance of normalcy despite the underlying turmoil. The narrator's reflections in this chapter encapsulate the painful struggle of children trying to understand and process the dysfunction within their home. They must navigate the emotional chaos, reconcile the disparity between their lived experiences and what they are told is true, and learn to build emotional resilience in the face of unpredictable violence. The chapter paints a vivid portrait of the complexity of growing up in an environment where love and pain are intertwined, and where the scars of the past remain, even when the exterior seems whole.

Chapter 70

Chapter 70 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with a sense of chaos and heightened tension as the air is thick with the scent of smoke, leaving confusion in its wake. This unusual aroma, caused by a fire that doesn't seem to fit the circumstances, hints at a deeper mystery, as guns typically don't set fires. Leighton, the protagonist, finds himself pushed against the stairs, with his mother anxiously trying to assess whether he has been injured in the melee. Despite his reassurances that he is unharmed, the scene around them paints a different picture. The wall near them has been shot, and it appears to be "bleeding" as if crying out for help, demanding immediate attention. This unsettling image serves as a metaphor for the damage that has been inflicted upon their world, both physically and emotionally. Leighton's internal turmoil intensifies as he realizes that the danger they're facing is more than just physical—it is psychological as well.

As the chaos continues to swirl around them, the urgency escalates. Someone begins frantically searching for keys, moving through the scene in a panic, their mind focused on the search rather than addressing the damage to the wall or the dangers around them. Their actions only serve to heighten the sense of confusion and distress, as priorities become misaligned in the face of mounting pressure. It is in this disordered moment that a crow named Joe unexpectedly makes his entrance, flying through an open window and landing on Leighton's shoulder with an almost supernatural presence. This sudden, almost surreal occurrence immediately draws the reader's attention, as Joe's arrival seems symbolic, reminiscent of the Morrigan, the mythical figure associated with fate, chaos, and transformation. Joe's erratic behavior only adds to the mounting disarray, as he knocks into a coffee table, sending trinkets and items flying across the room. Among these objects, Juniper's personal belongings—pennies, paper clips, and crucially, the truck keys—are scattered across the floor. The keys,

catching the light in the moon’s glow, become a pivotal item in the chaos, signaling the need for escape and action.

The symbolism of Joe’s entrance becomes even more apparent as fireworks light up the night sky, creating a brief moment of clarity amidst the surrounding confusion. The explosion of color and light contrasts sharply with the darkness and disorder within the house, amplifying the sense of urgency and the fragile nature of their reality. In a swift, almost predatory movement, Joe picks up the keys with his claws, his erratic flight leaving the room just as suddenly as he had entered. His departure, marked by the same chaos that preceded it, leaves behind an air of unpredictability. The protagonist, along with the others, is left in a heightened state of tension, wondering what the next move will be. The suddenness of Joe’s actions and their impact on the unfolding events reflects the precariousness of their situation—one where control is elusive, and even the smallest actions can lead to profound consequences. As Joe exits through the window, the tension within the room reaches its peak, and the reader is left questioning what will come of the keys and whether this unexpected turn of events is a sign of fate or simply another chaotic twist in their unpredictable reality.

As the chapter unfolds, the urgency continues to build, blending danger with the inexplicable presence of Joe, who seems to embody the randomness and unpredictability of their situation. The tension between the supernatural and the everyday becomes more pronounced, with each event adding layers of complexity to the narrative. The fireworks that illuminate the night, along with Joe’s unpredictable presence, create a surreal atmosphere, leaving the protagonist and the reader alike with a sense of unease. The randomness of Joe’s actions, though seemingly inconsequential, serves as a reminder of the fragility of their world and the unpredictable forces that shape their reality. In the end, the chapter presents a vivid, almost dreamlike portrayal of chaos and vulnerability, blending supernatural elements with everyday struggles in a way that keeps readers on edge, uncertain of what will happen next. The scene leaves a lasting impression of both danger and hope, as the protagonist and those around him grapple with the unknown.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the narrator contemplating her growing sense of disconnection from the world around her. She feels isolated in Auburn, her small town, like she's standing at the edge of a cliff without any support. In search of comfort, she turns to books, following in the footsteps of her mother, who found solace in classic literature. However, while she once found refuge in these stories, she has grown disillusioned by their constant focus on tragedy. She now prefers the straightforward nature of journalism, which offers a more grounded and truthful perspective on the world. Despite her growing frustration with the classics, she finds herself reluctantly participating in a literature class discussion about *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, dreading the inevitable heartbreak that will accompany the novel's themes of love and loss.

As the class continues, the narrator becomes increasingly aware of Liam, a quiet yet magnetic classmate who stands out from the usual crowd of popular students. Unlike the typical jocks and attention-seekers, Liam carries a quiet charisma that draws both admiration and suspicion from others. The classroom dynamic becomes charged when Brody, a popular boy, makes disrespectful comments about feminism, using offensive language. The narrator, uncomfortable but resolute, takes the opportunity to challenge Brody's ignorance by defending feminism as a movement simply advocating for equal rights for women. She stresses that it's not a radical or extreme viewpoint, but a basic human right—something Brody dismisses with dismissive remarks. Her attempt to stand up for what she believes in only adds to the tension in the room, but it marks an important moment of resistance against the prevailing attitudes of her peers.

In an unexpected turn, Liam speaks up to state that he considers himself a feminist, although he hesitates when asked to explain what it means. The narrator feels a mixture of frustration and respect, as Liam's comment holds potential, but his

uncertainty undermines its power. The class, already uneasy, becomes more charged as the conversation shifts back to Brody, whose lack of understanding becomes more evident. The narrator challenges him further, feeling both bristly and resolute in her defense of women's rights. Meanwhile, she begins to realize that Liam, though well-liked and outwardly confident, also faces the subtle yet pervasive racism that exists in their small town. The narrator feels a pang of guilt for having ignored these issues in the past, reflecting on how easily she overlooked such inequalities during her childhood. Liam's quiet, conflicted presence acts as a catalyst for deeper introspection, forcing her to confront the complexities of their shared upbringing and the contradictions she once failed to notice.

The chapter serves as a moment of significant reflection for the narrator, who grapples with the limitations and challenges of her environment. As she reflects on the classroom discussion, it becomes clear that her perspective on feminism and social justice has evolved, pushing her to challenge the harmful norms ingrained in her small-town upbringing. Liam's quiet yet complex character stands in stark contrast to the overt racism and ignorance embodied by others in the class, making him both a symbol of familiarity and an enigmatic figure that sparks curiosity. Her growing awareness of these societal issues forces the narrator to reconcile her sheltered upbringing with the broader issues of race, identity, and acceptance that are quietly simmering beneath the surface of Auburn. This chapter encapsulates the internal conflict and personal growth that the narrator experiences as she navigates her complex relationship with her past, her peers, and her evolving sense of self. Through her interactions with Liam and her classmates, she begins to understand the larger societal forces at play, recognizing the impact of her own privilege and the importance of confronting the issues of race and equality that have shaped her town.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist reflecting on the importance of a thesis statement in writing. They express a deep appreciation for the logical structure it provides, emphasizing how each word that follows should support and strengthen the main claim. The narrator values the order and discipline inherent in a well-crafted argument, especially in academic writing. However, this sense of clarity and structure is contrasted with the narrator's struggles with poetry, which resists any attempt at being confined by strict rules. Poetry’s freeform style, with its disregard for conventional grammar and structure, leaves the narrator feeling alienated, as it doesn’t offer the same concrete satisfaction that comes from structured, fact-based writing. In contrast, the narrator’s mother approaches writing and life with a fluidity that mirrors her views on poetry. For her, life’s meaning is defined by a relationship with an important person, and her own “thesis statement,” “My life has meaning because he is in it,” serves as the guiding force in all of her decisions. This reliance on emotional validation through relationships is a sharp contrast to the narrator’s belief in logic and order.

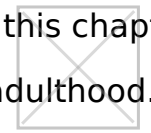
The narrator’s focus then shifts to their academic path, as they express a firm commitment to journalism. Journalism, with its demand for clarity, structure, and an unwavering commitment to truth, aligns more closely with the narrator’s view of the world. They appreciate the straightforward nature of the profession, where every word serves a clear purpose in presenting factual information. This conviction about the importance of order and truth stands in stark contrast to the vagueness and emotional undercurrents of poetry and other forms of personal expression. However, as the narrator prepares to write a paper for their literature class, they experience a moment of self-discovery. Instead of starting the paper with a thesis statement centered around the analysis of the novel, they find themselves setting a more personal goal: “I

will leave Auburn and go to college.” This shift represents a pivotal moment in the protagonist’s life, as it marks the first time they consciously separate their future from the confines of their small town. The realization not only solidifies the narrator’s ambition but also redefines their purpose, providing the emotional drive to work toward achieving that goal. The desire to leave Auburn becomes a motivating force, one that will drive their academic efforts, including the pursuit of scholarships and the cultivation of their writing skills.

As the chapter progresses, the narrator’s internal focus begins to shift, and they realize that their personal aspirations are now tied to academic success. No longer just completing assignments for the sake of grades, they are framing their future with a clear vision. The narrator’s growing commitment to leave Auburn and attend college takes on the same importance as a thesis statement in their academic writing. Just as the narrator’s mother defines her life through her emotional connection to a significant other, the narrator’s identity is now defined by their ambition to escape their rural roots. This new goal becomes the central force driving the protagonist’s actions, influencing how they approach their schoolwork and interactions with others. Their focus now includes excelling academically, not just for the sake of grades, but to create a pathway to their future. A pivotal moment occurs when the protagonist decides to enter the Auburn scholarship contest, signaling their determination to take active steps toward their dreams. This contest represents more than just an opportunity for financial assistance—it is a tangible step toward breaking free from the life that has been mapped out for them by family expectations and small-town life. The protagonist's internal shift toward self-determination reflects a universal desire for independence and the pursuit of one's own ambitions, marking a significant phase in their personal growth.

In this chapter, themes of ambition, personal identity, and familial expectations are intricately explored, providing the reader with a powerful narrative about the struggles of adolescence. The protagonist's shifting focus from structured writing to personal aspiration mirrors their growing desire to break free from the confines of their environment. The chapter highlights the complexity of balancing one’s aspirations with

the weight of family expectations and the challenges of achieving personal independence. As the protagonist navigates the delicate intersection of ambition, love, and family influences, they experience a pivotal moment of self-realization. This realization empowers them to take charge of their future, fostering a sense of independence and personal growth that drives them forward in the story. The dynamic between personal ambition and family ties will continue to shape the protagonist’s journey, making this chapter an important step in their transformation from adolescence to adulthood.



Chapter 38

Chapter 38 begins with a chilling description of a barren landscape, littered with the remains of thirty-two dead crows, each arranged in a precise formation as the aftermath of a crow hunt. The cold air is sharp, every breath biting into the narrator’s lungs, intensifying the oppressive atmosphere that surrounds them. The stark contrast between life and death is undeniable, as the lifeless crows are positioned in a way that evokes the feeling of an eerie math problem—an unsettling image of cold, calculated death. Their feathers, once vibrant, now lie scattered across the ground, and their vacant eyes seem to stare out into nothingness, reflecting a profound sense of loss and emptiness. The narrator contemplates the strange communal nature of the crows, pondering whether their individual deaths represent a deeper connection between them—a single entity fragmented into many forms. This thought lingers in their mind, adding an existential layer to the scene, where the loss of life is not just individual but symbolic, a painful reminder of how interconnected life and death truly are.

As the narrator walks through the scene, they begin to count the crows, each number representing another group of lives lost—57, 82, 154. These numbers are not just statistics; they are stark reminders of the fragility of existence, underscoring the vastness of the loss. With each number, the emotional impact deepens, and the significance of these deaths grows. The thought of other crows flying above, possibly observing the grim aftermath of the hunt, makes the narrator uneasy, leading them to reflect on the nature of the birds. They remember Dr. Cornell’s theory that crows mourn their dead, and this insight forces the narrator to ask a disturbing question: Do these birds understand the violence that has been wrought upon them? This question lingers, darkening the scene, as the narrator grapples with the unsettling idea that the crows may not just be passive victims but are capable of mourning and understanding their loss. The emotional weight of the scene is magnified, not just by the act of the

hunt, but by the thought that the crows themselves may feel the full impact of their demise, adding a layer of grief and awareness to the otherwise cold and detached violence of the hunt.

The chapter continues to explore the emotional complexity of the scene, layering feelings of fear, sorrow, and reflection on death. The imagery of the dead crows becomes a meditation on mortality itself—life being interrupted by violence in ways both physical and psychological. The narrator is reminded of other lost lives, their thoughts drifting to the haunting image of girls trapped in a crawl space. This connection between the dead crows and the hidden, unresolved trauma of the past creates a sense of perversion and unease, as the narrator contemplates the fragile nature of life. These thoughts draw a parallel between the visible violence in the hunt and the hidden violence of past experiences, making the reader confront uncomfortable truths about the way death and suffering are intertwined. The crows' lifeless bodies symbolize not just the end of individual lives but also the broader, more pervasive effects of violence on the human psyche and the environment. The chapter forces a confrontation with the often unseen consequences of death, the way it ripples through life and alters the world in ways that cannot always be seen or understood.

In this moment, the dead crows are no longer just animals caught in the crossfire of a hunt. They become symbols of the larger human experience—death, loss, mourning, and the consequences of violence. Through the imagery of the crows and their tragic end, the narrator invites readers to reflect on the fragility of life and the often invisible marks left by death. The haunting visuals of the birds scattered across the landscape act as a grim reminder of how life is constantly interrupted, whether through external violence or internal struggles. The chapter is not just a recounting of a hunt but a deeper exploration of mortality, the emotional scars left by trauma, and the complex ways in which individuals and communities experience and process loss. The idea of mourning, both by the crows and the narrator, offers a poignant commentary on the shared nature of grief, reminding readers that death, in its many forms, is something everyone must confront, whether directly or through the lens of others' suffering. Through the reflections of the narrator, the chapter calls for a deeper understanding of

the impact of death—not just on the individual but on the broader web of existence, creating a powerful meditation on life’s transience and the unsettling reality of its fragility.

