

Chapter Twenty-Three

In the midst of a bonfire contained by stones, the flames dance hungrily, reminiscent of the narrator's troubled thoughts about a past house on Frederick Street and old memories. The heat affects her physically and emotionally, making her feel as if she herself is ablaze. Liam, a comforting presence, notices her discomfort and offers support. His attention draws her away from the eerie thoughts as they consider leaving the gathering.

Their attempt to escape is thwarted by the comments of Liam's friends, who mockingly label them as "lovebirds." Despite the jibes, Liam reassures her and they decide to leave, but the air is chilly and the tension from the previous exchange lingers. As they get into his car, they wish to drive around instead of heading directly home.

On the dark roads, illuminated only by headlights, they share a spontaneous moment, pulling over to a secluded lot surrounded by trees. The air is thick with anticipation, leading them to a hesitant yet electric first kiss. Comfort turns to awkwardness as physical intimacy develops, but boundaries are respected when Leighton expresses her discomfort. They shift their location to the car's hood, where they attempt to reconnect over the peacefulness of nature around them.

As they lie back, they spot satellites moving across the sky, leading to playful competition between them. Liam's casual charm makes her feel at ease, and as the night progresses, they share heartfelt moments. Eventually, Liam offers to take her home, marking a shift in their relationship dynamic when he agrees to whatever she wants.

The evening ends with a tender kiss that aligns with the narrator's expectations of their first kiss. Yet, as they part ways, doubt creeps in, making her wish for more time spent together away from prying eyes. She climbs out of his car, filled with conflicting emotions, hoping for future encounters that defy their current reality.