

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.