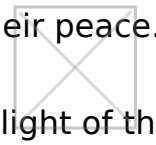
Chapter 13

Chapter 13 begins with Leighton being abruptly woken at 3:30 AM by the unsettling creak of her bedroom door. Fear pulses through her as fragments of a disturbing nightmare linger in her mind, but she quickly tries to reassure herself, reminding herself that her family is safe. Her thoughts turn to her sisters and mother, affirming they are all okay despite the eerie feeling that lingers in the air. At that moment, her younger sister Juniper appears at her side, seeking comfort from the unsettling noises that echo from outside the room. Leighton encourages Juniper to climb into bed with her, offering a sense of safety in the midst of their shared unease.

As they begin to settle, the muffled voices coming from downstairs continue to disrupt their fragile calm, signaling an escalating tension that neither can ignore. Juniper, restless and unable to find peace, suggests they play a game she calls "Anywhere But Here," designed to offer a mental escape from the frightening sounds outside. This game provides a distraction, and soon their older sister Campbell joins them, though reluctantly, mirroring the somber mood that fills the room. Together, they immerse themselves in their imaginative game, describing far-off places like the Galápagos Islands and London, trying to push the fear aside. However, their escape is short-lived, as the sound of a loud crash from downstairs abruptly shatters the fragile peace, and the sisters instinctively huddle together, each feeling the cold grip of fear tighten around them.

The crash amplifies their anxiety, and Juniper, nearly choking on a cry, seeks even more comfort. Realizing that their game can no longer shield them from the terror outside, they retreat to their grandmother’s armoire, stashing clothes and other items to create a small, cozy refuge within. Leighton grabs a kerosene lantern, one that reminds her of her grandfather, and lights it, casting a soft glow over their makeshift hideout. The dim lantern light creates a sense of warmth and security, offering a

temporary escape from the growing sense of fear that looms outside. Inside their cramped sanctuary, they begin to create shadow puppets, their imaginations temporarily replacing the dread that surrounds them. As they play, Leighton reflects on how their father once taught her this game, and how it was once a comfort during nights filled with simpler fears. The playful shadows of animals on the walls provide them with a brief respite, allowing them to forget, if only for a moment, the danger that threatens their peace.



However, as the light of the lantern flickers and dims, reality begins to creep back into their small sanctuary. Leighton, ever the protector, remains alert, her primary focus being the safety and comfort of her sisters. She blows out the lantern, plunging them back into darkness, and they are left alone with the uncertainty that hangs in the air. The dimming light serves as a metaphor for the fleeting sense of safety they have created in the armoire. Yet, despite the encroaching darkness, their bond remains unshaken. They face their fears together, silently, proving that even in the most terrifying moments, the strength of their connection is what keeps them grounded. This powerful moment of unity speaks volumes about their resilience, showing that their love for each other can withstand even the darkest of circumstances.

The chapter’s atmosphere contrasts the innocence of childhood games with the harsh realities of fear and uncertainty. As Leighton and her sisters navigate the tension that permeates their home, they create their own small world of safety, highlighting the importance of familial bonds during times of crisis. The chapter showcases how, even in moments of vulnerability, the sisters find strength in one another, leaning on each other to cope with the darkness that surrounds them. This dynamic not only emphasizes the emotional depth of the characters but also highlights the theme of resilience, showing that, in times of adversity, familial love can be an anchor that keeps them grounded and hopeful.

Chapter 71

Chapter 71 of *If These Wings Could Fly* plunges the reader into a world where tension and uncertainty are ever-present, as Leighton Barnes is forced to confront the painful and life-altering realities that have come to define her existence. The fragility of life and the delicate balance between survival and destruction take center stage as Leighton reflects on a traumatic night that almost claimed her life. During this harrowing encounter, a bullet narrowly misses her, lodging itself deep into the wall of her home. This near-fatal moment serves as a stark reminder of the constant violence that surrounds her, a reminder of how quickly everything she knows could be ripped away. The bullet, embedded in the wall, becomes a powerful symbol of the danger that continually looms over her, highlighting how fragile the line between life and death truly is in her world. The episode leaves a profound mark on her, as she realizes that her safety, once taken for granted, can no longer be assumed.

The chapter’s imagery is sharp and emotional, painting a vivid picture of Leighton’s mental and physical landscape. Her home, once thought to be a place of refuge and comfort, has now transformed into a suffocating prison. The sense of security she once felt within its walls has been shattered, replaced by a constant, oppressive reminder of the violence that has shaped her life. She cannot escape the memories of broken glass, physical altercations, and the trauma that has seeped into every corner of her living space. The house, originally a symbol of protection, is now a prison that holds her captive, a place where the ghosts of past anger and fear continue to haunt her. The walls of the house, once sturdy and supportive, now feel like barriers trapping her in an emotional and psychological web of unresolved conflict. Even the concrete beams and wooden supports, which were meant to be the foundation of her stability, now stand as symbols of the brokenness that permeates her existence.

The moment when the bullet falls from the wall marks a significant turning point, both in the physical space of the house and in Leighton’s mental state. It is as though the house itself is trying to mend the damage caused by the violence that has marked her life. Yet, this act of physical repair is only superficial, as the deeper emotional and psychological damage remains. The bullet’s fall symbolizes the fragility of her environment, a reminder that while the external damage can be fixed, the internal turmoil will not be so easily erased. Leighton’s ongoing struggle is not just against the external violence that has invaded her home but against the internal chaos that has taken root in her mind. Safety continues to elude her—both from the external dangers that threaten her existence and from the internal turmoil that is perpetuated by her past. This dual struggle, between the dangers outside and the psychological burden inside, creates an ongoing cycle of conflict that is impossible to escape.

The chapter concludes with a chilling realization: the battle is far from over. Leighton is left to grapple with the unrelenting nature of her circumstances, understanding that she cannot outrun the ghosts of her past or the violence that constantly threatens her. While the bullet may have been removed from the wall, the deep emotional scars that it represents remain, unresolved and painful. The reader is left with a sense of impending danger, unsure of what lies ahead for Leighton. As the chapter closes, the tension mounts, and it becomes clear that the emotional and physical battles Leighton faces are far from finished. Her journey toward healing, stability, and safety seems like an impossible one, as she continues to live in the shadow of violence, both in her surroundings and within herself. The struggle is ongoing, and the uncertainty of what the future holds hangs over her, adding a layer of foreboding to the already charged atmosphere. This chapter lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration of Leighton’s internal conflict and the challenges that lie ahead, leaving readers anxiously awaiting what will happen next in her tumultuous journey.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - December 25

Auburn, Pennsylvania, serves as the setting for a quiet yet profound moment in *If These Wings Could Fly*, set on December 25. In the opening scene, the crow population is revealed to be a staggering 78,460, a precise statistic that immediately draws attention to the natural world around the town. This number is more than a simple fact; it establishes a sense of place and provides a lens through which the reader can reflect on the intersection of human life and the environment. The choice to focus on the crows, with their distinctive black feathers and mysterious presence, evokes an atmosphere that is both grounded in reality and tinged with symbolism. The holiday itself, typically filled with human warmth and celebration, contrasts with the stark image of these birds, who continue their lives unaffected by the hustle and bustle of human festivities. The quiet coexistence between the growing crow population and the activities of Auburn's residents suggests a deeper, often unspoken connection between the two worlds, where nature’s presence lingers even in the midst of human celebrations and rituals.

The presence of the crows in such large numbers introduces a thematic undercurrent that is more than just an environmental observation. Crows are often associated with mystery, intelligence, and adaptability in literature, traits that make them an intriguing choice for the chapter's focal point. The significant number of crows in Auburn hints at a complex relationship between the natural world and human life, one that may not be immediately apparent but holds deeper meaning as the narrative develops. Crows are highly intelligent creatures, known for their ability to adapt to various environments, and their survival instincts make them a symbol of resilience. This symbolism is particularly potent within the context of a holiday season, a time when families gather and reflect on the year gone by, yet the crows continue with their lives, unperturbed by human concerns. The mention of the crows' growing population serves as a

reminder of nature’s persistence, as well as its capacity to adapt and thrive alongside humans, even in the most unexpected places. Their numbers hint at the possibility that the relationship between nature and humanity will be explored more deeply in the chapters to come, and perhaps even serve as a metaphor for broader themes of survival and transformation in the face of adversity.

As the chapter progresses, the statistic about the crow population becomes more than just a moment of observation; it transforms into a symbol of the delicate balance between the human world and the natural world. The fact that this observation is made on December 25, a holiday marked by reflection and family gatherings, adds another layer of meaning. Christmas, traditionally a time to celebrate human connection, is contrasted by the cold, indifferent presence of nature, represented by the crows. This juxtaposition forces the reader to think about the often-overlooked role that nature plays in shaping the rhythms of human life, even on a day that is typically focused on personal connections and familial bonds. The mention of the crow population provides a microcosm of life in Auburn, suggesting that the natural world continues its own cycles, unaffected by human concerns. The statistic becomes a subtle invitation for the reader to think beyond the immediate celebrations and reflect on the broader environmental and ecological forces that persist alongside everyday life. The crows, ever-present, highlight the interconnections between humans and nature, reminding us of the quiet yet powerful forces at work around us. This detail encourages readers to appreciate the complexity of the world around them, urging reflection on how even the smallest aspects of nature can have profound effects on the larger community. By weaving this environmental element into the story, the author invites readers to consider the roles that all creatures play in shaping our experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the delicate balance that sustains both human and ecological life.

Chapter 52

Chapter 52 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins in the stillness of a cold winter night, where the characters find a rare moment of solace together, huddled inside an armoire. The house, though seemingly safe, carries an unsettling atmosphere, amplified by the howling wind and the eerie creaks that echo through the darkened spaces. To ease the tension, the narrator engages in comforting activities, such as playing games and telling stories to Juniper, who eagerly asks for a tale. These small acts of distraction help to foster a sense of normalcy, even though the environment around them seems charged with anxiety. The narrator’s attempt to reassure and protect the girls reveals a deeper need for emotional security, despite the oppressive atmosphere that looms over them.

The story the narrator tells takes a darker turn as it explores the tale of a girl made of flowers, combining both beauty and strength. With bluebell eyes and sunflower hair, she attracts those around her, sharing her vibrant blooms selflessly. Yet, her love for an oak tree-like man leads her into a tragic journey of sacrifice, where her deep affection for him consumes her. As the girl falls deeper into her devotion, she forgets her own needs and fades away, a mere shell of herself, while he takes everything she has to offer without ever noticing her diminishing spirit. The story speaks to the themes of self-sacrifice and the dangers of neglecting one's own well-being for the sake of others, paralleling the narrator’s own feelings of emotional depletion and unfulfilled desires in the face of external pressures.

After settling the girls into bed, the narrator takes a moment to reflect on the future, flipping through the latest edition of the **Auburn Gazette**. The football team’s triumphs dominate the headlines, but the job listings in the newspaper offer little hope, with most positions available at the local diner or library. The growing reality of adult responsibilities weighs heavily, and the narrator feels the pressure of needing to

provide for the girls while maintaining some semblance of stability in their lives. The realization of how much lies ahead is overwhelming, yet a sense of urgency drives the narrator to keep moving forward, despite the mounting uncertainties. The juxtaposition of personal responsibilities and the longing for a better future reveals the internal struggle between hope and the harshness of reality, leaving the narrator caught in a constant push for survival.

As the chapter continues, the narrator discovers a notebook belonging to Campbell, which contains clippings of press columns and police reports that she has been collecting. The eerie nature of Campbell's interest in these articles stands out, as the reports range from everyday occurrences to more serious and concerning events in the town. When the narrator inquires about her fascination with these reports, Campbell expresses a chilling premonition: she believes that one day, they may become part of such stories. This unsettling thought hints at a future yet to unfold, where the family might either find resolution to their struggles or face something far darker. The significance of this moment lingers, as it highlights the increasing tension in their lives and the feeling that something ominous is on the horizon.

The chapter concludes with the narrator's futile attempt to provide comfort, watching as Campbell drifts off to sleep while the weight of their precarious situation presses heavily on the narrator’s mind. The sense of uncertainty and foreboding only intensifies, and the narrator is left to reflect on how much more fragile their lives have become. Despite the small moments of peace and the desire to shield the girls from the harshness of their reality, the looming threat of an unknown future remains ever-present. This moment of vulnerability emphasizes the fragile balance between comfort and chaos, signaling that the family’s struggles are far from over. The chapter closes with lingering questions about what lies ahead, leaving readers to ponder the unfolding narrative and the forces that will shape their fate.

Chapter 47

Chapter 47 begins with Leighton settling into a quiet Friday evening at Liam's home, enjoying the calm and simplicity of the moment. The atmosphere is peaceful, providing a contrast to the tension she's felt in recent days. After a brief but helpful shower tutorial from Liam, she borrows one of his old football shirts to wear, feeling a sense of comfort in the ordinary. As she explores the house, her fingers lightly graze the picture frames that line the walls, each one holding memories that seem to tell a story of their own. She becomes momentarily lost in these reflections, considering the significance of each photograph and the way they represent moments frozen in time. The familiar and safe environment offers a temporary escape, allowing Leighton to momentarily set aside the weight of her emotional turmoil.

Liam, with a casual ease, prepares dinner for the two of them. His choice of a playful spread of peanut butter sandwiches sparks laughter from Leighton, the absurdity of it making her smile. Their time together feels light-hearted, as they settle into the family room to watch superhero movies. The simplicity of the evening offers a sense of ease, allowing the two of them to enjoy each other's company without the distractions of the outside world. In an amusing yet rebellious moment, Liam breaks the rules of his household by eating on the couch, something his family typically forbids. This small act of defiance leads to a discussion about their evening, about how it’s unfolding in ways they hadn’t expected but are enjoying nonetheless. It’s moments like these that highlight the comfort they share, despite the complexities they both carry.

As the evening progresses, their physical affection grows more intense, deepening the connection they’ve been nurturing. However, when Liam’s hand brushes against Leighton’s breast, he pulls away suddenly, his concern about moving too quickly coming to the forefront. Leighton, frustrated by the situation, feels that her father’s past mistakes are clouding their present moment. She wishes for their relationship to

evolve based on mutual desire and trust, rather than being dictated by the emotional baggage she carries from her past. To her, it’s important that their connection remains genuine, not influenced by external fears or past trauma, particularly from her father’s actions. She is insistent that any intimate step forward should come from their shared connection, not out of obligation or past mistakes.

