

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 “pinky 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.