

Where the Crawdads Sing



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF DELIA OWENS

Born in 1949, Delia Owens grew up in Georgia, where she developed a strong love of nature. As a child, she rode horses and explored the woods, encouraged by her mother to spend time in the wilderness. During this time, Owens developed an early passion for writing, even winning a writing contest in the sixth grade and deciding that she would someday be a professional writer. However, when she went to college at the University of Georgia, she studied zoology instead of English, eventually going on to complete a doctorate in Animal Behavior from the University of California, Davis. After this, Owens and her then-husband moved to Africa, where they worked as wildlife scientists in Botswana. For seven years, they lived in an extremely remote area and studied packs of lions and hyenas, eventually co-writing *Cry of the Kalahari*, which was a bestseller. After living in Botswana, Owens and her husband moved to Zambia, where they studied elephants and founded a social work program that helped locals survive economically without having to become animal poachers. Over the years, Owens has published her writing about wildlife in a number of scientific journals and has won awards for her research and conservation efforts. *Where the Crawdads Sing* is her first work of fiction. She currently lives in Idaho.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As explained in the novel itself, *Where the Crawdads Sing* takes place in the marshlands of North Carolina, which have an interesting history in terms of settlement and habitation. In the 1500s, the explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano sailed the eastern coastline of the United States and claimed the area in the vicinity of present-day North Carolina for France. However, Francis I—the king of France at the time—was unhappy with the area because he was primarily interested in finding gold and silver, along with discovering a passage to the Pacific Ocean through the continent. Shortly thereafter, Spanish explorers tried to settle in the region but ultimately failed. These kinds of attempts continued, though explorers were generally unenthused when they saw the marshlands, which they thought had very little value and wouldn't make for good settlements. This aversion to the area continued throughout the ensuing centuries, which is why the area in which Kya lives in *Where the Crawdads Sing* is so sparsely populated. Furthermore, the stigma that Kya experiences because she lives in the marshlands comes from the fact that the region was largely inhabited by former slaves, indentured servants, criminals, and other people who had been ostracized by society.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Because of its engagement with the theme of independence and self-sufficiency, *Where the Crawdads Sing* is similar to another work of contemporary fiction, [Before We Were Yours](#) by Lisa Wingate. Like *Where the Crawdads Sing*, [Before We Were Yours](#) examines what happens when children are abandoned by their parents. Furthermore, it's worth mentioning *Cry of the Kalahari*, *The Eye of the Elephant*, and *Secrets of the Savanna*, three nonfiction books that Owens co-wrote with her former husband about her experiences as a zoologist. Given that *Where the Crawdads Sing* engages so deeply with the natural world and animal kingdom, these works are relevant because they demonstrate Owens's vast knowledge of such matters. In addition, this novel has drawn comparisons to the works of Barbara Kingsolver, whose novels like [The Bean Trees](#) and *Flight Behavior* also closely consider nature and wildlife.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Where the Crawdads Sing
- **When Published:** August 14, 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Coming of Age Novel (Bildungsroman)
- **Setting:** The coastal marshes of North Carolina
- **Climax:** After Kya's death, Tate discovers that Kya murdered Chase and got away with it.
- **Antagonist:** Chase Andrews

EXTRA CREDIT

Motherly Advice. When Delia Owens was a child, her mother used to encourage her to spend as much time as possible exploring nature, urging her to go way out to “where the crawdads sing”—something that Kya's mother also tells her in the novel.

Off-Grid. Owens is familiar with the kind of isolation that Kya experiences in *Where the Crawdads Sing*. When she was working in Africa with her ex-husband, she lived in an area in the wilderness that was as big as Ireland and in which there weren't any other humans except for several nomadic tribes who roamed the region.



PLOT SUMMARY

One day in 1952, six-year-old Kya Clark's mother walks down the lane leading from their rundown shack in the North Carolina marshlands. Kya senses that Ma won't return, but her

brother, Jodie, assures Kya that she will, claiming that mothers only abandon their children in order to survive—a reason he doesn't think pertains to Ma. However, Ma never returns, leaving Jodie, Kya, and their three older siblings with their violent and alcoholic father. As time passes, Kya and Jodie's siblings leave, too, and then Jodie also abandons the shack. Suddenly, then, Kya is on her own with Pa, wondering how she's going to care for herself. With this in mind, she teaches herself how to cook, slowly learning how to prepare grits and taking it upon herself to do the shopping in the nearby town of Barkley Cove, though she dislikes going into public because the townspeople mistreat her and call her "swamp trash." Still, Kya learns how to sustain herself, and she even manages to mollify Pa's anger by cooking for him. Because of this, he takes her fishing in the marsh and introduces her to Jumpin', who owns a nearby gas dock and bait shop. Jumpin' is one of the only people Kya interacts with other than Pa, though she also has fleeting encounters in the marsh with a boy named Tate.

The narrative jumps back and forth between Kya's upbringing and a murder case involving a young man named Chase Andrews. This case takes place in 1969, when two local boys find Chase's dead body beneath the fire tower in the marsh. When Sheriff Ed Jackson comes to investigate, he notices that there aren't any footprints in the mud around Chase's body, suggesting that Chase was murdered. As the novel progresses, the storyline switches between Kya's coming of age process and Ed's investigation, in which he becomes certain that Chase was murdered and begins to suspect that Kya has something to do with what happened, since she and Chase had a secret relationship in the marsh until just before Chase married a local girl named Pearl.

As a child, Kya only attends school for one day, refusing to go back after being bullied by the other children who mock her and call her a "swamp rat." However, despite a lack of formal education, she becomes quite self-sufficient. Kya even starts enjoying spending time with Pa—this changes, though, when Pa receives a letter from Ma. Kya doesn't know what the letter says because she can't read, but whatever it says enrages Pa, who burns it before going out to get drunk. This marks his return to his abusive, alcoholic ways, and it isn't long before Pa starts disappearing for long stretches of time. Then, when Kya is 10, Pa leaves and never comes home, leaving Kya completely on her own. To make money, Kya starts collecting mussels and selling them to Jumpin', but because there are other fishermen who sometimes sell him mussels before her, she tries to think of different ways to make money. After catching and smoking a large quantity of fish, Kya agrees to give them to Jumpin' on consignment. However, Jumpin' takes the entire bucket of fish home, knowing they won't sell. At home, his wife, Mabel, decides to make stew with the fish, but she instructs Jumpin' to tell Kya that they found somebody who wants to trade clothes and other supplies for her fish. This isn't actually true, but

Mabel worries that Kya won't accept their help if they don't tell her this. Mabel then gathers a number of supplies and gives them to Kya, who is eternally grateful.