The conversation shifts, with Leighton revealing that she is on birth control, signaling to Liam that she has thoughtfully considered her decisions regarding sexual intimacy. This revelation reassures Liam, alleviating some of his concerns and allowing them to explore their feelings further. In turn, Liam surprises her with a heartfelt confession, admitting that he’s falling for her. The weight of the word “love” hangs in the air, and Leighton feels a mix of surprise and uncertainty. She wasn’t expecting such strong feelings to surface so soon, and the idea of love carries significant implications that she isn’t sure she’s ready to navigate. Despite the uncertainty, they both agree that they should take things one step at a time, with no pressure or expectations for the future. The connection they share is meaningful, and they both want to explore it, but without rushing into anything that might complicate things.

As the chapter reaches its conclusion, the evening ends with a sense of emotional honesty between them. Their light-hearted moments and playful exchanges give way to deeper discussions about their feelings and what the future might hold. Leighton, though still processing the emotional complexity of the situation, feels content in this moment of shared understanding. The evening serves as a way to help her process the overwhelming emotions that have been building up over the past day. The bond between them, though still developing, feels like a source of comfort and relief. There is a sense of mutual respect and understanding, as they agree not to rush into anything and to take the time to truly understand each other. Despite the uncertainties that lie ahead, this night offers a moment of peace, helping Leighton to confront her emotions and move forward without the pressure of immediate answers.

Chapter 72

Chapter 72 of *If These Wings Could Fly* escalates the tension as Leighton and his mother find themselves trapped in a nightmarish situation, struggling to find a way out of their burning home. Leighton's mother urgently insists that he escape, even as the chaos intensifies around them, with Leighton's friend holding a gun in an increasingly unstable environment. Amidst this, Leighton faces an unsettling realization: his keys are missing, and with escape routes narrowing, their only option is to climb up towards the girls trapped above. This realization forces him to act quickly, knowing that the danger is closing in from all sides and the time to make decisions is running out. The weight of the situation sinks in as Leighton is thrust into a life-or-death scenario, one that will force him to face his fears head-on while trying to keep his family safe.

As Leighton struggles up the stairs, his body grows heavier with each movement, exhaustion overtaking him. The smell of smoke quickly transitions into a harsh visual reality as it pours from his room, a stark reminder of the danger that threatens not only his life but the lives of those he loves. In this moment, Leighton understands that the fire is no accident—it was the result of a lantern that was knocked over, setting the curtains aflame and now threatening to consume everything in its path. This realization only deepens the distress, as the immediate danger is compounded by the thought that his belongings may be destroyed, but more crucially, the girls are trapped inside a locked armoire. Their muffled screams intensify Leighton's desperation, urging him to act swiftly, knowing that every second matters.

The tension builds even further as Leighton recalls the key that Joe had once left, a key he had long since believed lost. A flicker of hope surfaces as Leighton frantically searches, guided by the memories of Joe's kindness, until he finally finds the key. With it, he unlocks the armoire, freeing the girls, whose faces are filled with terror and tears, their fear palpable as they step into the chaos. But the danger is far from over; a

loud slam against the bedroom door signals that they are not yet safe. Panic surges again as Leighton realizes they are trapped, with no way to escape unless they act quickly. Without hesitation, they make a split-second decision to flee, racing toward the window and stepping onto the roof in a last-ditch effort to survive the inferno threatening their home.

Outside, however, they are confronted by yet another peril—an ominous figure emerges from the smoke, adding to the rising tension of the situation. The figure's presence raises questions about the true threat that lurks in the shadows, as Leighton and his family now face not only the blaze consuming their home but a new danger from within the smoke. As they ascend to the highest point of their home, the smoke thickens, making it harder to breathe and heightening the sense of danger. The crows, swarming the area in a chaotic frenzy, prevent the dark figure from escaping, creating a sense of foreboding as the family remains on the roof, trapped between the fiery chaos below and the growing storm above. Despite the looming threat, Leighton's gaze shifts, noticing the calmness of his family. Their collective focus on the crows suggests a strange sense of unity, even as the situation seems increasingly hopeless. In this moment, the possibility of hope emerges, not from escaping the fire, but from finding strength in one another amidst the overwhelming darkness.

The chapter reaches a poignant moment as Leighton watches his family's calm resolve in the face of peril, offering a stark contrast to the violence and chaos surrounding them. While the dangers are far from over, there is a subtle suggestion that even in the most hopeless situations, there may be a flicker of hope. The chapter encapsulates the complex emotions of fear, urgency, and the quiet strength that can arise in times of crisis, hinting at the possibility that survival doesn't always come from the physical escape but from the inner strength one finds when facing insurmountable odds. The story unfolds not just as a battle for survival against external forces but as an exploration of the human spirit and its capacity to endure even the darkest moments. The sense of impending doom is counterbalanced by the calm determination of the family, hinting that even in the face of catastrophe, there is room for courage and unity.

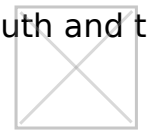
Chapter 43

Chapter 43 begins on a snowy day as Leighton eagerly awaits Liam's arrival, her excitement mixed with a touch of anxiety. When he parks his car awkwardly in the snow-covered street, she greets him with both anticipation and nervousness. The backyard is alive with the laughter and energy of her younger sisters, Campbell and Juniper, who are joyfully playing in the snow. The moment is filled with playful tension as Leighton and Liam hesitate for a brief second, unsure of how to act, but Liam’s enthusiasm quickly draws them into the fun. He takes charge, suggesting a snowball fight, and with his infectious energy, they all rush into the battle with excitement and abandon. The spontaneity of the situation brings them closer, breaking the initial awkwardness and setting the tone for a day filled with laughter and lighthearted fun.

In the midst of the snowball fight, Liam steps up as the captain of their team, choosing Juniper as his teammate, which leaves Leighton feeling slightly overlooked but not discouraged. However, this fleeting feeling of exclusion quickly fades as the game escalates and Juniper enthusiastically embraces her role as "the Beast." She charges at their snow fort with determination, and the entire scene shifts from friendly competition to pure joy, with all three of them working together to build defenses and hurl snowballs at each other. The playful chaos of the battle ends with Juniper's victory, but the moment lingers as a perfect representation of childhood innocence and joy. This simple yet delightful scene underscores the beauty of carefree moments, reminding Leighton of the joy that can be found even in the smallest, most spontaneous interactions.

As the snowball fight winds down, a tender moment unfolds between Leighton and Liam, setting the stage for a quieter, more intimate interaction. In contrast to the cold winter air, the warmth of their kiss stands as a symbol of their budding connection, bringing a softness to the otherwise frosty day. Their shared kiss, lighthearted yet

meaningful, marks a significant moment in their relationship, a quiet affirmation of their growing bond amidst the playful chaos of the day. Just as this tender exchange takes place, the unexpected discovery of a letter from Juniper to a crow named Joe adds a whimsical element to the scene. The letter, filled with innocence and creativity, serves as a reminder of the pure and imaginative world through the eyes of a child, adding a layer of charm to the narrative and highlighting the differences between the simple joys of youth and the more complex emotions that Leighton is beginning to experience.



However, the warmth of the day is quickly overshadowed when Leighton’s father unexpectedly returns home earlier than anticipated. His arrival brings an immediate shift in the atmosphere, as Leighton is struck with a sense of unease. She becomes concerned about how her father will react to Liam’s visit, knowing that his presence might upset the delicate balance in their home. Despite her worries, Liam interacts effortlessly with the family, discussing college and sports in a way that suggests normalcy, providing a sense of calm in the tension-filled household. The dinner conversation flows smoothly, but beneath the surface, Leighton’s internal anxieties grow, sensing that this moment of peace could quickly unravel.

As the evening progresses and Liam prepares to leave, the tension between Leighton and him becomes palpable, though still wrapped in playful banter. Their parting words carry a mix of lightheartedness and underlying concern, as Leighton urges caution about their affection in front of her family. This warning reflects the complexity of her feelings, as she navigates the delicate balance between her growing feelings for Liam and the unpredictable dynamics of her household. The chapter ends with a sense of foreboding, as Leighton grapples with the unsettling feeling that the peace they’ve experienced is fleeting. Despite the laughter and warmth of the day, her instincts tell her that the sense of normalcy in her home is precarious at best. The phrase "Not yet" echoes in her mind, encapsulating her anxiety as she returns inside, knowing that the equilibrium she has come to rely on could shift at any moment.

Chapter 41

Chapter 41 begins with a cozy, intimate scene as the narrator and her sisters find comfort in each other's presence, nestled under blankets on their bed. With their long hair cascading over the mattress, the atmosphere is warm and filled with the soft hum of conversation. The girls are all gathered together, taking refuge in this sacred moment of sisterly bonding. Campbell suggests the idea of a movie marathon for the upcoming weekend while their father is away on a work trip, and excitement quickly builds among the sisters. They eagerly discuss the junk food they'll indulge in and the films that will accompany their time together. Settling on the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the decision brings a wave of nostalgia, mixing the joy of familiar entertainment with the promise of a fun and carefree day ahead. This moment encapsulates the closeness the sisters share, a welcome escape from the stresses of daily life.

As they settle into the warmth of their plan, the reality of their tight finances starts to cast a shadow over the gathering. Grocery trips have become a rare occurrence, and the heat is off in their home, highlighting the financial strain that is often felt but rarely discussed. The cold winter months loom ahead, creating a sense of urgency as the season's challenges become more apparent. Additionally, the ongoing construction work keeps them confined indoors, further complicating the family's day-to-day life. Despite these external pressures, the sisters focus on the joy of the present moment, the shared excitement of their upcoming movie day offering a brief reprieve from the anxiety surrounding their financial situation. The weekend becomes a symbol of unity, providing a much-needed distraction from the growing challenges and a reminder of the strength found in family bonds.

However, the mood shifts slightly when Campbell suggests that Liam, the narrator's boyfriend, should be invited to join their movie marathon. The narrator, initially hesitant, feels protective of their close-knit sisterly tradition, unsure of how Liam's

presence might change the dynamic that they've carefully cultivated. As the conversation continues, her sisters begin teasing her playfully, nudging her to reconsider. Campbell argues that, sooner or later, they will have to meet Liam and assess whether he fits into their family's life. This suggestion raises a number of questions for the narrator, making her wonder what introducing Liam to her family will mean for her relationship and the dynamics she holds dear. It's a delicate balance between personal relationships and family bonds, and the narrator's unease grows as she considers the potential consequences of merging the two worlds. The idea of blending her private life with her family's everyday reality feels daunting, but it also stirs up a sense of excitement about the next step in her relationship.

Ultimately, the narrator agrees to ask their mother if it's okay to invite Liam to join the weekend plans, understanding that this could be a defining moment in her relationship. The thought of introducing him to her family is both thrilling and terrifying, as she's unsure of how this will affect the close relationship she has with her sisters. There is an emotional weight to the decision, as it marks a significant shift in how she sees her personal life and her role within the family. As the sisters continue to laugh and whisper, enjoying each other's company, the narrator feels a momentary sense of peace. The warmth of their shared experience provides a brief escape from the more complex emotions she's been grappling with. However, as she drifts off to sleep, her worries about the future start to resurface. The thoughts of the crawl space and the unresolved issues in her life suggest that, while the night offers a sense of comfort, the underlying uncertainties still remain. This moment of closeness with her sisters, though soothing, cannot completely block out the bigger challenges that lie ahead.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 of *If These Wings Could Fly* delves into the protagonist’s evolving daily routine, which centers around the comfort she finds in the mornings, particularly in her interactions with Liam. Every day, he drives her to school, and this small but consistent ritual becomes a welcome part of her life, offering her something to look forward to amid the anxiety she feels about the crawl space at night. Their relationship remains friendly and uncomplicated, full of shared conversations and laughter, but devoid of any physical intimacy. This routine serves as a steady anchor in her life, providing a semblance of normalcy in a world that often feels uncertain and unsettling. Liam's presence becomes a calming influence, and the simple act of driving to school together allows the protagonist to start her day on a positive note, distracting her from the deeper, more pressing fears that lurk in the back of her mind.

On a typical Friday morning, as the two prepare for their literature exam, a playful exchange reveals Liam’s fatigue from football practice and showcases the ease with which they communicate. As they discuss their plans for the day, the protagonist offers him hot chocolate, while she herself opts for coffee, highlighting the differences in their preferences. This small act emphasizes the developing closeness between them, as they share personal likes and dislikes. Their conversation flows naturally, and the subject of music comes up—when a Guns N' Roses song begins to play, the protagonist, unable to enjoy it, promptly turns it off. This moment reflects her growing comfort in expressing her opinions, showing how their friendship is evolving into something where both individuals feel free to be themselves. The little moments of consideration, like turning off music that doesn’t sit right, signal the trust and understanding developing between them.

As the day progresses, the protagonist finds herself delving deeper into her thoughts during the exam, but it’s in her conversation with Liam that she experiences a more

meaningful exchange. The protagonist quizzes Liam on their summer reading assignment, focusing on *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, and as they explore its themes of social class and gender dynamics, she is struck by Liam's thoughtful responses. To her surprise, he demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of societal issues than she initially expected, acknowledging the continued relevance of issues like harassment and discrimination. Liam's perspective surprises her, particularly given that he's much younger, yet his insight into these complex subjects indicates a level of maturity that defies his age. This exchange becomes a turning point in their relationship, as the protagonist sees Liam not just as a friend but as someone capable of contributing meaningfully to discussions about social issues, deepening her respect for him.

The conversation takes a more serious turn as they discuss women's roles in society and the consequences of challenging societal norms. The protagonist expresses her concerns about the dangers that women face when they speak out against injustices, especially those related to gender inequality. She shares her aspiration of becoming a reporter one day, with the hope of shedding light on these painful truths and using her voice to expose hidden injustices. This conversation not only strengthens their bond but also reveals the protagonist's deep desire to bring attention to the struggles faced by women. She reflects on how voicing dissent can be a powerful act, yet it also carries a heavy burden, one that she feels compelled to take on in her future career. The chapter showcases her growing resolve to make a difference and challenge the status quo, as she grapples with the complexities of the world around her.

