

Chapter 35

Chapter 35 opens with Leighton feeling emotionally overwhelmed after a disturbing encounter with her father the previous night. Seeking solace, she hurries to Liam's car, rain pouring down around her, adding to the weight of her distress. As she settles into the car, Liam greets her casually with a "Good morning, beautiful," a simple phrase that triggers a flood of tears. Despite her best efforts to keep her emotions in check, the pain that has been building up inside her bursts free, leaving her vulnerable. She opens up to Liam, unable to hold back the anguish she has been carrying, her heart laid bare as she admits the depth of her suffering. This moment reveals the emotional toll of living in an environment filled with manipulation and abuse, as well as the rare comfort she finds in sharing her pain with someone who listens.

Liam, noticing the intensity of her distress, does not take her to school as planned. Instead, he pulls over, showing deep concern for her well-being, allowing her the space to talk. As Leighton struggles to articulate the years of emotional abuse she has endured at the hands of her father, her frustration grows. She feels trapped, unable to leave her toxic home, especially because her mother's blind love for her father has kept her bound to that environment. The weight of these complex emotions prevents her from breaking free, leaving her feeling helpless and conflicted. This moment of vulnerability brings a sense of clarity, but also reinforces the painful reality that escape is not so simple. The emotional abuse Leighton endures is not just physical; it is psychological, leaving deep scars that prevent her from severing the ties to her family despite the ongoing harm.

As they sit together in the car, the pouring rain mirrors Leighton's inner turmoil, symbolizing the overwhelming emotions she's struggling to control. Liam urges her to distance herself from her home, telling her that she doesn't deserve to live in such a toxic environment. While his words are filled with care and compassion, they clash

with Leighton's reality. The attachment she feels to her family, especially her mother, makes leaving feel impossible, even though she knows it would be for the best. Her mother's unwavering devotion to her father makes it difficult for Leighton to envision a life outside the confines of her home, even though the emotional toll is undeniable. This internal conflict deepens her feelings of entrapment, as she is torn between her need for safety and her loyalty to her family, especially her mother.

Eventually, Leighton begins to feel a sense of relief from having shared her pain with Liam, a small weight lifted from her shoulders. She thanks him, and together, they decide to return to school, though not immediately. Liam suggests staying away until after the first period, a suggestion that Leighton agrees to wholeheartedly. In these precious moments of vulnerability, they share a quiet understanding, both finding comfort in the brief respite from their individual struggles. The rain slows, a subtle shift that symbolizes a lighter mood, and the couple observes crows playing in the trees, a lighthearted moment that contrasts sharply with the heaviness of Leighton's emotional battles. This brief moment of connection provides a welcome distraction, offering a brief taste of normalcy in the midst of her otherwise chaotic world.

When they finally arrive at school, they are late, and Leighton is reminded of the calculus exam waiting for her. As she rushes through the hallways, her thoughts briefly shift from her personal struggles to the pressures of her academic life. A flyer about a crow hunt catches her eye, an unsettling reminder that she is not the only one facing disturbing situations. The flyer represents another troubling reality she cannot escape, paralleling the discomfort of her emotional turmoil with the dark undertones of the world around her. The chapter concludes with a poignant exploration of Leighton's complex emotions, illustrating the deep struggles she faces within her family while offering brief moments of solace through her connection with Liam. In this chapter, Leighton's internal conflict between seeking freedom and remaining tied to her family is laid bare, providing a rich exploration of her emotional landscape amidst the harsh realities of her life.