Around this time, Tate—who has taken an interest in Kya—starts leaving rare bird feathers for her on a stump in the woods. He admires Kya's appreciation of nature, so this is a way to connect with her. He soon leaves other presents, too, including an extra spark plug for her boat's engine and a short note. However, Kya can't read his note, and she tells Tate this when he suddenly appears at the stump, catching her off-guard before she can run away. Kindly, he suggests that he could teach her to read, and she agrees. From that point on, they spend as much time together as possible, as Tate comes to the marsh and brings as many books as he can, relishing his time with Kya. Similarly, Kya comes to look forward to her time with Tate, and she also loves being able to read, especially since one of the books Tate gives her is an almanac about the kind of wildlife Kya sees in the marsh. Kya particularly loves poetry and connects with the poems of a local poet, Amanda Hamilton, that are published in the town paper.

Kya and Tate develop a romantic bond. Because Tate is 19 and Kya is still only 15, though, Tate refuses to have sex with her—a fact that frustrates her because she thinks he's treating her as if she's younger than she actually is. Still, he remains steadfast, though they do become physically romantic in other ways. Unfortunately for Kya, though, Tate informs her one day that he'll soon be leaving, since he's about to go to college and has just accepted a job for the summer in a biology research lab at school. Having said this, he promises to return on July 4th for a visit, so Kya eagerly awaits his arrival. When the day comes, though, Tate is nowhere to be seen, nor does he come the next day or the day after that. While waiting for him one evening, Kya watches a female **firefly** flash her light in a pattern that attracts a male of a different species. As soon as the male gets close, the female firefly eats him, and though Kya recognizes the mercilessness of this, she understands that this is simply how nature works—there is no morality when it comes to survival in the wilderness, she thinks.

On her own once again, Kya vows that she'll never get close to anyone again. And yet, she can't deny how lonely she feels, which is why she finds herself drawn to Chase when she spots him and his friends on the beach one day. As she watches him, he turns around and makes eye contact with her, and she can tell that he's interested in getting to know her. Several days later, Kya sees Chase at Jumpin's, and he invites her to go on a picnic in his boat that weekend. She agrees, and so they take his boat to a remote beach, where they go for a walk. At one point, Chase finds a shell that Kya identifies as somewhat rare, so he gives it to her before sitting down and playing harmonica. Then, after lunch, they kiss, and suddenly Chase throws his entire body onto Kya and tries to take off her clothes. Frantically, she tells him to stop and shifts out from underneath him, deciding

to run home even though it's quite far. But even though Kya is angry and feels violated, she later accepts Chase's apology. To make it up to her, he takes her to the fire tower in the marsh and shows her the magnificent view, promising that he'll never do anything to make her uncomfortable again. In turn, Kya accepts Chase's apology and gives him a **necklace** she made using the shell he found on the beach. In the coming months and years, they continue to spend time together, eventually becoming romantic. And though Kya puts off having sex with Chase for as long as possible, she goes through with it after they've been seeing each other for several years. Overall, she finds it uncomfortable and unenjoyable, but Chase doesn't seem to mind—he's too satisfied to notice her discontent.

It is now 1966, and Tate has returned to the marsh, having finished undergraduate school and embarked upon a Ph.D. in protozoology. He wants to apologize to Kya for abandoning her, but she screams at him when he pays her a visit. Still, he tells her that he made the biggest mistake of his life by leaving her. Tate also tells Kya that Chase has been seeing other women in town, but she tells him that this is none of his business. Not knowing what else to say, Tate asks if he can come to Kya's shack to see her collection of shells and feathers, and she hesitantly says yes. Once inside, he admires how the collection has grown since he last saw it and asks if he can take a sample to show several publishers, suggesting that Kya could publish a book containing her illustrations of the specimen she has amassed. She allows Tate to do this, and he takes his leave.

Kya doesn't confront Chase about what Tate told her, but she does try to get him to integrate her into his life outside the marsh. Every time she brings this up, though, he puts off introducing her to his parents, all the while promising to someday marry her. One day, Kya goes into town and sees Chase with his arm around a young woman. She then buys a newspaper, and when she opens it at home, she sees that Chase and this woman—Pearl—have just announced their engagement. Kya promptly stops seeing Chase, and though she gets closer and closer to forgiving Tate, she doesn't rekindle their romance.

A year after Kya breaks things off with Chase, he comes up behind her in a place called Cypress Cove. Forcing himself upon her, he tries to rape her, but she escapes by kicking him in the groin and then in the kidneys. As she runs back to her boat, she screams that she'll kill him if he tries to harm her again—something a nearby fisherman, Rodney Horn, hears her say. This factors into Kya's trial later that year, when she stands accused of having murdered Chase. Thankfully, Kya's lawyer, Tom Milton, is quite good at refuting the state prosecutor's allegations, primarily doing so by pointing out that the only indication that Chase was murdered is actually a *lack* of evidence. After all, there are no footprints, nor are there fingerprints on the fire tower, suggesting that somebody intentionally wiped them away. Throughout the trial, Eric—the

state prosecutor—tries to frame Kya as the mysterious and sinister "Marsh Girl," using various witnesses to present a narrative of her as emotionally unstable and dangerous. However, Tom manages to destabilize this argument by reminding the jury that Kya isn't the fearsome creature the townspeople have made her out to be. Instead, he argues, she's just a young woman who was abandoned in the marsh as a child and has had to fend for herself in order to survive. This argument ultimately resonates with the jury, which finds Kya not guilty of murdering Chase.

In the aftermath of Kya's trial, she returns to her shack, having been held for several months in the courthouse's jail. Throughout her trial, Tate sat behind her and gave her emotional support, as did Jodie, who returned to Kya shortly before Chase's murder and told her he recently learned that Ma—who was apparently mentally unstable when she initially abandoned her family—died in New Orleans two years earlier. Jodie encourages Kya to forgive Tate, seeing quite clearly that she loves him. But until now, Kya has been too wary of letting him back into her life. Finally, though, she decides to reestablish their romantic connection. Once more, Tate apologizes for leaving her, and they move into her shack and live a happy life, as Tate works as a research biologist and Kya publishes seven books about the North Carolina wildlife. Then, while boating in the marsh one day, Kya slumps over and dies at the age of 64. After Kya's funeral—which everyone in town attends—Tate looks for her will. Under their floorboards, he finds Chase's shell necklace and a poem that Kya secretly wrote under the pseudonym Amanda Hamilton. It's called "The Firefly," and it reveals once and for all that she lured Chase to the fire tower and tricked him into falling through an open hatch.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark) – The protagonist of *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Kya is a six-year-old girl at the outset of the novel. A curious and adventurous person, she lives in the North Carolina marshlands in a run-down shack. Unfortunately, Kya's Ma and siblings run away because of Pa's abusive ways, leaving her to navigate her father's alcoholic rages. Effectively on her own, Kya teaches herself to cook, proving her powers of self-sufficiency. Around this time, she meets a young boy named Tate in the marsh and wishes they could be friends. However, she rarely interacts with other people, except for Jumpin', who owns a nearby gas dock. When Pa fails to come home one day, Jumpin' does what he can to help Kya, telling her he'll buy mussels from her. In this manner, Kya sustains herself as she enters her adolescence, surviving on her own and avoiding school, where she knows the townspeople will mistreat her and call her the "Marsh Girl." At one point, Tate begins leaving rare feathers for her, gradually coaxing her out of her private life to