Ultimately, this chapter represents a crucial moment in the protagonist's personal development. She navigates the balance between confronting her fears and nurturing her ambition, finding strength in her conversations with Liam and drawing inspiration from their shared discussions. The chapter closes with a note of determination, as the protagonist solidifies her desire to speak out against injustices and pursue her dreams of becoming a reporter. In doing so, she affirms her commitment to using her voice, despite the challenges she faces. This resolve serves as a powerful testament to her growth, showcasing the inner strength she's building as she moves closer to her

aspirations. The chapter reflects a pivotal step in the protagonist's journey, where her fears are met with the courage to speak her truth and fight for a better future.

Chapter 73

Chapter 73 of *If These Wings Could Fly* takes readers deep into the narrator's emotional struggle as they confront the destructive fire that has erupted. While they firmly assert that they did not physically start the blaze, there is a clear undercurrent of guilt, suggesting that their inner turmoil may have played an indirect role in igniting the flames. The narrator is caught in a conflict between denial and acceptance, acknowledging that while they may not have directly set the fire, their feelings of anger and resentment could have contributed to the situation in ways they may not want to admit. The emotional complexity of this moment reveals a deeper truth about their internal state—feelings of fear, helplessness, and long-standing frustration have been quietly brewing, waiting to be released.

The imagery of fire serves as a powerful symbol throughout the chapter, representing the narrator’s long-buried emotions. Their bitterness and resentment, which had been smoldering under the surface for years, are now brought into the open as they manifest into the uncontrollable blaze. The vivid phrase “Burn, baby, burn” rings out like a mantra, capturing the narrator’s secret longing for release and transformation through destruction. This desire for emotional release becomes the catalyst for their ambivalence toward the fire—while they didn’t initiate it, there is a part of them that finds relief in watching the flames spread. The fire becomes a metaphor for both the destruction they seek and the potential for a new beginning. For the narrator, the blaze represents a chance to break free from the weight of their accumulated emotions and seek a kind of emotional renewal, even if it means embracing chaos in the process.

As the fire rages on, the narrator’s response reflects a deeper struggle with their own emotions. Though they didn't set the fire in motion, their decision not to stop it when they could have suggests a quiet acceptance of the destruction. There is an almost

paradoxical thrill in watching the fire grow, revealing an internal desire for change that the narrator is reluctant to confront directly. By choosing not to extinguish the flames, they seem to acknowledge a darker part of themselves that might secretly long for the upheaval and chaos the fire represents. The narrator's inaction speaks volumes about their need for something to shift in their life, even if it means giving in to the destruction they fear. This inner conflict is the crux of the chapter, offering a glimpse into the narrator's psyche and their struggle with both their past and their desire for liberation.

The chapter offers a profound exploration of the complexity of human emotions, especially how anger and bitterness can lead to destructive impulses. However, it also reveals how such impulses can be tangled with a yearning for change and self-liberation. The narrator's internal battle, torn between guilt, desire for release, and acceptance of chaos, forces readers to question the true nature of personal accountability and the thin line between intention and consequence. In many ways, this chapter asks us to reflect on the way we deal with our own repressed emotions and how they might eventually find expression—sometimes in ways we cannot control. The narrator's experience serves as a poignant reminder of the power of suppressed emotions and the potential for both destruction and rebirth that lies within us all. As the fire burns, it is not just an external event—it becomes a mirror of the emotional turmoil and transformation that the narrator is undergoing, symbolizing their complex relationship with themselves and the world around them. Ultimately, the chapter forces readers to examine the consequences of their own emotional lives, questioning the fine line between wanting to let go and the risks involved in embracing that release.

Chapter 55

Chapter 55 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist feeling weighed down by a promise made to Liam—to attend his game. Throughout the event, she struggles with regret and anxiety, caught in a whirlwind of conflicting emotions. The energy of the game surrounds her, with the loud cheers from fans and the lively performances of cheerleaders filling the air. Despite this outward excitement, the protagonist is keenly aware of the underlying tension within her family, particularly her father's increasingly volatile behavior. As they sit in the bleachers, surrounded by familiar faces from the town, the community's presence only adds to the sense of discomfort. Though the public appearance of the family suggests normalcy, the protagonist can feel the cracks in the surface of their relationships, particularly between her parents. The promise to Liam now feels like a burden, as the protagonist finds herself distracted by the emotional turmoil playing out before her eyes.

As the game unfolds, the father’s irritation becomes increasingly visible, and it soon leads to a confrontation with the mother. The public display of unity among the family masks deeper, more troubling issues within their home life. The father’s escalating behavior begins to draw the attention of those around them, but the mother, ever the peacemaker, tries to cover up the strain with a forced smile. Even as the crowd cheers for the Wolves, the protagonist cannot shake the awareness of how much damage is simmering just beneath the surface of their family dynamic. The mother's efforts to maintain appearances only heighten the tension, as it becomes evident that the cracks in their marriage are becoming harder to hide. For the protagonist, this public outing is a painful reminder of how fragile the veneer of normalcy truly is, as her family's struggles are laid bare amidst the festive atmosphere of the game.

The situation takes a darker turn as the father, in a tense exchange, forces the mother to leave, his grip on her signaling a disturbing escalation. The protagonist, desperate

to intervene and stop the growing conflict, finds herself paralyzed by fear, caught between loyalty to her family and the instinct to protect her mother. In this moment, the tension at the game seems to mirror the turmoil within their home life, where violence looms just beneath the surface. The protagonist longs to restore some sense of normalcy, to hold onto the fleeting moments of peace before everything unravels completely. As the family dynamics continue to deteriorate, the protagonist's struggle to find stability becomes more intense, and the fear of what might happen next begins to overwhelm her. The backdrop of the football game, a place usually filled with joy and excitement, becomes tainted by the fear and emotional strain that marks their personal lives, deepening the protagonist's sense of helplessness.

Amidst the chaos, the protagonist decides to follow her mother, attempting to shield her younger siblings from the escalating conflict. Although support is offered by friends at the game, it provides little relief from the emotional burden weighing on her. The situation feels out of her control, and the protagonist’s desire to protect her family only intensifies the urgency with which she tries to keep them safe. This moment becomes a turning point, where the protagonist realizes that her family’s struggles are no longer something she can ignore or compartmentalize. The chapter concludes with a sense of urgency, as the protagonist races to catch up with her mother, yearning for the stability that seems to elude them. The feeling of longing for peace in the face of such instability becomes a key theme, as the protagonist is forced to confront the emotional strain and chaos surrounding her. The chapter effectively underscores the protagonist's internal struggle and the devastating impact of her family's dysfunction, marking a poignant moment in the unfolding narrative.

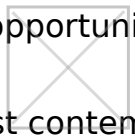
Chapter 39

Chapter 39 opens with the protagonist reflecting on a literature class that explores the portrayal of women in literature. The class focuses on powerful authors such as Jane Austen, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Sylvia Plath, but there is a particular emphasis on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The protagonist appreciates the depth and complexity with which female writers represent women, contrasting them with male authors who tend to depict women as either victims or mere archetypes. This distinction offers the protagonist a sense of empowerment, as the works they study reflect women in all their complexity, encouraging the protagonist to view herself and other women as multifaceted individuals rather than just passive figures in a patriarchal narrative.

As the class concludes, the teacher, Mrs. Riley, encourages the protagonist to participate in an essay contest and slides a pink sheet of paper across the desk. Despite her enthusiasm for the idea, the protagonist feels a sense of dread about the task, unsure of how to approach the prompts. She expresses her fear that she may not be able to articulate her thoughts effectively, a concern that makes her hesitate. Mrs. Riley, however, urges her to push past these self-doubts, emphasizing the importance of finding her voice, especially as a budding journalist. She reassures the protagonist that the recognition from winning the contest could open new opportunities, encouraging the protagonist to see this as a chance for growth and self-expression. This push from Mrs. Riley helps the protagonist understand the value of perseverance and self-belief, especially in the face of doubt.

While considering the contest, the protagonist reflects on the symbolism of a crow in ancient folklore—a bird that drops pebbles into a water container to raise the level, enabling it to drink. The crow's persistence becomes a metaphor for her own journey, suggesting that small, consistent efforts can eventually lead to success. Although the

essay contest may not immediately propel her toward her ultimate goal of attending NYU, the protagonist recognizes that each effort, no matter how small, could bring her one step closer. The realization shifts her perspective, helping her see that progress doesn’t always have to come in giant leaps, but in tiny steps forward that, over time, accumulate into meaningful achievements. This moment of clarity fuels the protagonist’s determination to participate in the contest, as she begins to view the challenge as an opportunity to develop her voice rather than a daunting task.



As the protagonist contemplates possible ideas for her essay, a more controversial notion arises—one that might not be well received by the contest judges, a group of men who are often resistant to change or new ideas. She considers the implications of presenting a viewpoint that could challenge the status quo, especially in a community where traditional norms are heavily adhered to. The protagonist recalls a humiliating classroom moment when a male teacher ridiculed a female student who had been a victim of harassment, effectively silencing her. This incident serves as a reminder of how women’s voices are often dismissed or belittled, a theme that has pervaded the protagonist’s life. In addition to this memory, the protagonist notices the unsettling dynamics between men and her mother, particularly when men treat her mother dismissively at the diner. These observations underscore the pervasive culture of minimizing women’s voices and experiences, further fueling the protagonist’s desire to speak out.

Ultimately, the protagonist struggles with the idea of speaking out in a town that seems to maintain its rigid structure through fear and conformity. She understands that challenging the established norms could threaten the very foundations of her community, which has long relied on the suppression of dissenting voices. As she reflects on this, she grapples with the idea that some truths, if spoken, could unravel the status quo and disrupt the comfortable complacency that so many take for granted. The tension between personal truth and societal expectations weighs heavily on her, as she contemplates the potential consequences of speaking out. This chapter highlights the risks associated with challenging deeply ingrained systems of power, as well as the personal toll it may take on those brave enough to push against them. The

protagonist’s reflections on the nature of change suggest that while progress is necessary, it comes with inherent risks that can disrupt not only individual lives but entire communities.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton finding herself surrounded by a growing number of crows in Auburn, a town where these birds seem to multiply daily. Their presence, unsettling to most, adds a peculiar yet captivating element to Leighton’s life. While the crows become a source of irritation for the local townspeople, Leighton finds an odd sense of comfort in their numbers. The birds, with their ominous presence, reflect the emotional complexities of her own life and the transformations happening within her town. Leighton begins to observe how these crows, much like the shifts in Auburn, seem to quietly grow, imposing themselves on the landscape and the everyday routine. Their increase serves as a reminder of how certain things—like grief, change, and loss—are unavoidable and difficult to ignore, much like the crows themselves. As she watches them, Leighton feels a sense of recognition, as if their presence mirrors her own struggles and unspoken anxieties.

The chapter also delves into Leighton’s relationship with her grandmother, Nana, who now lives in an assisted living facility in Lincoln. Leighton often visits Nana, but her trips are shrouded in secrecy, as she lies to her mother about where she’s going, further complicating the already strained family dynamics. These visits to Nana’s apartment are marked by moments of intimacy and sadness. Nana, despite her declining health, still carries with her a sharp memory and wisdom, but the underlying tension between them remains palpable. Their conversations, while filled with warmth and connection, are also laced with the unspoken grief that has overtaken their family since Grandpa's death. The loss of her grandfather brought about a shift not only in Nana’s health but also in the entire family structure, as grief and unresolved issues continue to shape their interactions. Leighton finds herself in the position of supporting Nana, but she also struggles with the emotional weight of the family fractures that seem to deepen with each visit. These visits, though comforting, underscore the fact

that nothing remains unchanged, and each passing day brings with it new challenges that they must face together.

While caring for Nana, Leighton reflects on the familiarity of the apartment—the smells, the routines, and the memories that fill the space. Even as they discuss their shared struggles, there is a sense of solace in the ordinary acts of care and love that still exist between them. Despite the heavy conversations about their family's difficulties, there is comfort in the rituals they maintain together. Yet, as the chapter progresses, Leighton’s thoughts begin to drift back to her own dreams and uncertainties about the future. When she returns to Auburn, hoping for a sign of reassurance from her late Grandpa, she is instead met by the crows, whose constant presence seems to mirror the unresolved turmoil within her. The birds, who dominate the sky and fill the air with their calls, become a metaphor for the emotional weight she carries. Their presence, as ominous as it is, represents the haunting nature of Leighton’s inner struggles and her inability to escape the grief, fear, and uncertainty that have become a part of her reality.

The crows in the chapter serve as a powerful symbol of Leighton’s emotional state—unsettling, constant, and inescapable. As she contemplates her own life, the presence of the birds heightens her awareness of the unresolved issues within her family and her personal life. Their increasing numbers remind her that, much like the natural world, change is inevitable and cannot be controlled or avoided. These birds, seemingly insignificant to others, are a constant reminder to Leighton that the fears and emotional challenges she faces will not simply disappear. Instead, they will remain with her, looming over her, much like the crows that fill the town. This chapter portrays Leighton’s emotional journey with remarkable depth, as it intertwines her external surroundings with her internal struggles, painting a vivid picture of a young person trying to navigate the complexities of loss, family, and personal growth amidst the constant presence of things they cannot control.

Chapter 74

Chapter 74 of *If These Wings Could Fly* delves deeply into a metaphor that portrays the experience of falling, both physically and emotionally. The chapter opens with an intense and urgent situation, where the narrator finds themselves in a position where jumping seems to be the only option. The imagery is stark and evocative, with a "sky on fire" above and a "house on fire below," symbolizing the overwhelming chaos and sense of danger that surrounds them. As the roof begins to give way, a feeling of hopelessness sets in, forcing the narrator to confront the inevitability of leaping into the unknown. The act of falling becomes a powerful representation of surrendering to a situation that feels entirely out of control, yet it also hints at the possibility of transformation, however frightening the journey may be.

