

Chapter Sixty

In Chapter Sixty of "If These Wings Could Fly," Leighton and Liam revisit a spot where they once skipped school, seeking solace from the world around them. The cold weather prevents them from leaving the car, yet they find warmth in each other as they sit on the hood and gaze at the starry sky, feeling a sense of protection from the towering trees. This moment of intimacy allows them to be alone together, especially after a period of silence following Auburn's disappointing football loss and the town's withdrawal from its usual excitement.

Leighton's desire to share her thoughts prompts her to lean against Liam, where she confides in him about submitting an essay for a scholarship contest, highlighting her feelings about home and the complexities of their town. She mentions that if she wins, her piece will be published in the *Gazette*, acknowledging the challenges she wrote about—particularly regarding a figure from her past.

As they discuss Leighton's essay, Liam expresses concern for her safety amidst the scrutiny such an announcement might attract. Their conversation shifts to the difficulties of growing up in Auburn; Liam shares his struggle with the expectations placed on him and the constant pressure to maintain a perfect image. He explains that while he excels due to hard work, he feels that the town's acceptance is conditional.

Their dialogue delves into deeper reflections on identity and fear. Leighton reveals the emotional toll of living with anxiety, feeling burdened by a life marked by caution and hypervigilance. Liam encourages her, asserting that their aspirations reach beyond the confines of Auburn, expressing optimism about their future.

The mood shifts as they engage in playful banter, reminiscing about the early days of their connection. Liam recalls how Leighton caught his attention, not just because of her looks but because of her unexpected bravery during a class discussion. They find joy in this exchange, reinforcing their bond and hinting at Leighton's struggles with self-acceptance and their complicated relationship with love and fear. Ultimately, the chapter reveals the strength of their connection amidst challenges and vulnerability.