spend time with him. Kya demonstrates her thirst for knowledge when Tate teaches her to read, relishing the information she can learn about the marsh from reading about biology. She also develops a love of poetry, particularly the work of Amanda Hamilton, whose poems are printed in the local paper. Kya's relationship with Tate becomes romantic, but he leaves for college one summer and, though he promises to return, fails to do so. Abandoned once more, Kya decides to never trust anyone again, but she soon starts seeing a local young man named Chase. Their relationship becomes serious, but Chase never integrates her into his life outside the marsh, and Kya learns one day that he's engaged to another woman. A year or so after breaking things off, she encounters him once again, and he tries to rape her, though she manages to escape. Having studied biology, Kya knows that some female insects attract potential mates only to destroy them, which is exactly what she does with Chase, luring him to a nearby fire tower and tricking him into stepping through an open hatch. She is later found not guilty for this offense and lives the rest of her life with Tate in the marsh. It is only after Kya's death that Tate discovers Chase's **shell necklace** that was taken off of his dead body along with an Amanda Hamilton poem entitled "**The Firefly**," detailing Chase's murder, under the floorboards of their house. From this, it's clear that Kya really did murder Chase, and that Kya herself was Amanda Hamilton all along.

Tate – Tate is from Barkley Cove, and is Kya's primary romantic interest. As a boy, Tate fishes with Jodie and interacts with Kya, though Kya is too young to remember this. For this reason, she's surprised to learn that Tate knows her name when she encounters him in the marsh after Ma, Jodie, and the rest of her siblings leave home. During this encounter, Tate helps Kya find her way home, an act of kindness that instills in her a wish to become his friend. Over the coming years, she sees him periodically in the marsh but keeps her distance. Because he admires her appreciation of nature, Tate finally makes deliberate contact with Kya when she's 14, leaving rare feathers for her on a stump. Before long, she leaves rare artifacts for him, too, so he decides to show his face one day at the stump. A calm, polite young man, he encourages her not to run away and then offers to teach her to read. So begins their friendship, as Tate brings Kya books and spends time with her whenever he can. Soon their relationship becomes romantic, but Tate refrains from having sex with Kya because she's still only 15, whereas he's 19. He then informs her that he's going to college and has accepted a job in a research lab over the summer, though he promises to visit on July 4th—a promise he fails to keep. When Tate finally does come to see Kya, he secretly watches her and is overwhelmed by the fact that she's unlike people in the outside world. Worried she'll never fit into the life he wants to build, he slips away. Tate later thinks this is the worst decision he's ever made, but he can't find a way to make it up to Kya, though he helps her publish her first book and later emotionally supports her when she's on trial for the

murder of Chase Andrews, her former boyfriend. Kya is ultimately found not guilty, and in the aftermath of the trial, she takes Tate back and they live together in the marsh for the rest of Kya's life. After Kya's death, however, Tate comes across Chase's **shell necklace** and an Amanda Hamilton poem, "**The Firefly**," which details Chase's murder, under the floorboards of their house. He promptly disposes of this evidence, which confirms that Kya did murder Chase and that Amanda Hamilton was Kya's secret penname. gre

Chase Andrews – Chase Andrews is a widely beloved young man who lives in Barkley Cove. Known in town as one the best former quarterbacks the area has ever seen, Chase is confident and popular. When Chase sees Kya watching him and his friends one day shortly after Tate leaves her, he goes out of his way to speak to her, eventually inviting her for a picnic the following weekend. This outing doesn't end well, since Chase quickly tries to have sex with Kya without bothering to discern whether or not she's interested. However, he later convinces her to give him a second chance, admitting that he's attracted to her "wild" ways but claiming that he just wants to spend time with her. Moving forward, he promises, he'll never pressure her do anything she doesn't want. In the coming years, then, they develop a romantic relationship, and he even begins talking to her about getting married, though he never introduces her to his parents or tries to integrate her into his life outside the marsh. Soon enough, Kya discovers that Chase is engaged to be married to a young woman named Pearl, so Kya stops seeing him, though he finds her roughly a year later and tries to rape her. Luckily, Kya escapes, but she senses that he will come back for her. This is the story that ultimately drives the novel's plot, as readers learn in the first chapter that Chase has been murdered and are therefore invited to wonder if Kya was the killer as they follow the events that led up to his death. Since Kya was allegedly spotted near the crime scene on the night of the murder, and Chase's body was found missing the **shell necklace** that Kya had given to him, Chase's mother, Patti Love (among others in the community), believe that Kya is the culprit. Although Kya is officially found not guilty for the crime, it later becomes clear that she did, in fact, murder Chase when Tate discovers the shell necklace and a confessional poem under the floorboards of their house after Kya's death.

Ma (Kya's Mother) – Kya's mother, whom she calls Ma, is a middle-aged woman from New Orleans who at the outset of the novel lives in the marshlands of North Carolina with her husband and five children. When Ma first met her husband, whom Kya calls Pa, she thought he had more money than he actually did and was surprised when he eventually convinced her to move onto his family's land in North Carolina, at which point she discovered that there was nothing there but a run-down shack. In the ensuing years, she suffered violent abuse, which is why she eventually leaves once and for all when Kya is only six years old, abandoning Kya and the rest of her children.

More than a decade later, Kya learns from her brother Jodie that Ma was mentally unstable when she left home, hardly registering that she was leaving behind her children, since she was instinctively focused on trying to save her own life. Once Ma left, Jodie tells Kya, she went to live with her sister in New Orleans, where she remained cooped up in her bedroom, hardly able to speak. Roughly a year later, Ma came to her senses and realized that she'd left her children, but Pa refused to let her see them when she wrote a letter asking to do so. Instead, he threatened to hurt them if she ever tried to contact them again. For the rest of her days, then, Ma remained in New Orleans, devoting herself to creating oil paintings of her children—paintings that Jodie obtains and gives to Kya when he returns to the marsh after many years.