Within this whirlwind of fear and confusion, there is a glimmer of hope rooted in the narrator’s trust in Joe, a character who embodies reliability and strength in the face of adversity. Even as the flames rage and the situation spirals, the narrator’s belief that Joe will be able to save them provides a sense of calm amid the chaos. This sense of trust in others, especially in a time of crisis, is a central theme in the chapter, highlighting the power of relying on those around us when the world feels overwhelmingly hostile. As the narrator jumps into the darkness, they are met with an unexpected, yet timely, intervention—the arrival of crows. These birds are described as “cawing, clawing, and covering us in feathers,” a vivid image that transforms the feeling of falling into one of safety and protection. The crows, in this context, act as symbolic rescuers, representing the comfort and security that can come from unexpected sources, turning a moment of intense fear into one of hope.

The act of falling, in this chapter, transcends its literal meaning and becomes a metaphor for vulnerability, trust, and the unexpected emergence of hope. The narrator’s willingness to trust in Joe during such a terrifying moment exemplifies the

power of faith, even when the outcome is uncertain. In that moment, the act of surrendering to the fall is not about defeat but about opening oneself up to the possibility of something greater. The arrival of the crows, with their protective presence, marks a dramatic shift from danger to safety, symbolizing how sometimes, the most unexpected forms of support appear just when they are needed most. This shift from fear to relief illustrates a core theme of the narrative: that vulnerability, while frightening, can also lead to moments of grace and redemption. The crows' role as saviors demonstrates that help and protection can come in forms that are not always anticipated, and the journey through fear can often lead to a place of comfort and safety.

As the chapter concludes, the narrator reflects on the emotional journey they have just experienced. The act of falling, which once felt like a descent into despair, now represents an emotional journey of transformation and renewal. The narrator's fall is no longer simply a physical act but a profound experience of personal growth, symbolizing how, through trust and faith, one can navigate even the most perilous situations. The crows' appearance signifies not just physical rescue but an emotional turning point, where the overwhelming anxiety and fear of the fall give way to the peace and safety of being caught. This duality of emotions—fear and faith, falling and being saved—underscores the complexity of the human experience. In this narrative, falling is not something to fear but something that can lead to salvation when embraced with trust in others and the willingness to face the unknown.

Ultimately, Chapter 74 is a powerful exploration of how moments of vulnerability can lead to profound emotional shifts, where falling becomes a symbol of both fear and transformation. It emphasizes the importance of trust, not only in others but also in the process of surrendering to the unknown, as this can often lead to the protection and support that we need most. The crows, as symbolic figures of rescue and safety, represent the unexpected sources of hope that can appear during life's darkest moments. Through this imagery, the chapter encourages readers to see falling not as a loss of control but as an opportunity for change, healing, and ultimately, the discovery of new beginnings. The balance between the fear of falling and the faith in

being caught forms the emotional backbone of the chapter, illustrating how even in the most chaotic and uncertain times, hope can still find its way through.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 opens with the protagonist returning home after an evening that had, until then, brought her a rare sense of peace. The calm she feels is shattered when she walks into the kitchen and discovers utter chaos: a broken dish in the sink, burnt chicken, and boiling water left unattended, signaling that something went terribly wrong in her absence. As she begins to process the mess, she hears a soft whimper from the living room and finds her younger siblings, Campbell and Juniper, huddled together in the dark. They reveal that Campbell had reacted angrily when he saw the burnt food, throwing dishes in frustration, which leaves the protagonist to confront the underlying tension that has been festering within their home. The mess in the kitchen becomes a metaphor for the emotional wreckage within their family, a symbol of how anger and frustration can disrupt even the smallest moments of peace.

As the protagonist listens to her siblings' explanations, she senses the unsaid feelings that linger between them, especially regarding their father's erratic behavior. Her concern for their mother, who may be upstairs, only grows, as she anticipates what might happen next. The quiet that fills the house after the outburst is somehow more unnerving than any shouting would have been, as if the calm before a storm is always the most dangerous. The siblings converse quietly, discussing their day and their fears, their voices full of innocence yet shadowed by the uncertainty of their home life. The protagonist tries to provide them comfort, even as her own anxiety about the instability at home deepens. Despite her attempts to reassure them, she knows that their lives, and her own, are inextricably tied to the unpredictability of their father's temper, making the future feel precarious and uncertain.

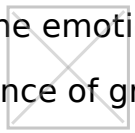
The tension only deepens as the protagonist contemplates the sounds coming from upstairs, hinting at yet another conflict between her parents. When they finally come downstairs, her father's smug attitude does little to ease the growing sense of

discomfort in the room. The volume of the loud music that fills the house only amplifies the dissonance, while the mother's dismissive responses to the situation only add fuel to the protagonist's frustration. In the midst of this emotional turbulence, the protagonist retreats to cleaning and tidying up, an attempt to restore some semblance of order in a world that feels out of control. The physical act of cleaning becomes her coping mechanism, a way to assert control over her environment, even when everything else is in chaos. Yet, as she goes through the motions of straightening up the house, the emotional undercurrents of the day weigh heavily on her, reminding her that some things—like the emotional fractures within her family—cannot be so easily fixed.

Amidst the chaos and emotional turmoil, the protagonist has a brief, almost magical moment of solace when she encounters Joe, a crow that brings back Juniper's lost leather cuff. This simple act of the crow returning the cuff becomes a symbol of hope, reminding the protagonist that even in the darkest of times, there can still be moments of unexpected grace. As she reflects on the crow's actions, she begins to draw a parallel between the crow's behavior and the lessons of resilience she's learning from her own struggles. The crow, much like the protagonist, seems to be navigating a difficult world, but in the process, it shows that even small gestures of kindness or recovery can bring light to the darkest situations. This symbolic return of the cuff mirrors the possibility of finding healing, even when it feels like everything is falling apart. The protagonist also reflects on how bravery doesn't always mean fighting or confronting the world directly; sometimes, it's about knowing when to retreat, to step back from harm, or to choose a different path entirely. This insight resonates deeply with the protagonist, as she contemplates her own fears and the difficult decision of whether to stay and endure or leave to find something better.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist meditating on the deep, underlying struggles of her family and her place within this complex web of emotions. While the gesture of the crow and the idea of retreating in the face of danger offers a flicker of hope, the protagonist is left to grapple with the heavy burden of her reality. The chapter delves into themes of family conflict, resilience, and personal courage,

portraying the emotional and psychological weight that children often carry when trying to make sense of their home lives. The protagonist’s internal conflict is palpable, as she is torn between her desire to escape the chaos and her love for her family, which keeps her tethered to a painful but familiar world. In the end, the chapter encapsulates the protagonist’s struggle to reconcile her fears with her growing strength, her desire for safety with the recognition that finding peace often requires great sacrifice. The emotional journey she embarks on in this chapter speaks to the universal experience of growing up in a turbulent environment, where each decision is fraught with complexity and emotional weight.



Chapter 50

Chapter 50 of *If These Wings Could Fly* portrays a pivotal moment in the protagonist Leighton's emotional journey as she faces the discomfort of attending a high school art show where her own work is on display. Leighton stands beside her piece, *Portrait of an Old Crow*, feeling the crushing weight of embarrassment and self-doubt that so often accompanies high school events. The eyes of her peers, the judgment she imagines, and the reality of presenting her personal work push her further into a state of vulnerability. Although Liam encourages her to continue with her art by suggesting she take Art II next spring, she remains skeptical of his praise, comparing herself to an old house that needs restoration. This internal comparison reflects her low self-esteem and inability to accept the support being offered. The juxtaposition between Liam’s genuine encouragement and Leighton’s inner doubts highlights the complexity of their dynamic, where Leighton is still struggling to believe in herself despite external validation.

As the evening stretches on, time seems to drag painfully for Leighton, heightening her discomfort in the social setting. At 7:30, desperate to escape the tense atmosphere surrounding her, she hurries away from her display and seeks out Liam, hoping to find some sense of solace. But instead of simply seeking him out for comfort, she unexpectedly discovers his artwork, which captivates her in a way she hadn’t anticipated. His drawings depict three girls, with one notably resembling Leighton in both her features and expression, conveying deep feelings of isolation and heartbreak. The piece is titled *THESE BROKEN WINGS: AN ORIGIN STORY*, a title that adds weight to her realization. The art deeply unsettles her, and she confronts Liam, demanding to understand why he would choose to depict her in such a way. As their eyes meet, Leighton’s internal world collides with the rawness of her feelings, leaving her questioning whether Liam sees her as broken, as depicted in his art.

The emotional intensity of the moment drives Leighton to retreat to the girls’ locker room, seeking a place of refuge away from the charged atmosphere. Liam, concerned but not understanding the depth of her hurt, follows her, gently reminding her that he is her ride and that she is staying at his house. The cold air outside does little to soothe the discomfort between them, and as they drive in silence, Leighton struggles to process her emotions, feeling the weight of her vulnerability and the hurt that lingers. Upon reaching Liam's home, Leighton is still emotionally raw, needing to express herself despite the silence that has settled between them. She states firmly, “I am not broken,” signaling her defiance against the portrayal of her inner struggles. Liam, recognizing the pain he’s caused, apologizes, assuring her that the depiction was accidental and expressing regret for not forewarning her about the nature of his work. His apology does little to ease the emotional rift between them, leaving Leighton grappling with her feelings of exposure and vulnerability.

After the heavy exchange, Liam invites Leighton to see more of his artwork, specifically a comic that tells the transformative story of a female character who begins as fragile and vulnerable but grows into a powerful hero. As Leighton examines the drawings, she begins to understand the underlying message of strength and resilience, seeing the character evolve from a place of vulnerability into someone who can stand tall and fearless. This revelation shifts her perspective on Liam's intentions, revealing that his work was not meant to harm her, but to explore themes of personal growth and empowerment. As they share this quiet moment together, with their laughter and the ease that follows, a deepened bond forms between them. This moment of connection offers Leighton a glimpse into Liam's creative vision, one that reflects themes of transformation and hope. By the end of the chapter, Leighton decides to release the anger she had initially felt, understanding that moving forward in their relationship requires embracing vulnerability and letting go of misconceptions. This decision marks a turning point for Leighton, as she acknowledges the importance of mutual understanding and connection in building a relationship.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with Leighton reflecting on the end of summer, a season that typically brings a sense of freedom for many, but not for her. While others embrace the end of the long break, she faces a different reality. Returning to Auburn High, she finds comfort in the return to routine and structure, something that provides a sense of normalcy in her otherwise chaotic life. The predictability of school offers her a brief escape from the challenges she faces at home. As Leighton steps off the bus, she feels a shared understanding with her peers, knowing that they too are somewhat relieved that summer is finally over. For many of them, school marks a return to familiar rhythms and the end of long, unstructured days.

Leighton soon reconnects with her best friend, Sofia, in the hallway, where they exchange enthusiastic greetings. The excitement in Sofia’s voice highlights the week they have spent apart and the lack of communication between them. Despite Leighton’s ongoing struggles at home, which she describes as a "domestic nightmare," Sofia’s upbeat and positive energy shines through, providing a brief but welcome distraction from her own reality. As they move through the crowded halls, navigating around fresh-faced freshmen, their banter flows easily, reinforcing the strength of their friendship. Sofia casually mentions her first class, Physical Education, prompting Leighton to tease her about the usual discomforts that come with gym class—specifically, the dreaded showers afterward and the hassle of dealing with wet hair all day. This lighthearted exchange momentarily takes Leighton’s mind off the weightier issues in her life, reminding her of the simple joys of high school friendship.

As they continue chatting, the two girls check their schedules, and Leighton discovers that she has AP English as one of her classes. Sofia makes a joking comment about the grim and often dark subject matter they will study in the class, adding a touch of

humor to what might otherwise be an overwhelming thought. While the news of their class schedules not overlapping is a disappointment, the girls still manage to find excitement in other areas. They begin to plan for the school newspaper, eager to write and contribute, especially with their shared interest in covering sports. The thought of collaborating on articles gives them something to look forward to, and for a moment, it feels as if everything is right in the world. This shared enthusiasm for their extracurricular activities strengthens their bond, reminding Leighton that not all things in her life are complicated, and there are still moments of joy and connection to hold onto.

As the girls move past a large window overlooking the soccer field, their attention is caught by a bizarre and unsettling sight. The field is completely covered by a large gathering of crows, their dark shapes nearly filling the entire space. The sheer number of birds is overwhelming, and the sight is both striking and eerie, as they move in erratic, chaotic patterns across the field. Leighton, who has lived in Auburn for years, is immediately taken aback by this unusual occurrence, recognizing how out of place such a sight is in their small town. Crows, while common in many places, are not usually drawn to a school field in this way, and their presence seems almost too deliberate, too ominous. Both girls pause, mesmerized by the overwhelming sight before them, their conversation slowing to a halt as they try to make sense of the scene.

Leighton watches with a growing sense of unease as the crows continue to fly in unpredictable formations, their black wings cutting through the air in a frenetic dance. The more she watches, the more unsettled she becomes, feeling a strange connection between the chaos of the birds and the disarray in her own life. There is something about the sight of the crows that feels significant, as if their gathering might be a sign of something larger at play. The birds seem to have no clear direction, and their erratic movements mirror the turmoil Leighton feels inside. As the crows continue to swirl in the sky, Leighton can’t shake the feeling that something is drawing them to this spot, something beyond mere coincidence. Both girls stand there in silence, taking in the

scene, unable to comprehend its meaning but unable to look away either. The sight of so many crows is jarring, and it lingers with them long after they move on, marking the beginning of a strange and unsettling atmosphere that seems to haunt the day.

The unexpected gathering of crows symbolizes more than just an eerie visual; it marks a turning point in the narrative, one that hints at deeper, more foreboding events yet to unfold. For Leighton, the sight of the crows stirs up a sense of dread, something that hints at her internal struggles and the challenges she will soon face. The birds, with their chaotic flight, serve as a metaphor for the unpredictable nature of life and the emotional turbulence that Leighton is experiencing. Their overwhelming presence becomes a symbol of the forces outside of her control, forces that will soon converge in her life, forcing her to confront both external and internal conflicts. This seemingly small moment encapsulates the larger themes of the novel, hinting at the dark currents that will shape the coming events.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 unfolds as a brief moment of peace, offering a welcome respite from the usual chaos that engulfs life. Saturday night is spent in quiet harmony, with the girls immersed in their reading, while I struggle with the complexities of *Portrait of an Old Crow*. This rare calm provides a fleeting sense of normalcy, and I savor the tranquility that fills our home. After enduring a life filled with constant turmoil, experiencing a little boredom is nothing short of magnificent. The stillness in the air is a stark contrast to the usual noise and upheaval, giving me a taste of what it feels like to exist without the ever-present weight of stress.

