

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.