Jodie – Jodie is Kya's brother, and is the closest to her in age of all their siblings. When Ma leaves, he tries to make her feel better by insisting that she'll return, pointing out that mothers never abandon their young. However, Kya reminds Jodie that they recently saw a female fox leave her cubs, but he says this was only because the fox was hurt and knew she wouldn't survive if she stayed. Because Ma isn't trying to save her own life, Jodie assures Kya, she will certainly come back. Unfortunately, though, Jodie is wrong to think that Ma isn't leaving home as a means of survival, since her decision to escape Pa's wrath is nothing but a means of self-preservation. In fact, Jodie himself secretly recognizes this, but he doesn't say anything about his misgivings because he wants to soothe Kya—a sign that he's an empathetic person who wants to do what he can to make his little sister feel better. But despite this determination, he decides after his siblings follow their mother's footsteps that he, too, must leave home, thereby abandoning Kya. In the coming years, Kya thinks about Jodie quite often, since he taught her how to sneak around the marsh and how to hide from strangers, so she recalls his advice on a regular basis. To her surprise, he actually returns as an adult after having completed two military tours in Vietnam, and he apologizes for ever leaving Kya. He also tells her that he recently discovered that their mother died two years ago. For the rest of Jodie's life, he lives near the marsh, visiting Kya often and supporting her whenever he can.

Pa (Kya's Father) – An angry man with a drinking problem, Pa is Kya's abusive father. Pa served in the trenches of World War II, sustaining an injury and receiving an honorable discharge, though he's the only one who knows that his injury was the result of the fact that he was too cowardly to move from his place on the battlefield. With this in mind, he goes through life feeling like a failure, though he manages to successfully court Kya's future mother by spending all of the money to his name taking her out to fancy restaurants. By the time they get married, he has no more money and starts drinking heavily—a habit that never dies, especially when the couple moves the marshlands of North Carolina, where Pa owns property. Over

the years, he becomes increasingly violent, drinking heavily and living off of the disability checks he receives from the military. Eventually, Ma leaves him, as do all of his children except Kya, who manages for a short while to quell his anger by treating him with kindness. During this period, Pa and Kya go fishing together, and he refrains from getting too drunk. When Pa receives a letter from Ma, though, he resumes his angry ways and starts drinking again, disappearing for long stretches of time until, one day, he simply never comes home.

Jumpin' – Jumpin' is a kindhearted man who owns a gas dock and bait shop that sits between Kya's area of the marsh and Barkley Cove. Although Kya is white and Jumpin' is black—and although they live in a racially segregated community—they become quite close, since Jumpin' does what he can to help Kya survive when her entire family abandons her. When Kya tries to think of a way to make money, Jumpin' agrees to buy sacks of mussels from her several times a week, though he warns her that other fishermen also bring him mussels, adding that he can only buy so many. Because of this, Kya catches fish and smokes them, hoping that Jumpin' will sell those instead. And though these fish look disgusting, Jumpin' agrees to take them, later bringing them to his wife, Mabel, who also feels sorry for Kya. Wanting to help her, Mabel and Jumpin' decide to tell Kya that they know somebody who wanted to trade the fish for clothing and other supplies. In reality, though, Mabel and Jumpin' collect these supplies from their church without trading the fish. This is the kind of support that they continue to show Kya, even when she's on trial for Chase's murder. Jumpin' dies years after Kya is found not guilty, and Kya feels as if she has lost her true father.

Mabel – Mabel is Jumpin's wife, and Kya's only female role model. When Kya tries to sell a bucket of disgusting smoked fish to Jumpin', Mabel tells Jumpin' to claim that somebody in their community wanted to trade the fish for clothing and other supplies. This, of course, isn't true, but Mabel wants to help Kya because she feels sorry for her, knowing that the child has nobody to support her. In keeping with this, Mabel assembles a number of donations from her church and gives them to Kya. Later, when Kya is going through adolescence, Mabel brings her a bra and tells her that she can come talk if she ever has any questions. Shortly thereafter, Kya has her first period, and when she tells Mabel, Mabel gives her a long, emotional hug, telling her that she has become a woman. For the rest of her life, Mabel continues to provide Kya with emotional support, eventually telling her after Jumpin' dies that he saw Kya as his own daughter.

Sheriff Ed Jackson – Ed Jackson is the sheriff in Barkley Cove. When Benji Mason and Steve Long find Chase Andrews's dead body near the fire tower, they visit Ed and tell him the news before taking him to the scene of the crime. Once he arrives, Ed notices that there are no footprints surrounding Chase's body. In fact, the only footprints in the entire area are his own and

Benji and Steve's. This leads him to believe that Chase was murdered, so he begins investigating the case. Throughout the novel, he collects information from the townspeople, working with Deputy Joe Purdue to piece together what, exactly, happened on the night that Chase fell from the fire tower. In doing so, he comes to suspect that Kya—whom he and other townspeople call the “Marsh Girl”—might have had something to do with the case. Accordingly, he and Joe try to bring Kya in for questioning, but she evades them whenever they come to her shack. Before long, though, they decide to arrest her because they hear from a local fisherman named Rodney Horn that she once yelled that she was going to kill Chase after a certain dispute that Rodney saw take place in Cypress Cove. Later, Kya's lawyer, Tom Milton, frames Ed as incompetent, suggesting that he jumped to conclusions about Kya simply because she lives an alternative lifestyle. This, in turn, persuades the jury to find Kya not guilty of Chase's murder.

Miss Pansy Price – Miss Pansy Price is a woman who lives in the town of Barkley Cove. When Kya is a child, she hears Miss Pansy Price refer to her as “swamp trash.” Despite this insensitivity, though, Miss Pansy Price later visits Sheriff Jackson to tell him that she saw Kya board a bus two days before Chase Andrews's murder and return the day after, thereby going out of her way to corroborate Kya's alibi.

Mrs. Singletary – Mrs. Singletary is the cashier at a store called the Piggly Wiggly in Barkley Cove. When Kya starts coming into town to buy grits after Ma leaves, Mrs. Singletary takes an interest in her, asking her why her mother never does the shopping anymore. A sympathetic woman, she also helps Kya count out her change, feeling sorry for her and her lack of parental support. Later, Mrs. Singletary testifies during Kya's trial, saying that she saw her board a bus before Chase Andrews's murder and return to town the day after his death. In this way, she substantiates Kya's alibi.

Amanda Hamilton – Amanda Hamilton is a writer who publishes poems in Barkley Cove's local newspaper. Throughout her life, Kya recites Amanda's verses, which are usually about love, nature, freedom, or independence. Shortly after Kya dies, Tate discovers that Amanda Hamilton was Kya's penname, realizing that she has been writing and publishing poems for years under this pseudonym. More importantly, he finds an unpublished Amanda Hamilton poem called “**The Firefly**,” which makes it clear once and for all that Kya murdered Chase Andrews, despite the fact that she was found not guilty in court.