However, by Sunday, optimism begins to cloud my judgment, making me feel reckless and naive. Dad returns early from a construction job that had been interrupted by rain, and as we gather around for dinner, he suggests a game night, reminiscent of the fun we used to have at our grandparents' house. Campbell and I exchange a look, uncertain yet hopeful that this gesture might indicate a shift, that the storm inside our home may finally be passing. I silently wish for some kind of warning, a narrator to caution me whenever I dare to hope, knowing that moments of happiness are often followed by chaos. There’s an undeniable sense of tension that follows these brief bursts of joy, making it impossible to fully relax and embrace the fleeting moments of peace.

The evening takes a turn when Dad starts searching for his wallet, his frustration building as he realizes it’s missing. Mom suggests checking the truck, and as they head outside to look, Campbell and I begin to search the house, feeling the tension rise with each passing minute. Despite our efforts, the wallet remains elusive, deepening Dad’s irritation and setting the mood for the evening. Just when it seems like the situation might escalate, Juniper finds the wallet near the front door, claiming it must have fallen from Dad's jacket. A wave of relief washes over us, but the brief

moment of happiness is quickly overshadowed as we dive into the game of Apples to Apples, our minds still slightly on edge. The joy of finding the wallet doesn't last, and the realization that the peace we've briefly felt can be so easily disrupted hangs heavy in the air.

As the game progresses, the underlying sense of unease grows, as if we're walking on a fragile, rickety bridge that could collapse at any moment. The lighthearted atmosphere quickly shifts when Dad pauses during the game, his apology for losing the cash in his wallet sinking the mood back into seriousness. These apologies have become a routine part of our family dynamics, like a dance we all know too well, but the rapidity with which Dad offers them provides a flicker of hope—an indication that he recognizes his actions and their impact. Yet, despite the apologies, the weight of unspoken tension continues to simmer beneath the surface, unaddressed and unresolved. Mom tries to redirect us back toward joy, but it's clear that the unresolved issues, especially Dad's, continue to shape the air around us. The scars from his upbringing, the anger he carries with him, are never far behind, shaping the way we interact with one another and the way we navigate our relationships.

The desire to break free from this cycle of inherited pain becomes ever more evident, but the reality of our situation often pulls us back. While trying to enjoy our time together, it's impossible to ignore the physical and emotional scars that hold us captive, continuing to dictate our actions and emotions. In this chapter, the fleeting moments of joy are contrasted with the deep-seated struggles that remain unresolved, leaving a sense of entrapment within the legacy of pain. Though we long for something different, it seems that the fear and anger passed down through generations continue to cast a shadow over our lives, affecting the relationships that matter most.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 of *If These Wings Could Fly* focuses on the narrator's ongoing struggle with sleeplessness, stemming largely from an intense fear of the crawl space in the basement. This crawl space, concealed behind the staircase, is a dim, damp, and seemingly insignificant area that becomes a powerful source of anxiety for the narrator. What should be a simple, unremarkable space becomes transformed by the narrator's imagination into a dark, foreboding place that fills her with dread. This irrational terror is not caused by the physical space itself, but by the unknowns it represents, fueling an ongoing sense of fear that keeps her awake at night. As the darkness of night envelops the house, the crawl space becomes a symbol of everything that is hidden, a place that might conceal things far worse than its ordinary appearance suggests.

The narrator's inability to sleep is worsened by the unpredictable emotional climate of her home. Despite moments where everything appears peaceful—when laughter fills the air, when flowers are admired, and when the household mood is light—there remains an ever-present undercurrent of tension. The narrator is keenly aware that what may seem like calm at any given moment could quickly shatter into chaos. Tomorrow could bring another outburst of her father's anger, which may result in a violent confrontation that disrupts the entire household. This knowledge of an impending storm constantly looms over her, overshadowing any fleeting moments of tranquility. It's the uncertainty of not knowing when the next emotional storm will hit that keeps her on edge, making it impossible to relax and fully enjoy any peaceful moment.

The crawl space, in the narrator's mind, becomes much more than just a neglected corner of the house; it is symbolic of the buried traumas and unresolved fears within her family. The real terror does not come from the darkness itself but from the

ambiguity and the potential danger that could be hidden within it. The narrator imagines that the crawl space could one day become a physical manifestation of everything that has been pushed down and ignored—buried memories, suppressed emotions, and unresolved conflicts. This space symbolizes the family's collective suffering, the parts of themselves they've tried to forget but that still haunt them. The fear of the crawl space mirrors the fear of the unspoken issues that loom just beneath the surface, always threatening to come to light. As the narrator lies awake, she is not only fighting against the physical discomfort of insomnia, but she is also battling the psychological toll of living in an environment filled with uncertainty and emotional chaos. The inability to sleep becomes a manifestation of her constant vigilance and anxiety, a direct result of the trauma she experiences in her home life. The crawl space thus serves as a powerful metaphor for the larger emotional landscape of the family, a place where everything they cannot face is stored away, quietly waiting to be revealed.

This chapter is a profound exploration of the mental and emotional struggles that arise from living in a home filled with unpredictability. The fear of the crawl space is just the tip of the iceberg, representing a much deeper well of psychological distress. The narrator's insomnia and her constant state of alertness reflect the toll that living in such an environment takes on her mental health. As she contemplates the crawl space and the darkness that may lurk there, she is confronted with the unsettling reality that the true source of her fear lies not in the physical space itself, but in the unaddressed trauma that it represents. This chapter speaks to the emotional scars left by a chaotic and unstable home life, and the struggle to find peace when that peace feels perpetually out of reach.

Chapter 53

Chapter 53 of *If These Wings Could Fly* presents a vivid scene where the protagonist, despite ongoing tensions with her parents, decides to bike three miles to attend a town hall meeting about the crows that have invaded Auburn. With no ride available, she opts to make the journey alone in December’s cold, refusing to ask for help from her parents. When she arrives at the municipal building, she encounters a lone crow perched nearby, a sight that resonates deeply with her as she briefly exchanges a glance with the bird. This moment feels significant to her, as the crow seems to symbolize the very problem the town is grappling with, adding a layer of symbolism to her experience.

Inside the meeting, the discussion begins with a report from the game warden, who details previous crow hunts. Unfortunately, the results have been disappointing, with over six hundred crows captured in the past, yet the latest attempt yielded no captures, suggesting the crows are aware of the danger. The protagonist is struck by the idea that the crows might have developed a memory of previous hunts, leading her to wonder if their behavior is an instinctive reaction to the threat. Her thoughts drift to consulting an ornithologist, considering the possibility that there might be more to the crows’ behavior than meets the eye. This reflection speaks to the larger tension of the meeting: how to manage an intelligent species that seems to understand the human efforts to control its presence in Auburn.

As the meeting continues, the atmosphere grows heavier, filled with frustration from the town's residents who are fed up with the crows’ disruptive behavior. They complain about the crows raiding trash cans and attacking garbage bags, their actions causing a mess around town. Mr. DiMarco, a local figure, dismisses the complaints with an air of superiority, deepening the protagonist’s growing dislike for him. Amidst the heated discussions, one resident claims the crows killed his cat, further fueling the

animosity towards the birds. This complaint prompts a councilman to suggest that only verifiable evidence should be presented, pushing for more rational discussions about the crows’ impact on the community. This moment reveals the divide between the more emotional reactions and those who seek practical solutions, emphasizing the tension between the townspeople and the crows.

In the midst of the contentious meeting, Mrs. Stieg, a neighbor who is passionate about her rose garden, shares her distress about the crows damaging her beloved plants. She speaks about the years of effort she’s put into cultivating her roses, urging the town to take action and eliminate the threat posed by the crows. Her emotional plea resonates with some attendees, and she calls for expert intervention to handle the problem. The room is divided, with some residents fully supporting her stance, while others remain unconvinced. This moment showcases the deeply personal connection some people have to their land and possessions, further complicating the debate on how to deal with the crow population. The chapter captures the tension between individual grievances and the larger community's approach to managing the issue.

When the vote for Town Ordinance 4420 to fund crow eradication is called, the room falls into an uneasy silence. The protagonist, standing firm in her beliefs, votes "nay," but her dissent is drowned out by the overwhelming chorus of "aye" votes from her neighbors. She leaves the meeting quickly, feeling the weight of the decision press down on her. Outside, she is greeted by the cacophony of crows, their cries echoing the outcome of the meeting. This powerful imagery, with the crows seemingly resonating with the "nay" vote, highlights the deep conflict between the town and the birds, symbolizing the struggle for control over nature and the power of collective decision-making. The protagonist is left to reflect on the stark division that the vote has created, both within the town and within herself, as the crows become a powerful symbol of the ongoing battle for space and survival.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist reflecting on the allure of brand-new notebooks, associating their blank pages with boundless potential. She compares these unmarked pages to the innocence and possibilities of a newborn, yet acknowledges that, like life, these notebooks inevitably fill with imperfections over time. This reflection serves as a metaphor for her own experiences, as she navigates the imperfections and challenges that come with living. The protagonist expresses excitement about having her own column in the school newspaper, yet she struggles to find a specific theme that feels right. Meanwhile, her friend Sofia is actively covering sports events, making the protagonist feel both inspired and pressured by her peer's confident focus on a topic. Despite the uncertainty, the protagonist sees this opportunity as a way to express herself and carve out her own space in the school community.

As the story unfolds, Sofia's curiosity about the protagonist's growing connection with Liam, a boy she has been talking to, begins to stir a mixture of embarrassment and intrigue in the protagonist. Sofia playfully probes her about her interactions with Liam, suggesting that their casual exchanges have developed into something more significant. Although the protagonist protests that they are "not a thing," Sofia insists that their recent interactions seem to indicate otherwise. This conversation signals a pivotal shift in the protagonist's feelings as her casual conversations with Liam gradually transform into something more emotionally meaningful. Sofia teases the protagonist about having a crush on Liam, and while the protagonist is flattered by the suggestion, she feels hesitant to label her feelings just yet. These moments of self-reflection and the evolving relationship with Liam highlight the protagonist's vulnerability, allowing readers to connect with her internal struggle of navigating love, desire, and self-identity.

As the protagonist contemplates her feelings and relationships, an unexpected inspiration for her column surfaces. She becomes fascinated by the crows that frequently appear near the baseball fields outside her classroom, deciding to investigate their presence further. The crows, once a background detail in her life, now represent a symbolic exploration of the world around her. She recalls how the local news has even reported on the growing crow population in the area, which adds depth to her curiosity and desire to explore the subject in her column. This discovery sparks her ambition to create something meaningful with her writing, yet it also serves as a reminder of her broader aspirations beyond high school. She dreams of leaving the confines of rural Pennsylvania and attending New York University, but the path to her goals feels uncertain, especially due to financial limitations and the expectations her family holds regarding her education.

The protagonist’s internal conflict deepens when she comes across a flyer for a scholarship essay contest, which presents a potential opportunity to fund her dreams. This contest offers a glimmer of hope, motivating her to consider how she can pursue her future while balancing her current circumstances. The phrase “Auburn born, Auburn proud” echoes in her mind, reflecting the pride her family holds for their small town, yet she wonders if this pride will hold her back from achieving her dreams. As she contemplates the scholarship opportunity, the protagonist grapples with the weight of her family’s expectations and the reality of her aspirations. This moment marks a crucial point in her journey toward self-discovery, as she begins to question what it means to honor her roots while striving for something greater.

Throughout the chapter, themes of love, ambition, and self-discovery are woven together as the protagonist navigates the complexities of her personal life. Her relationship with Liam and the uncertainty about her future at New York University reflect the tension between her desires and the constraints of her current circumstances. The crows, the scholarship contest, and her evolving relationship with Liam all serve as symbols of the protagonist’s longing for independence and personal growth. As she faces these challenges, the reader is offered a glimpse into the protagonist's determination to forge her own path, even as she remains anchored by

her family’s expectations. This chapter captures the universal experience of navigating love, family, and ambition during the tumultuous period of adolescence.

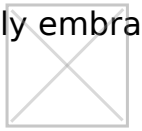
Chapter 37

Chapter 37 begins on a cold Saturday morning at 6:45 A.M., with the narrator standing beside a frosty field, preparing to interview hunters dressed in camouflage and armed with loaded guns. The temperature is a brisk 34 degrees, and as the chill bites at their skin, they reflect on the series of decisions that led them to this moment. The interview is crucial for their crow column, which was sparked by an inquiry to Dr. Cornell, a bird expert. Dr. Cornell explains that another town had made unsuccessful attempts to manage a crow population of approximately fifty thousand, using sporadic hunts. While the town's residents hoped to control the population, Dr. Cornell points out that such hunts are ineffective at significantly affecting the crows' numbers or their migration patterns. This insight paints a grim picture for the community's efforts, suggesting that the approach is flawed and unlikely to bring lasting results.

As the interview progresses, the narrator learns of an alternative approach from a nearby town that turned its crow problem into a positive opportunity. Instead of resorting to hunting, this town embraced its crow population by hosting a festival that celebrates the birds, transforming a problem into a tourist attraction. This innovative strategy catches the narrator's attention, making them question the efficacy of the current approach and whether there might be a more compassionate, sustainable solution. The idea of celebrating the crows instead of hunting them stirs curiosity in the narrator, who begins to wonder how other towns might benefit from a similar mindset. By reframing the problem in a new light, the town was able to both solve its issue and bring in economic benefits, suggesting that looking at problems from a different angle can often yield unexpected and creative results.

Liam, who is present with the narrator during the hunt, reveals that his father has expressed a desire for them to bond over hunting, a tradition Liam does not feel connected to. While he understands his father's intentions, Liam admits he finds little

enjoyment in the idea of hunting crows, a species he has developed a fondness for. This conversation reveals a generational gap between them, highlighting differing views on traditional practices such as hunting. Liam’s discomfort with hunting showcases the shift in attitudes among younger generations, who are increasingly questioning the need for such practices in modern times. This insight into Liam’s perspective adds depth to the narrative, illustrating how traditions are often inherited but not necessarily embraced by every individual, especially as personal beliefs and values evolve.



