

Chapter Forty-Three

In Chapter Forty-Three of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the narrative unfolds on a snowy day as Leighton waits for Liam to arrive. As he parks awkwardly in the snow-filled street, she greets him with excitement and anxiety. The backyard is bustling with Leighton's younger sisters, Campbell and Juniper, who are playing joyfully in the snow. After a brief moment of hesitation between Leighton and Liam, they are quickly drawn into the playful chaos of a snowball fight, led by Liam's enthusiasm and strategy.

Liam establishes himself as captain, playfully choosing Juniper as a teammate, which leaves Leighton feeling slightly overlooked. However, this moment of competition swiftly turns into laughter and fun as Juniper embraces her role as "the Beast," charging at their snow fort. The scene captures an innocent joy, with the three of them constructing defenses and hurling snowballs in a spirited battle that ends with Juniper's victory.

After the playful chaos, a tender moment unfolds between Leighton and Liam, marked by a kiss that contrasts the coldness of winter with warmth. Their interaction is lighthearted yet intimate, showcasing a budding connection amidst the backdrop of familial interactions. The unexpected encounter with Juniper's letter to a crow named Joe adds a whimsical element to the narrative, highlighting the innocence and creativity of childhood.

As the day progresses, tension creeps in when Leighton's father unexpectedly returns home early. His presence alters the dynamic, introducing a sense of unease for Leighton, who is concerned about her father's potential reaction to Liam's visit. Despite this, Liam interacts smoothly with her family, discussing college and sports, creating a facade of a normal family dinner.

However, Leighton's internal struggles amplify, sensing that this calm moment may quickly shift. As Liam prepares to leave, they share a mix of playful banter and underlying tension, ultimately leading to Leighton urging caution about their affection in front of her family.

The chapter concludes on a note of foreboding; although the day has been filled with laughter and warmth, Leighton grapples with unsettling instincts, aware that happiness in her household often coexists with a precarious balance. The phrase "Not yet" encapsulates her anxiety as she returns inside, already knowing that the sense of normalcy may be temporary.