Mrs. Culpepper – Mrs. Culpepper is a truancy officer in Barkley Cove who makes frequent visits to Kya's shack in order to take her to school. Shortly after Ma leaves, Kya agrees to get into Mrs. Culpepper's car when Mrs. Culpepper tells Kya that she can eat chicken pot pie for free if she comes to school. However, Kya never returns to class after that day, instead evading Mrs. Culpepper every time she comes looking for her.

One time, she even toys with the woman by creeping up to her car and scratching the door with a branch, looking straight at her as she does so and—she thinks—detecting a slight smile on Mrs. Culpepper's face. Later, when Kya's on trial for Chase Andrews's murder, Mrs. Culpepper is one of the jury members. She is privately relieved when Kya is found not guilty.

Hal Miller – Hal Miller is a shrimper in Barkley Cove who claims to have seen Kya on the night of Chase Andrews's murder. Hal testifies that he was on his way back to shore that night when he spotted Kya zoom by in her boat, headed for the fire tower. However, when Kya's lawyer, Tom Milton, cross-examines Hal, he admits that he can't be absolutely sure that the person he saw was Kya.

Scupper – Scupper is Tate's father. A fisherman who lost his wife and daughter in a car accident, Scupper has a kind, gentle soul and an appreciation of life that he makes sure to instill in Tate. For instance, he goes out of his way to show Tate that poetry is a beautiful artform, one that can make people feel certain ways. In turn, Tate passes on this viewpoint to Kya, who becomes an avid poet herself, secretly publishing her work under the penname Amanda Hamilton. Furthermore, Scupper teaches Tate that it's all right—and even *good*—for a man to show his emotions, adding that a true man doesn't hide the way he feels and does whatever it takes to help a woman, especially if he loves that woman. Shortly after Kya is found not guilty for murdering Chase Andrews, Scupper dies of a heart attack, and Tate feels guilty for focusing so much of his attention on Kya instead of paying attention to his father, though he knows that Scupper would approve of his undying love for Kya.

Robert Foster – Robert Foster is Kya's editor, who helps her publish seven books about wildlife in the North Carolina swamplands. Robert is also an important witness in Kya's trial, since he testifies that he was with her in Greenville on the night that Chase Andrews died, since he invited her there because he wanted to meet the gifted author with whom he'd been corresponding for the past year or so.

Rodney Horn – Rodney Horn is a local fisherman who watches an argument play out between Chase Andrews and Kya in a place called Cypress Cove. He later testifies in court that he heard a woman yelling and, upon motoring toward the sound, saw Kya kick Chase and yell out that she'd kill him if he ever tried to harm her again. What he didn't see, though, is that Chase tried to rape Kya before she said this.

Judge Sims – Judge Sims is the judge who presides over Kya's trial for the murder of Chase Andrews. A fair man, Judge Sims tries to make sure that the jury isn't biased because of Kya's public image as the “Marsh Girl.” He also makes an announcement that anyone is welcome to sit wherever they like in the courthouse when some spectators are bothered by the fact that Jumpin' and Mabel (who are African American) sit behind in Kya in what is generally considered the “white

section.”

Sunday Justice – Sunday Justice is a cat that lives in the courthouse. One day, he sneaks into the block of cells and finds his way into Kya’s lap. For the first time in months, Kya finds herself able to relax enough to sleep soundly that night, Sunday Justice purring in her lap as she finally unwinds. Because of this, Jacob starts letting Sunday Justice into the cells whenever possible.

Dr. Steward Cone – Dr. Steward Cone is the coroner who examines Chase Andrews’s dead body. While answering Tom Milton’s questions, Dr. Cone says that the red fibers found on Chase’s jacket—fibers that are made of the same material as a hat found in Kya’s shack—could have been left there as long as four years before the incident. Consequently, Tom is able to prove that the fibers themselves don’t definitively incriminate Kya.

Tim O’Neal – Tim O’Neal is a shrimper who was coming ashore on the night of Chase Andrews’s murder. During Kya’s trial, Tim testifies that his employee, Hal Miller, is mistaken when he says that they saw Kya speeding toward the fire tower in her boat, claiming that it was too dark to discern whether or not it was her.

Tom Milton Tom Milton is the lawyer who represents Kya when she’s on trial for Chase’s murder. A considerate, levelheaded man, he comes out of retirement to be her lawyer, wanting to advocate for her because he knows that the townspeople of Barkley Cove have mistreated her for her entire life. In keeping with this mindset, Tom helps convince the jury members that Kya is innocent by urging them to disabuse themselves of their preconceived ideas about her. Rather than focusing on the stories they’ve heard about Kya as the mysterious “Marsh Girl,” Tom says, the jury members should consider that Kya was abandoned by her entire family as a young girl and left to survive on her own in the marsh. Worse, none of the townspeople helped her through this period, showing her animosity instead of support. Consequently, he argues, the jury members should take it upon themselves to finally treat Kya with the kindness she deserves. In the end, this argument works, and Kya is found not guilty.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Eric Chastain – Eric Chastain is the state prosecutor who argues in court that Kya is guilty of murdering Chase Andrews.

Benji Mason – Benji Mason is a young boy from Barkley Cove who finds Chase Andrews’s dead body when he and his friend Steve Long visit the fire tower.

Steve Long – Steve Long is a young boy from Barkley Cove who finds Chase Andrews’s dead body when he and his friend Benji Mason visit the fire tower.

Deputy Joe Purdue – Joe Purdue is a deputy police officer in

Barkley Cove. Working alongside Sheriff Ed Jackson, he investigates the circumstances surrounding Chase Andrews’s death, eventually playing a part in Kya’s arrest as a murder suspect.

Dr. Vern Murphy – Dr. Vern Murphy is a doctor in Barkley Cove. Sheriff Ed Jackson brings him along when he first goes to see Chase Andrews’s dead body, and he speculates that Chase has been dead for roughly 10 hours.

Patti Love – Chase Andrews’s mother, who suspects that Kya is responsible for the murder of her son.

Jacob – Jacob is the guard at the courthouse jail, where Kya spends several months awaiting trial. A sympathetic man, he starts intentionally letting the courthouse cat, Sunday Justice, into the cells because Kya tells him she likes the animal’s company.

Lang Furlough – The owner of the Three Mountains Motel in Greenville, North Carolina, Lang Furlough testifies that Kya stayed at his establishment on the night of Chase Andrews’s murder.