As the narrator and Liam discuss potential interviewees at the hunt, the narrator’s thoughts drift to Joe and Juniper, who are also involved in the event. Anxious about Joe’s participation, the narrator’s unease grows, especially as they reflect on the darker aspects of the hunt. Liam notices the change in the narrator’s demeanor and offers a comforting gesture, but the narrator deflects, insisting they are fine and that they don’t like guns. Despite the narrator’s attempt to hide their discomfort, Liam’s concern only deepens, and he advises caution as they part ways. This subtle moment of support from Liam further illustrates their growing bond, but it also emphasizes the narrator’s internal conflict and wariness surrounding the hunt and its effects on both the birds and the people involved.

Despite the hunters’ general disinterest in the environmental impact of their actions, they eagerly engage with the narrator, offering information and anecdotes about the hunt. However, the sound of gunshots rings out, and the narrator becomes increasingly unsettled, longing for a different outcome. They wish the town would shift towards a more positive celebration of the crows, akin to the festival mentioned earlier. The narrator imagines a world where the town embraces the crows, turning the event into something joyful and educational rather than grim and violent. They long for a more meaningful exchange, where the efforts made by the community could be directed toward fostering understanding and appreciation for the birds, rather than perpetuating a cycle of violence. This reflection captures the narrator’s inner desire for change, highlighting their growing belief that there are always alternative solutions to problems, if only people are willing to shift their perspective.

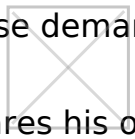
Chapter 17

In Chapter 17 of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the atmosphere in Leighton's home grows increasingly tense as a series of challenges unfold. Family conflicts escalate, adding to the already strained mood of the household, and to top it off, Leighton faces the disappointment of losing a crucial construction bid. As if that weren't enough, she becomes overwhelmed by a massive pile of papers she's printed for her research on crow myths, a project she's been working on in the chaos of a malfunctioning printer at the newspaper room. The stress of these mounting issues weighs heavily on her, and her focus is shattered when she accidentally collides with Liam, a fellow student, causing her papers to scatter all over the floor. This unexpected encounter highlights just how chaotic her life has become in recent days.

As Leighton gathers the papers and shares an exchange with Liam, a subtle connection between them begins to form. Their conversation is lighthearted at first, as they jokingly discuss the pressures they both face in juggling academic commitments and extracurricular activities. The chemistry between them is evident, though neither acknowledges it fully. Liam compliments Leighton on her writing, a gesture she brushes off, dismissing it as flattery, but Liam insists that his praise is sincere. The conversation, full of playful teasing, reveals a growing familiarity between the two, offering a moment of levity in Leighton's otherwise tense and overwhelming day. As the two talk, a friendship starts to solidify, and Leighton allows herself to entertain the thought of a deeper connection with him, perhaps even romantic, though she tries to keep those thoughts at bay.

Their brief but meaningful conversation continues as they both arrive at the newsroom, where Liam surprises Leighton by offering a listening ear. He proposes that if she ever feels the need to talk or unload her thoughts, he would be there to listen. Leighton, caught off guard by his kindness and understanding, feels a wave of emotion

flood over her. In that moment, she feels vulnerable, caught between her burgeoning feelings for Liam and the many complications in her life. She admits that she has feelings for him, but the timing is wrong. She explains the complexities of her life, especially her responsibilities toward her sisters, which make it impossible for her to focus on a romantic relationship right now. Despite her feelings, she prioritizes her familial duties, acknowledging that she cannot afford to get involved with someone when so much else demands her attention.



Liam, in turn, shares his own personal struggles and the ways his family life has shaped his own choices. While they exchange these intimate details, Leighton feels the weight of her responsibilities bearing down on her. She is torn between the desire to explore a relationship with Liam and the practical realities of her life, where family always comes first. Though part of her wishes to give in to her feelings and say “yes” to Liam, she cannot escape the role she’s been playing as a caregiver. The chapter ends with Leighton grappling with this internal conflict, standing at the crossroads of personal desire and the heavy burden of familial obligation.

This chapter serves not only to deepen the emotional connection between Leighton and Liam but also to explore broader themes of duty, sacrifice, and the complications that come with growing up. The interplay of these themes offers readers a poignant reflection on the struggles many face in balancing personal wants with the responsibilities that life throws at them. Through Leighton's inner turmoil and her interaction with Liam, the narrative highlights the difficulty of making choices when emotions and obligations collide, a struggle that will resonate with readers who have experienced the tension between personal aspirations and familial ties.

Chapter 56

Chapter 56 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with the protagonist experiencing an intense moment of emotional distress as they find the parking lot unexpectedly empty. Realizing that someone significant has left, the weight of the situation becomes overwhelming, and they are left sitting on the cold ground, struggling to breathe through the heaviness in their chest. As they sit in the chill of the moment, Sofia, a devoted friend, finds them and sits by their side in the freezing mud. Despite the ongoing festivities of the halftime show at the game, Sofia chooses to prioritize her friend's emotional state over her cheerleading duties. This act of compassion underscores the strength of their friendship, as Sofia provides the support needed to help the protagonist regain composure in the midst of their emotional storm. Her willingness to pause her own life for a moment to help a friend in distress highlights the depth of their connection, emphasizing that emotional support can offer solace during times of overwhelming grief.

As the two friends sit together, Sofia’s comforting presence allows the protagonist to slowly regain control over their emotions. The conversation naturally shifts toward the issues the protagonist has been facing at home, which Sofia has long suspected but never pressed due to her friend's desire to keep such matters private. Their bond is highlighted by Sofia’s understanding and respect for her friend’s boundaries, as well as her unwavering support in difficult times. Sofia offers refuge by suggesting a sleepover at her house, which lightens the mood, providing a moment of light-hearted relief amid the protagonist's internal struggles. The idea of spending time with friends and pets allows for a brief respite from the weight of the problems they are dealing with at home. It becomes clear that their connection is a source of strength, with Sofia’s ability to create space for comfort and support becoming essential in helping the protagonist navigate through their emotional turmoil. This moment of connection

serves as a reminder of the importance of friendships during times of hardship.

Once the protagonist feels ready, they return to the stadium, where they share a moment of warmth with their mother, who stayed despite the turbulence at home. The protagonist expresses gratitude for their mother’s presence, appreciating her support in such a difficult time. As they discuss how to get home, the protagonist suggests a bus route that passes by their grandmother’s house, which signals a desire to return to a familiar and safe environment. The idea of home lingers in their thoughts, prompting a deeper internal reflection on what home means to them. This reflection reveals a fear of being forgotten or left behind, much like snowflakes that disappear upon contact with the ground, leaving no trace behind. The metaphor of fleetingness and impermanence resonates deeply, evoking a sense of longing for something lasting and stable amidst the chaos of their current life. The protagonist's internal struggle centers around the desire for connection and the fear of disappearing into the background, unsure of where they truly belong.

As the chapter progresses, a metaphor of seasons emerges, with the protagonist reflecting on their own emotional state. Instead of seeing themselves as delicate spring blooms or the gentle warmth of summer, they begin to liken themselves to a fierce winter storm—cold, harsh, and full of mourning. This metaphor reflects their inner turmoil, as they acknowledge the darker parts of their personality and emotions, yet it also symbolizes a longing for transformation. There is a glimmer of hope within this self-realization, as the protagonist yearns for a personal miracle, something that will help them emerge from the storm stronger and more resilient. This desire for change and personal growth amidst chaos becomes a driving force as the protagonist contemplates their future. The chapter ends with the realization that Auburn, once seen as home, no longer feels like a place of belonging. However, there is a hint of optimism that despite the challenges, a personal miracle may still be possible, offering the possibility of finding a new sense of home, or at least a place of inner peace.

Chapter 75

Chapter 75 of *If These Wings Could Fly* takes the intensity to new heights as the characters are thrust into a deadly struggle within a burning house. Campbell, overwhelmed by panic, charges into the raging fire, and his mother, driven by the instinct to protect him, attempts to stop him. Despite her best efforts, she fails to intercept him in time, and the tragic realization sets in that her actions unintentionally led to this deadly scenario. The protagonist, filled with an overwhelming sense of guilt, cannot escape the haunting thought that had they been the one to cause the fire, it might have been easier to bear the weight of responsibility. The protagonist reveals an emotionally complex and painful truth: they would have chosen to allow Campbell to burn if it meant that they wouldn't have to face the emotional turmoil that now consumes them. This internal conflict serves as the heart-wrenching foundation for the protagonist's actions throughout the chapter.

Despite the deepening emotional turmoil, the protagonist's determination to save Campbell rises above the overwhelming feelings of guilt. As smoke swirls thickly around them and flames roar, the protagonist charges into the burning house, undeterred by the crows that once guarded the entrance. The environment inside is suffocating, with the air thickened by smoke and the intense heat of the fire. Inside, the protagonist finds Campbell lying unconscious, his body weighed down by debris, a stark contrast to the frantic desperation driving their every move. Every second counts as they struggle to navigate the fiery peril to reach him, and though each breath becomes increasingly difficult, the protagonist presses on. They call out to Campbell, urging him to leave the burning house, but their path is hindered by Mom's insistence on saving her son, complicating their already perilous escape. Despite this, the protagonist realizes that working together with Mom is their only hope. The two join forces, dragging Campbell toward safety while contending with the intense heat and

smoke that threatens to suffocate them.

As they continue to fight their way out, the situation becomes even more dire. The house begins to collapse around them, its structure weakened by the intense flames that rage inside. The tension in the air is palpable, each moment filled with agonizing hesitation as they struggle to free Campbell from the wreckage. Finally, they manage to pull him from the burning house and roll him out into the yard, where they can finally breathe a sigh of relief—if only for a moment. The house, now unable to withstand the flames, shudders violently before the entire structure collapses inward. This devastating moment serves as a stark visual representation of the emotional and physical toll the fire has taken on them. It is a final, terrifying acknowledgment of their near-impossible odds, as their frantic efforts to escape the inferno almost cost them everything. The collapse marks the culmination of their struggle, a literal and symbolic end to a chapter defined by survival against overwhelming odds.

Throughout the chapter, the emotional complexity of the protagonist is explored in depth, revealing how guilt, fear, and the desire to protect loved ones collide in the face of danger. Their instinctive drive to save Campbell, despite the overwhelming odds, underscores the deep, primal need to protect those they love, even when facing destruction. The protagonist's internal battle between guilt and responsibility adds layers of emotional depth to the narrative, making each decision feel more agonizing than the last. By the end of the chapter, the theme of familial bonds is brought into sharp focus, with the protagonist’s actions driven by both love and the need to atone for the past. The collapse of the house serves not only as a physical destruction but also as a metaphor for the emotional destruction the characters are experiencing. The final moments of the chapter are filled with urgency, but they also hint at the possibility of redemption and recovery, offering a glimpse of hope amidst the ashes of tragedy. This chapter serves as a poignant reminder of the strength of familial love and the lengths one will go to protect those they care about, even when faced with impossible circumstances.

Chapter Seventy-Six

In Chapter Seventy-Six of "If These Wings Could Fly," we find ourselves in a scene filled with trauma and uncertainty. The characters huddle in the street, their toes numb and hearts filled with doubt. Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) assess their conditions while a police officer questions them about the events that transpired. Amidst this chaos, Mrs. Stieg arrives, offering comfort with blankets and coffee for mothers and responders alike.

As the tension rises, an oxygen mask is applied to Campbell, and the protagonist experiences a jarring moment when her dress is cut open, revealing a bloody injury where a bullet grazed her side. This stark image conveys the violence they've endured and hints at the physical toll it has taken on her.

Bill DiMarco makes an entrance, finally delivering the words they've longed to hear: an arrest warrant. He outlines the violations that led to this moment—violations that include the endangerment of children and the firing of a gun, underscoring that prison time is inevitable for the assailant. While these revelations should bring a sense of justice, our protagonist steps away, drawn toward the remains of the house that once stood. The fire chief restricts her movement, but her desire to confront the destruction fueled by violence is palpable.

Reflecting on the malevolent shadow that lurked near them, she contemplates its proximity to their lives and how easily it could have swallowed them whole. The memory is suffused with a legacy of anger and an inheritance of fear that lingers in the aftermath of their ordeal. However, unlike before, the house in ruins will not be able to erase the violence inflicted upon them. The ashes stand testament to their pain, as dark as a crow’s wings, signifying a poignant end to an era marked by fear and suffering.

Chapter 77

Chapter 77 of *If These Wings Could Fly* opens with a serene yet poignant scene as the early morning light gradually envelops the yard. As the sun begins to rise, the familiar sound of crows awakens the stillness, filling the air with their graceful movement. A particular flash of gray among the sea of black birds catches the eye, prompting Juniper to quietly whisper a goodbye to Joe, a simple yet meaningful gesture that indicates a profound emotional connection to someone not physically present. This moment, though subtle, reveals a deeper layer of sentiment, highlighting the bonds that go beyond the visible and the power of shared, unspoken understanding between individuals.

As the crows gather momentum, their synchronized flight mirrors a reverse domino effect—each bird following in the path of the one before it, creating an almost hypnotic pattern in the sky. What begins as a small group of birds gradually grows into an awe-inspiring spectacle, with thousands and then tens of thousands of crows filling the sky. The sunlight, casting a warm glow over their dark feathers, creates a striking visual—a scene where it feels as though the birds are on fire or undergoing a rebirth, akin to phoenixes rising in unison over the horizon of Auburn. This imagery becomes an emblem of hope and renewal, symbolizing the end of a long, dark chapter in the characters' lives and the beginning of something brighter. The crows' flight represents the power of transformation, and the vivid, fiery display offers a visual metaphor for the emotional shifts happening within the characters themselves, reinforcing the underlying themes of rebirth and the promise of a new beginning.

