

# Chapter 17

In Chapter 17 of *If These Wings Could Fly*, the atmosphere in Leighton's home grows increasingly tense as a series of challenges unfold. Family conflicts escalate, adding to the already strained mood of the household, and to top it off, Leighton faces the disappointment of losing a crucial construction bid. As if that weren't enough, she becomes overwhelmed by a massive pile of papers she's printed for her research on crow myths, a project she's been working on in the chaos of a malfunctioning printer at the newspaper room. The stress of these mounting issues weighs heavily on her, and her focus is shattered when she accidentally collides with Liam, a fellow student, causing her papers to scatter all over the floor. This unexpected encounter highlights just how chaotic her life has become in recent days.

As Leighton gathers the papers and shares an exchange with Liam, a subtle connection between them begins to form. Their conversation is lighthearted at first, as they jokingly discuss the pressures they both face in juggling academic commitments and extracurricular activities. The chemistry between them is evident, though neither acknowledges it fully. Liam compliments Leighton on her writing, a gesture she brushes off, dismissing it as flattery, but Liam insists that his praise is sincere. The conversation, full of playful teasing, reveals a growing familiarity between the two, offering a moment of levity in Leighton's otherwise tense and overwhelming day. As the two talk, a friendship starts to solidify, and Leighton allows herself to entertain the thought of a deeper connection with him, perhaps even romantic, though she tries to keep those thoughts at bay.

Their brief but meaningful conversation continues as they both arrive at the newsroom, where Liam surprises Leighton by offering a listening ear. He proposes that if she ever feels the need to talk or unload her thoughts, he would be there to listen. Leighton, caught off guard by his kindness and understanding, feels a wave of emotion flood over her. In that moment, she feels vulnerable, caught between her burgeoning feelings for Liam and the many complications in her life. She admits that she has feelings for him, but the timing is wrong. She explains the complexities of her life, especially her responsibilities toward her sisters, which make it impossible for her to focus on a romantic relationship right now. Despite her feelings, she prioritizes her familial duties, acknowledging that she cannot afford to get involved with someone when so much else demands her attention.

Liam, in turn, shares his own personal struggles and the ways his family life has shaped his own choices. While they exchange these intimate details, Leighton feels the weight of her responsibilities bearing down on her. She is torn between the desire to explore a relationship with Liam and the practical realities of her life, where family always comes first. Though part of her wishes to give in to her feelings and say "yes" to Liam, she cannot escape the role she's been playing as a caregiver. The chapter ends with Leighton grappling with this internal conflict, standing at the crossroads of personal desire and the heavy burden of familial obligation.

This chapter serves not only to deepen the emotional connection between Leighton and Liam but also to explore broader themes of duty, sacrifice, and the complications that come with growing up. The interplay of these themes offers readers a poignant reflection on the struggles many face in balancing personal wants with the responsibilities that life throws at them. Through Leighton's inner turmoil and her interaction with Liam, the narrative highlights the difficulty of making choices when emotions and obligations collide, a struggle that will resonate with readers who have experienced the tension between personal aspirations and familial ties.