Pearl Pearl is a woman who lives in Barkley Cove. When Kya is still in a relationship with Chase, she discovers that he’s engaged to be married to Pearl, so she stops seeing him. Chase ends up marrying Pearl, but he continues to have affairs with other women in town.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SURVIVAL, NECESSITY, AND VIOLENCE

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, a novel about a young girl growing up alone in the marshlands of North Carolina, Delia Owens frames survival as an innately human skill that arises out of necessity. When Kya is a child, her mother leaves home, and her older siblings follow their mother’s lead, escaping the dilapidated shack Kya’s family owns in a remote section of the marsh. This decision to leave is in and of itself something of a survival tactic, since Kya’s siblings want to escape their abusive father. Soon enough, Kya’s brother Jodie, who is closest in age to her, leaves too. Alone with her alcoholic father, Kya adopts certain behaviors that are necessary to her survival, like acquiring food and cooking. She also learns to interact with her father in a way that won’t set him off. In other words, she learns how to adjust to the harsh reality of his violence, proving that she’s capable of protecting herself even in threatening circumstances. This ability becomes

even more essential to Kya's wellbeing when her father disappears as well, as she has to fend for herself—a mere seven-year-old—in the wilderness without any support. And though most readers might assume that Kya would need adult guidance to sustain herself, she manages to not only stay alive, but to establish a rather peaceful life, illustrating the human capacity to adapt to unfavorable circumstances—a capacity that requires little more than necessity to flourish.

Early in the first chapter, it becomes clear that *Where the Crawdads Sing* is interested in examining what it takes to survive, viewing the process of staying alive not as something that a person learns, but rather as a hard-wired response to adversity. Owens goes out of her way to suggest that living things will always do whatever it takes to survive, especially when “cornered, desperate, or isolated.” She maintains that there’s an evolutionary reason for this, since traits that increase the likelihood of survival are “passed on more frequently from one generation to the next than the gentler genes.” With this in mind, it isn’t surprising that Kya manages to protect herself even as a seven-year-old when her family leaves her alone with her abusive father. Because Kya’s father doesn’t bother to feed her, she takes it upon herself to start cooking, even though she doesn’t know how. Through a process of trial and error, Kya gradually learns how to address her hunger pangs. What’s more, she cleans the house and makes things look nice, trying to reduce the likelihood that her father will take his drunken anger out on her. Sure enough, this pleases him so much that he starts treating Kya with more compassion, even taking her out on his boat and teaching her to fish. In this way, Kya manages to decrease the most dangerous threat in her life, mollifying her father and adapting to her environment in a manner that decreases the chances that she’ll starve or experience physical harm.

When Kya’s father disappears, Kya is forced to develop new survival tactics. Although he didn’t do much to help her stay alive, he at least gave her small amounts of money for groceries, and he paid for gas so they could use their small motorboat to fish. Without this financial help, Kya has no choice but to rise once again to the challenge of sustaining herself. To do this, she collects mussels and trades them to a kind man named Jumpin’ in exchange for gasoline, which enables her to keep fishing. She also learns to garden, gaining the self-sufficiency to live off her own land. Once again, then, Kya simply responds to the realities of the world, finding ways to scrape by because doing so is her only choice. And though Owens invites readers to marvel at Kya’s resourcefulness, she also intimates that these survival skills are ingrained in nature itself, since Kya observes that all of the animals and insects around her are—like her—doing whatever it takes to survive.

Of course, there is sometimes a ruthlessness to survival, especially in nature. Kya grasps this by observing the many creatures living around her. Once, for example, she watches

female **fireflies** flash their lights to attract mates. Kya knows there are different species of firefly and that each species has its own distinctive light pattern, making it easy for males to identify mates of the correct species. After watching a female attract and mate with a male, Kya sees that very same female flash a *different* light pattern, thereby coaxing a male of a different species to her and, when he arrives, eating him. Upon witnessing this, Kya thinks about how she has no right to judge this female firefly. “Evil was not in play, just life pulsing on, even at the expense of some of the players,” she thinks, noting that biology doesn’t distinguish between right and wrong. In turn, readers see that Kya is interested in one thing and one thing only: survival by any means.

It is perhaps because of this ruthless approach to survival that, as an adult, Kya uses violent tactics to take revenge on Chase Andrews, her former lover who tries to rape her. It’s worth pointing out that she most likely fears for her life after Chase attempts to rape her, worrying that he’ll come back for her after she narrowly escapes. At the same time, though, readers learn at the end of the novel that Kya has committed premeditated murder, planning out his death in a way that makes it hard to argue that she was acting purely out of self-preservation. However, *Where the Crawdads Sing* is about the harsh realities of the world, and Kya takes cues from the merciless survival tactics of creatures like the female firefly. In turn, the novel isn’t interested in condemning Kya for killing Chase. Instead, Owens simply presents a portrait of a young woman who has learned to do whatever it takes to ensure her safety, even if this means going against the moral considerations that humans have superimposed onto nature.



INDEPENDENCE VS. HUMAN CONNECTION

Because *Where the Crawdads Sing* is largely about abandonment, Delia Owens considers the importance of developing a sense of independence. Kya is only seven years old when her last family member deserts her, leaving her alone in isolated marshlands. Left to her own devices, she cultivates a form of self-sufficiency that helps her thrive by on her own. One facet of this self-sufficiency is an unyielding sense of independence that makes her distrustful of others, even when they want to help her. For instance, Kya is wary of Tate, an older local boy who reaches out to offer help. At first, she doesn’t trust Tate despite his uninhibited kindness, but as time goes on, she can’t help slowly embracing their relationship, recognizing just how necessary it is for even the most independent people to have others in their lives. Sadly enough, though, Tate also ends up leaving her when he goes to college, confirming her belief that she should never trust anybody, regardless of how desperate she is for human connection. And though Kya commits to this individualistic mindset for the majority of the novel, she eventually accepts

Tate's love when he finally proves to her—years later—that he regrets abandoning her. In this sense, Owens implies that even the most fiercely independent people have emotional needs that force them to let down their guard. People like Kya must accept others into their lives despite the emotional risks, because human connection is a basic need that can't be ignored.

Kya has good reason to doubt that her relationships will last. After all, her mother walks down the long road leading away from their house one day and never returns. When she asks her bother Jodie if their mother will come back, he assures her that she will, saying that mothers always come back to their young. In response, Kya reminds him that they recently saw a fox desert her cubs, but Jodie claims that this is only because she was starving and injured and knew she would die if she kept trying to care for her babies. What he doesn't understand, though, is that his own mother is going through a similar experience, running from her violent husband as means of pure survival. Unable to see this, Jodie promises Kya that their mother will come back, thereby setting Kya up for disappointment when their mother fails to return. Worse, all of their other siblings trail off, too, and then Jodie himself leaves Kya, saying that she'll understand when she's older. Lastly, Kya's father never comes home after leaving one night, and she knows that she's alone once and for all after this point. Simply put, everyone who is supposed to support Kya relinquishes this duty, demonstrating to her that it's foolish to depend upon others.

