

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.

