

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.



Summary

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.