Having learned not to put her trust in other people, Kya spends the next six or seven years avoiding human contact as much as possible. She evades truancy officers, avoids local boys and girls, and limits her involvement with the outside world as much as possible, only ever interacting with a kind man named Jumpin' (who owns a nearby gas dock) when she needs gasoline for her boat. Throughout these years, though, she sees Tate in the marshlands and remembers how he helped show her home when she was lost one day shortly before her father left. Then, when Kya is around 14, Tate endears himself to her by leaving rare feathers for her on a stump. Finally, she meets him face-to-face, and he offers to teach her to read. Slowly but surely, they become close, though Kya is hesitant to embrace their connection, constantly feeling as if she should run away from Tate. And yet, she also experiences something overwhelmingly pleasant when she's with him, as if "something warm ha[s] been poured inside her heart." This, of course, is the result of actually interacting with somebody who is kind and empathetic, who wants nothing but to spend time with her. Recognizing how good it feels to connect with another person, Kya slowly lets herself grow close to Tate.

Because Kya allows herself to become emotionally—and even romantically—attached to Tate, she is devastated when he informs her that he'll be leaving for college. However, she

believes him when he promises to visit in a month, when he's home for a short break. In retrospect, she sees this decision to trust him as a mistake, since he doesn't come back to her when he said he would. Consequently, she vows to never love nor even trust somebody else ever again, and she also wonders why everyone important in her life has found it so easy to leave her. All in all, she decides that "needing people end[s] in hurt," becoming a staunch individualist determined to never rely on anyone but herself.

After Tate fails to return when he said he would, Kya leads an intentionally isolated life. Even when she starts secretly dating Chase Andrews, she keeps her guard up, hesitating to let herself get too close to him. However, she eventually does become invested in their relationship, indicating that she can't quite help but gravitate toward any kind of bond that might give her a sense of love and appreciation. Then, when Chase marries another woman without telling Kya and even tries to rape Kya several years later, she once more commits to the idea that getting too close to others is always a mistake. In this mindset, Kya refuses to accept Tate's apology for abandoning her, even though he tells her it was the biggest mistake of his life and proves his devotion by refraining from marrying anyone else, making contact with her whenever he can without encroaching upon her private life. Later, when Kya is on trial for Chase's murder, Tate stands by her, and she sees that she actually *can* depend upon him, even in dire circumstances. Accordingly, they move in together after she's acquitted and spend a happy life with each other, suggesting that even those who crave the safety of isolation and individualism often instinctually embrace human connection.



EDUCATION, COMING OF AGE, AND ADULTHOOD

In *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Delia Owens presents the process of growing up as an accumulation of knowledge and experience. Although Kya doesn't attend school, she stitches together an understanding of the world, one that isn't confined to textbooks, classrooms, or standard courses of study. In fact, her alternative education is more holistic than it would be if she went to school, and her intellectual growth ultimately charts her path from childhood to adulthood. That she has to cobble together her own education helps her value everything she learns, appreciating the process of learning because it helps her mature in a way that nothing else can, since she doesn't have any role models or parental figures to turn to when she wants to understand life's complexities. Indeed, Tate is the only person who goes out of his way to help Kya, showing her how to read and—in doing so—helping her unlock a whole new world of knowledge. Interestingly enough, Kya's relationship with Tate is also what teaches her to navigate the sexual and romantic desires that come along with adulthood. By associating Kya's intellectual

education with her overall development, then, Owens frames the very process of coming of age as directly linked to learning. Because Kya's family members abandon her and she doesn't attend school, her life as a young girl is confined to a rather narrow existence. She's a curious child but doesn't know how to read, nor does she know how to interact with others, since she almost never ventures into town or has conversations with strangers. During this period, her lack of knowledge is a product of her lack of life experience, an indication that she hasn't been exposed to the things that most people encounter as children. More importantly, though, it's worth noting that this kind of exposure is generally what helps people grow up and learn how to move through the world—holding conversations, watching adults interact, attending school, and learning to read are all experiences that contribute to a child's overall understanding of life. Without these experiences, Kya not only remains uneducated, but finds herself stalled at an early developmental stage. As a result, readers see that education is closely related to the process of coming of age.

Despite her lack of a formal education, though, Kya manages to interface with the world in an inquisitive way that fosters growth. Of course, this is largely tied to her instinctual survival skills, since she realizes at an early age that she'll have to learn to provide for herself if she wants to stay alive. All the same, she gains worldly experience by learning about the fishing trade, digging up mussels each morning so she can sell them and use the money to buy what she needs. This is an education in and of itself, since it gives Kya experience and exposes her to elements of life she hasn't previously encountered. But still, Kya's education is limited to life in the marsh, and though she becomes adept at skills like identifying animals, she lacks certain basic abilities that most children her age have already mastered—that is, until Tate teaches her how to read. As Tate does this, he tells Kya that now she will be able to “learn everything, and she finds this to be true, since reading opens new worlds for her and helps her better understand her own existence. For instance, she's finally able to read the names and birthdates that her mother wrote in the back of the family Bible, thereby giving her a sense of her family history that she never would have gained if she couldn't read. Combining Kya's naturally curious disposition and informal education with the skills Tate teaches her, she becomes more aware of the world around her and—more importantly—her place in it.

But reading and writing aren't the only things Kya learns as a teenager. She also learns what it's like to navigate the changes that young women experience as their bodies transition into adulthood. Like her intellectual education, this process of maturing is unique, since she doesn't have women in her life to tell her about periods or sexual desire. In fact, Tate is the person who tells Kya about menstruation and brings her information on the subject, meaning that he's involved in several different aspects of her process of coming of age—he not only helps her

increase her intellectual knowledge, but also provides crucial emotional support when she has her first period, an experience that would possibly be even more daunting if she had no idea what was happening. Furthermore, Tate is the first person Kya loves and desires, and though they don't have sex as teenagers, her relationship with him shows her what it's like to have a meaningful romantic connection with another person.

It's worth acknowledging that, although Tate is an important figure in Kya's life, it would be reductive (and even a bit patriarchal) to give him credit for all of her intellectual and emotional growth. While it's true that Kya didn't have a traditional education or any female role models, this doesn't mean she couldn't have achieved the same amount of progress in life if left to her own devices. After all, conventional forms of education aren't the only means by which people develop and flourish, and she may well have prospered even without Tate's help. In fact, this is the very point that Owens makes in *Where the Crawdads Sing*: coming of age is a kind of education in and of itself, regardless of what that process looks like. For Kya, maturing means having new intellectual and emotional experiences, which happen to be related to her relationship with Tate. Regardless, though, what's important to grasp is that Kya's path to womanhood is laid out not by the steppingstones of a conventional upbringing, but by an unsystematic accumulation of knowledge, a beautifully chaotic education that combines personal experience with intellectual exploration and discovery.



