

# Chapter Thirty-Nine

In Chapter Thirty-Nine of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the protagonist reflects on her literature class focused on the portrayals of women in literature. They study influential authors such as Jane Austen, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Sylvia Plath, with a particular emphasis on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The protagonist appreciates how women writers represent women as fully dimensional characters, contrasting them with male writers who often portray women merely as victims or archetypes.

As the class ends, Mrs. Riley, the teacher, encourages the protagonist to apply for an essay contest, sliding a pink sheet across her desk. The protagonist shares her struggle with the prompts, expressing her apprehension about not being able to express her thoughts effectively. Mrs. Riley pushes her to persevere, emphasizing the importance of finding her voice as a budding journalist and highlighting the potential recognition that could come from winning.

While pondering over an essay about a crow in ancient folklore that drops pebbles to raise the water level for a drink—a metaphor for perseverance—the protagonist realizes that although the contest may not directly lead to her goal of attending NYU, each small effort could gradually bring her closer.

She contemplates a more controversial idea for the essay that might not sit well with the council, consisting of men who often resist changes or challenges to the status quo. The protagonist recalls past experiences, particularly a humiliating moment in class when a male teacher ridiculed a female victim of harassment, which silenced her. Additionally, she observes the unsettling dynamics of how men interact with her mother at the diner, revealing a culture where women's voices and experiences are minimized.

Ultimately, the protagonist grapples with the implications of speaking out in a town rigidly adhering to traditional norms. She contemplates the potential collapse of structures upheld by fear and oppression and understands the dangerous nature of her thoughts, realizing that some truths might disrupt the complacency of her community. Her reflections underscore the tension between personal truth and societal expectations, suggesting that while change is necessary, it also poses significant risks.