

# Chapter 54

Chapter 54 of *If These Wings Could Fly* begins with Leighton walking into her home, feeling a heavy tension in the air. Upon entering, she finds her family gathered in the living room, all seemingly engaged in a casual movie night. Her parents, along with Campbell and Juniper, are together, and while the scene might appear normal at first glance, Leighton is sharply aware of the strain between her parents. The sight of her mother and father cozying up together triggers a deep sense of discomfort, reinforcing the emotional distance that has been growing in their relationship. When her mother invites her to join them, Leighton is already filled with unease, and the conversation quickly shifts to the news of the canceled cable, which only exacerbates her father's apparent guilt. This subtle exchange highlights the emotional complexities in their home, where even simple gestures carry layers of unresolved tension.

Seeking to return some semblance of normalcy, Leighton offers to make popcorn, a small but meaningful gesture of attempting to reconnect with her family. In the kitchen, she finds her father, and they briefly talk about an upcoming football game where Liam, her boyfriend, will be playing. However, their conversation remains stiff, with Leighton struggling to bridge the growing emotional distance between them. While her father acknowledges the pressures surrounding the game, his response is distant, reflecting a deeper dissatisfaction with his life. His subdued tone speaks volumes about his internal struggles and disappointments, particularly about his work and the weight of his unresolved feelings. The brief exchange highlights the emotional isolation that Leighton feels, as she longs to connect with her father, but is met with emotional barriers that seem increasingly difficult to overcome. Their strained conversation underscores the challenges of maintaining family unity in the face of unspoken pain.

After the conversation, Leighton retreats to the quiet of her room, seeking solace from the chaos and tension of the evening. Her peace is interrupted by Joe, a bird who has become a strange but constant presence in her life. Rather than waiting for him to leave, Leighton opens her window to invite him in, signaling her willingness to engage with the world in whatever small, comforting way she can. As she watches him, Joe drops a small, rusted key onto her floor, an object that adds to her growing collection of trinkets from the bird. The act of receiving this small gift, though odd, feels significant to Leighton. It is as if the bird, in his peculiar way, offers a form of connection and meaning in a world that often feels cold and disconnected. This simple interaction with Joe becomes a way for Leighton to find some semblance of control and grounding, even amidst the emotional chaos surrounding her.

Leighton's thoughts then turn to the crows that dominate the skies over Auburn, and she feels a deep, unexpected connection to them. The sight of these birds, filling the air and casting their shadow over the town, becomes symbolic of the resilience she herself longs to embody. Despite their overwhelming numbers, the crows are unyielding in their persistence, just as Leighton desires to be in the face of her own struggles. The crows, often seen as a nuisance by others, represent a quiet defiance, continuing to thrive in an environment that might seem inhospitable. Leighton, in turn, sees in them a reflection of herself—someone whose pain and struggles are overlooked or dismissed by those around her. Yet, despite the challenges she faces, she continues to endure, much like the crows that have taken over the town. This realization becomes a turning point for Leighton, as she embraces the symbolism of the crows, understanding that there is strength in resilience and a quiet power in enduring despite the odds. This connection with the crows, in their unwavering persistence, provides Leighton with a moment of clarity, helping her realize that, just as they persist, so too can she, even when it feels like everything else is falling apart.