

Chapter Two

In the morning, the atmosphere is thick with crows, filling the trees and rooftops surrounding Leighton's home. Observing from her bedroom window, she notes the unsettling presence of these birds as her brother returns home, prompting her to rush through her shower to instill some semblance of normalcy in the chaotic morning. This school year feels particularly heavy for Leighton, as it marks her final stretch before she must find a way to protect her sisters and ensure her path to college.

Entering the kitchen, she is greeted by her mother, who, startled, spills coffee on herself. Though she attempts to smile at Leighton, the warmth is overshadowed by a hollow semblance of happiness that no longer reflects their closer relationship. The presence of scarlet roses in a chipped vase—a token from her brother's attempts to apologize—further complicates the family dynamics.

Leighton wrestles with her feelings, torn between confronting her mother about the situation at home or smoothing over the tension. When she inquires about her brother's recent actions, their mother deflects and insists on a casual morning routine, a tactic Leighton recognizes as an attempt to avoid the sensitive topic. The heaviness in the house remains palpable, with signs of disturbance evident in the disarray of picture frames and a pervasive sense of stress that seems to heighten during these difficult nights.

As the anticipation and anxiety swell in the household, Leighton reflects on her identity and the traits she shares with a photograph of a girl from a happier time. This contemplation leads her to question her ability to forgive and cope with the ongoing turmoil.

Before rushing her sisters to the bus stop, Leighton resolves to confront the remnants of their fractured life, symbolized by a useless house phone that links them to a world outside. With the familiar sound of a dial tone, she acknowledges the fragile vein of communication that remains, underscoring the tension and complexity of family, love, and the desperate need for safety amidst chaos.