As the scene unfolds, the moment intensifies when Campbell and Juniper step closer to the narrator, each taking one of their hands in a quiet yet deeply symbolic gesture. This simple act of connection brings an overwhelming sense of peace and calmness to the narrator, marking a powerful emotional shift. The frantic, almost chaotic feeling

that had been symbolized by the “winged thing” stirring in their chest begins to subside, giving way to a profound sense of safety and stillness. The overwhelming emotions that had once clouded their mind now settle into a tranquil quiet, signifying the end of their inner turmoil. The peaceful moment reaches its climax when the narrator, enveloped in the comforting embrace of their family’s support, softly declares, "We’re home." This statement, though simple, holds deep emotional weight, signifying a return to a place of emotional security and belonging. It encapsulates the emotional journey of the chapter, emphasizing the importance of family and the stability it provides in moments of uncertainty and change.

The concluding imagery and emotional resolution in this chapter serve as a powerful affirmation of the themes of hope, renewal, and connection that have been woven throughout the story. The symbolic flight of the crows, rising from the darkness into the light of the new day, mirrors the characters’ own transformation as they emerge from a period of struggle into one of healing and growth. The sense of safety and emotional comfort that envelops the narrator upon being surrounded by loved ones reinforces the central role that familial bonds play in the journey toward emotional recovery and peace. The chapter’s end, with the narrator’s declaration of being “home,” ties together the overarching themes of finding one’s place in the world, the healing power of love, and the promise of a brighter future. The profound connection between the characters, expressed through simple but meaningful actions, exemplifies the emotional depth of the story, showing that the path to healing and transformation is often shaped by the support and love of those closest to us.

In addition to the emotional and symbolic elements, the chapter also offers a sense of closure and resolution for the characters’ journey. The once-frantic, turbulent emotions have been replaced with a sense of calm, and the sense of belonging that the narrator experiences is both a personal triumph and a collective victory shared with the people who have supported them. The metaphorical rise of the crows and the warmth of the new dawn serve as the perfect backdrop for the emotional rebirth taking place within the narrator, signaling that no matter how dark the past may have been, the future holds the promise of renewal. This moment, framed by the powerful imagery of flight

and the emotional transformation of the characters, provides a sense of peace and finality, reminding readers that healing is not just possible but is often found in the connections we make with others and the support they provide. The chapter ultimately encapsulates the themes of transformation, hope, and the power of family, leaving readers with a sense of closure and anticipation for what lies ahead.

Auburn, Pennsylvania - January 1

The provided text is extremely brief and lacks the content necessary for a meaningful summary that adheres to your requirements. It primarily consists of a title, a date, a location, and minimal contextual information related to crow population.

If you could provide a more substantial chapter or additional content, I would be able to create a summary that follows your specifications.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments: In *If These Wings Could Fly*, the author takes a moment to extend heartfelt thanks to the many individuals and groups whose support and contributions were essential in bringing the book to life. The acknowledgments section is not only a tribute to those who played a direct role in the book’s creation but also serves as a reflection on the entire creative journey, from initial concept to finished manuscript. It underscores the importance of community, mentorship, and collaboration in the writing process, recognizing that no book is written in isolation. The author recognizes the contributions of many people, acknowledging the pivotal role that support systems and creative environments play in transforming an idea into a tangible work of art.

A significant portion of gratitude is directed towards the Pitch Wars team, a group that played an instrumental role in shaping the manuscript. The author credits the team for fostering a supportive environment and offering valuable guidance that helped refine the story. Special thanks are given to Kate Karyus Quinn and Mindy McGinnis, whose honest feedback and mentorship proved invaluable during the more challenging phases of writing. The author also expresses deep appreciation for their agent, Suzie Townsend, whose unwavering belief in the book's potential provided much-needed encouragement and support. The dedication of these individuals, who are part of a vibrant and nurturing writing community, is highlighted as one of the key elements that propelled the manuscript toward its final form.

In addition to these key figures, the author acknowledges the invaluable contribution of Ben Rosenthal, the editor who meticulously reviewed the manuscript and brought attention to details that enhanced the overall quality of the book. The team at Katherine Tegen Books also receives recognition for their welcoming and collaborative approach, which allowed the author to feel supported throughout the publishing process. Their collective expertise and diverse talents were integral to the success of

the project, creating an environment where the book could thrive. The author highlights the significance of the editorial team and their role in transforming the raw material of a manuscript into a polished, published work that readers can enjoy.

The acknowledgments also pay tribute to early writing influences, particularly the community that emerged from "The Great Noveling Adventure." The friendships and relationships formed within this group provided crucial support and encouragement during the author’s early writing journey. Figures like Jenny Perinovic are acknowledged for their consistent support, camaraderie, and the pivotal role they played in the author’s development as a writer. These early relationships, based on shared experiences and a passion for storytelling, are recognized for their lasting impact on the author’s creative process and career.

The author expresses deep gratitude to family members, acknowledging the unwavering love and support received from both immediate and extended relatives. Special thanks are given to Aunt Molly and Uncle Matt, whose kindness and contributions enriched the author’s life and experiences. Their involvement goes beyond simple family support; they are recognized as key figures who helped shape the author’s worldview and provided much-needed stability and encouragement throughout the writing journey.

Friends, too, are celebrated for their unwavering support. The author specifically mentions Kayleigh, whose encouragement played a crucial role in maintaining motivation during difficult times, and Katharyn, who brought joy and laughter during the more challenging phases of the writing process. These friendships provided not only emotional support but also a sense of community, reminding the author that they were not alone in their journey. Finally, a special acknowledgment is given to Andrew, whose belief in the author’s writing ambitions and his constant support throughout their shared life journey provided the foundation for the creative work that led to the book’s completion. This acknowledgment highlights the importance of personal connections, with Andrew’s support being recognized as a significant factor in the author's ability to pursue their dreams and complete the project.

In closing, the acknowledgments section serves as a poignant reflection on the importance of community, support, and personal connections in the writing process. The author’s deep gratitude toward the people who contributed to the journey—whether through professional guidance, personal support, or simply offering encouragement—demonstrates how a book is more than just the work of a single individual. It is the result of collective effort, and this acknowledgment stands as a testament to the invaluable role that others play in helping a writer bring their vision to life. Through this recognition, the author highlights the power of collaboration, mentorship, and personal relationships in the creative process, offering a heartfelt thank you to those who helped make *If These Wings Could Fly* a reality.

About the Author

About the Author: Kyrie McCauley is a multifaceted storyteller whose journey into the world of writing has been shaped by a wide variety of personal and professional experiences. Throughout her career, she has worn many different hats, taking on roles such as a waitress, nanny, singer in a band, ACLU intern, rally organizer, and, most significantly, a dedicated mother. Each of these experiences has provided McCauley with a rich tapestry of insights into the human condition, which she masterfully weaves into her writing. She holds a master's degree in social policy from the University of Pennsylvania, which has further equipped her with the knowledge and perspective needed to understand the complexities of society. Now residing near Philadelphia with her family and a number of beloved cats, McCauley continues to be an active member of the literary world, where she channels her personal experiences and academic background into compelling narratives. Readers can learn more about her and explore her work through her official website, www.kyriemccauley.com, which also offers an opportunity for fans to engage with her directly.

Beyond the personal insights into McCauley's life, this introduction invites readers to connect with a larger literary community, one that includes other talented authors and offers exclusive access to new stories. The connection to HarperCollins Children's publishing highlights the importance of supporting voices in the world of children's literature, a space where stories are not only created but celebrated for their ability to impact young minds. This community-centered approach encourages readers to immerse themselves in a world of literature where they can find new authors, new stories, and a sense of belonging that goes beyond the pages of any single book. For McCauley, this network of storytellers is vital in fostering creativity and nurturing the art of writing, especially for young readers who are just beginning their literary journey.

McCauley’s writing is a reflection of her unique life experiences, which have equipped her with a deep understanding of the diverse characters and narratives she brings to life. Her ability to write from different perspectives is one of her greatest strengths, and this is rooted in the many roles she has undertaken throughout her life. From the fast-paced world of being a waitress to the thought-provoking work of organizing rallies, McCauley’s diverse experiences allow her to explore a wide range of emotions and situations in her stories. Her background in social policy also brings a nuanced approach to her narratives, allowing her to tackle difficult social issues with empathy and insight. This combination of personal life lessons and academic understanding is what makes McCauley’s work so rich and engaging, as she taps into the complexities of human relationships and societal structures.

As readers dive into McCauley’s work, they can expect to encounter stories that are both deeply personal and socially aware, written by an author who is passionate about connecting with her audience. McCauley’s dedication to storytelling is not limited to her books; it extends to her active engagement in various causes that she believes can make a positive difference in the world. Her commitment to social issues shines through in her writing, where she often addresses themes such as inequality, community, and resilience. The sense of family and togetherness that McCauley values in her personal life is something she also seeks to explore in her work, making her stories not just a means of entertainment but a powerful force for fostering empathy and understanding. McCauley’s writing is an extension of her desire to create positive change, and through her stories, she offers readers a chance to reflect on the world around them and their role in it.

In addition to her creative and personal pursuits, McCauley remains dedicated to fostering a sense of community within the world of literature. She encourages her readers to not only explore her work but also to connect with other authors who share similar values and perspectives. Through her website, social media platforms, and interactions with readers, McCauley creates a space for people to engage with her stories and the broader literary community. This is not just about sharing her own

work, but about contributing to the ongoing conversation about storytelling and its role in shaping culture. McCauley’s ability to intertwine her personal experiences with her commitment to social change is what makes her an inspiring figure in the literary world. Her stories are more than just words on a page—they are a call to action, a reminder of the power of literature to create understanding, foster empathy, and inspire readers to make a difference in their own lives and communities.

In conclusion, Kyrie McCauley stands as a remarkable storyteller whose diverse experiences enrich her writing and resonate deeply with readers. Her dedication to her craft, her commitment to social policy, and her strong family values all contribute to the richness of her work. McCauley’s work goes beyond entertainment—it is an invitation for readers to engage with important societal issues and reflect on their own lives. As she continues to write and share her stories, McCauley offers a relatable and inspiring voice for anyone seeking connection through literature. Her ongoing work, both as an author and as an advocate, makes her an important and influential figure in today’s literary landscape, offering readers not only a glimpse into her world but also an opportunity to be a part of a larger movement for positive change.

Author’s Note

Author’s Note: In the opening chapter of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the author offers a deeply reflective and intimate look into the often-overlooked experiences of domestic violence. The narrative, set within the framework of a small town, unravels the complexities of survival in an environment shaped by abuse, while also shedding light on the intricacies of self-awareness in such challenging circumstances. The author’s primary goal is to give voice to individuals who might not immediately recognize the abuse they’re enduring, especially those who are young and uncertain about their own realities. By focusing on the perspective of a fifteen-year-old girl questioning her life and the world around her, the author aims to create a space for readers to see their own experiences reflected in a way they may have never been able to before. In doing so, she brings to light the subtle yet powerful forces at play in households marked by domestic violence, all while offering an opportunity for greater understanding and empathy.

The author’s writing is informed by her personal journey, including her work at a domestic violence intake center and her academic background in studying the sociological roots of violence. This combination of hands-on experience and scholarly exploration has allowed her to develop a nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of domestic violence. As she articulates in the note, the overwhelming challenge that many victims face is not just the abuse itself, but the difficulty of identifying it—especially when the perpetrators are often people they love and trust. What can make these situations even more confusing is the pervasive atmosphere of fear and manipulation, which distorts reality for the victims, often clouding their judgment. This confusion is exacerbated when those around them, who might seem like bystanders, are also unable to fully comprehend the severity of the situation. The author acknowledges how difficult it can be to differentiate between

what feels like normal, family dynamics and what is truly an abusive environment. This uncertainty is a core theme of the story, helping the reader to understand the psychological and emotional turmoil that many victims of domestic violence experience daily.

In an intriguing narrative choice, the author weaves magical realism into the story, introducing fantastical elements that highlight the surreal aspects of living within a cycle of domestic abuse. This infusion of magic allows the author to portray how the victim's reality can often feel like an alternate world—one where things are distorted and out of control, yet still within reach. The magic functions as a symbolic representation of the psychological effects of abuse, where reality becomes so skewed that it feels impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined. Within this surreal setting, the author introduces a powerful symbol—the legion of a hundred thousand crows—which represents the protective force the girls desperately need in the face of overwhelming adversity. These crows act as a metaphor for hope, resilience, and the possibility of freedom, offering a sense of protection and solidarity to the girls as they navigate the trials of their lives. Through these imaginative elements, the author provides readers with a symbolic layer that underscores the emotional complexity of surviving abuse, creating a bridge between the harsh realities of life and the aspirational dreams of a better future.

Further deepening the impact of the narrative, the author includes a practical, yet deeply compassionate section offering vital resources for domestic violence victims. These resources—such as The National Domestic Violence Hotline, Love is Respect, and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence—are carefully listed to ensure that readers who may be struggling with similar experiences are aware of the support available to them. The author's emphasis on safety while accessing these services is critical, as it acknowledges the real risks involved in seeking help in abusive situations. This practical component is woven into the fabric of the story, not as an afterthought but as a necessary part of the narrative's healing journey. By providing both emotional and tangible guidance, the author helps readers see that while the road to recovery

from domestic violence can be long and fraught with challenges, help is available, and change is possible. Through these resources, the story becomes not only a means of artistic expression but also a call to action for those who may find themselves trapped in similar situations. It offers a blend of compassion, guidance, and hope for survivors, showing them that despite the difficulties they face, there is a path forward, one that leads toward safety, support, and ultimately, healing.

In summary, the introduction of *If These Wings Could Fly* presents a powerful combination of personal reflection, awareness-raising, and emotional depth. Through the lens of a young girl's experience with domestic violence, the author brings to life a world filled with confusion, fear, and a search for hope. At the same time, the magical realism incorporated into the narrative provides a surreal yet meaningful framework for understanding the psychological effects of abuse. The author's inclusion of essential resources further strengthens the story's call for action, ensuring that readers not only find solace in the story but also have the tools they need to take steps toward safety and healing. This introduction serves as a compassionate, informative, and hope-filled entry point for anyone struggling with domestic violence, offering both an emotional journey and practical support. The story thus stands as both a work of fiction and a lifeline for those in need of understanding and assistance.