PREJUDICE, INTOLERANCE, AND ACCEPTANCE

Delia Owens sets *Where the Crawdads Sing* against a backdrop of prejudice and intolerance. This is perhaps best illustrated by the social stratification of the area in which Kya grows up, a place in North Carolina divided not only by race, but by class, too. Although Kya—who's white—doesn't face racial discrimination like her African American friends, Jumpin' and his wife, Mabel, she experiences unfair judgment based on her socioeconomic status, receiving harsh treatment from the townspeople simply because she lives in a shack in the marshlands. When Kya is forced to go to school, she only attends for one day because the other children ostracize her for being different, laughing at her lack of a formal education and refusing to interact with her because of her low status in society. It is this cruelty—this unwillingness to accept Kya simply because she's different—that her lawyer, Tom Milton, reminds the townspeople of when Kya is accused of murdering Chase Andrews. Asking the jury to consider how unfairly people have treated Kya, he urges them to finally recognize her humanity instead of assuming the worst of her. To do this, he underlines the fact that the only thing that makes Kya different is that she was abandoned by her family as a child. By saying this, he forces the jury to reconsider prejudices they've come to

take for granted. That Kya is then found not guilty suggests that this is a powerful, deeply affecting mental exercise, one that helps people examine the ways in which unfair biases influence the way they treat others.

The geographical landscape of *Where the Crawdads Sing* is significant, since its various divisions very clearly indicate the biases of Kya's surrounding community. The coastal region where Kya lives is broken up into three primary sections: the "Colored Town," the comparatively affluent village known as Barkley Cove, and the swampy wilderness that is sparsely populated by "squatters" like Kya and—before they leave—her family. To put it simply, only people from Barkley Cove receive any respect from the average white person in the area. In terms of race relations, this is unfortunately not surprising for a southern state in the 1940s. What's interesting, though, is that white people like Kya and her family also face discrimination (albeit of a different kind). This is because the areas in the marsh where people like Kya and her family live have historically attracted "mutinous sailors, castaways, debtors, and fugitives." Since these groups of people don't typically command much respect in society, people looking for "serious land" when the area was first colonized avoided the swamps. Consequently, the very fact that Kya lives in this marshy area makes her a target of the surrounding community's firmly established, classist belief that anyone who doesn't conform to the lifestyle of their wealthy society ought to be avoided and scorned.

Although she rarely ventures into Barkley Cove, Kya is quite aware of the townspeople's unwillingness to accept her. When she and her father do decide to eat in town one night, a woman screams at her for getting too close to her daughter. Without caring if Kya hears, she talks about how she wishes "those people" wouldn't come into town at all, calling Kya "filthy" and claiming that people from the marsh carry serious diseases. Later, this intense ostracization turns Kya into something of a legend, since boys her age refer to her as the "Marsh Girl" and dare each other to run out to her shack in the middle of the night and bang the door. The first time this happens is several years after Kya's father leaves, and Kya huddles in her shack and listens to the boys laugh and talk about how she failed to spell "dog" correctly on the one day she attended school. And though she feels fear when the boys approach her house, what she mainly feels is a prevailing sense of shame, as if she is less than human. In this way, readers see the harrowing effects that such ostracization and intolerance can have on a person's sense of self, regardless of the kind of prejudice that motivates the intolerance.

As an adult, Kya continues to face classist, judgmental notions about who she is and whether or not she deserves respect. This dynamic is especially amplified by Chase Andrews's murder trial, since the vast majority of the townspeople immediately assume she must have been the one who killed him. And while

there actually *is* good reason for them to think this, it's worth noting that their assumptions are just that—assumptions. Before people even learn about any of the evidence in the case, they jump to conclusions simply because Kya looms large in the town's social consciousness as the wild "Marsh Girl." Having forced this mysterious identity upon Kya ever since she was a child, the townspeople unquestioningly decide that she must have killed Chase, since this would align with their preconceived—but entirely uninformed—image of who she is. Thankfully, Tom Milton places this very image under scrutiny in his closing remarks while representing Kya in court, imploring the jury members to ignore hearsay and focus only on the evidence that has been presented in the trial. He points out that none of the town's social institutions reached out to help Kya when her family abandoned her. "Instead we labeled and rejected her because we thought she was different," he says, trying to get the jurors to see that Kya isn't the depraved and disreputable person they've always thought her to be, but simply a young woman who has been unfairly excluded from society for her entire life. This argument is so powerful that the jury ultimately acquits her, allowing her to go free and finally enjoy a life in which nobody makes unfair assumptions about her. This reveals how useful it can be to remind people of their various social intolerances, inviting them to reexamine their biases in order to treat others with the compassion they deserve.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



SEAGULLS

The seagulls that Kya feeds and interacts with on the beach near her shack provide her with the only kind of connection she can count on no matter what happens. Because of this, they become a symbol of her intense and undying connection to the natural world, which is the only thing in her life that remains constant. While people come and go, entering Kya's life only to disappoint her by disappearing once again, the seagulls are always there when she wants to spend time with them. However, while they make her happy to a certain extent, there's no denying that they don't banish her loneliness, since they don't satisfy her need for human connection. And yet, the gulls *do* remind Kya that she's not completely on her own in the world, even if she can't always turn to humans for support. In this way, then, the birds reflect not only Kya's desire for seemingly any kind of connection, but her ability to turn to nature for companionship.



THE SHELL NECKLACE

The shell necklace that Kya gives to Chase becomes a manifestation of the dissonance between her desire to be loved and her wariness to let other people into her life. When she and Chase first spend time together, he finds a shell and gives it to her. Later that very day, Chase forces Kya out of her comfort zone by trying to have sex with her before she's ready—a turn of events that imbues the shell with meaning, turning it into a reminder that even people who seem nice at first can quickly turn into a threat. However, Kya ends up putting the shell on a necklace that she later gives to Chase as a gift. This suggests that her yearning to be in a relationship with somebody overrides her initial misgivings about Chase. What's interesting, though, is that Kya takes the shell necklace off of Chase's dead body after killing him, thereby symbolically reclaiming her power over their relationship by taking back the very thing that represents both her own acquiescence to Chase and the danger that he posed to her wellbeing.



FIREFLIES

The female firefly that Kya watches eat a potential mate represents the same kind of power that she herself taps into when she uses her own sex appeal to lure Chase into a death trap. Shortly after Tate abandons Kya, she observes a female firefly emit a light pattern that summons a male firefly of a different species, at which point the female firefly eats the unsuspecting male. As she watches this, she sees that females in nature have a certain power that they can lord over males, since males are so eager to mate with them that they overlook certain dangers. Given that Kya later uses this same tactic of seduction to kill Chase (who has become a threatening presence in her life), it becomes clear that Kya sees fireflies as examples of female predation and strength. This ultimately enables her to avoid feeling helpless against the possibility that Chase might come and try to rape her for a second time.



Chapter 1 Quotes

“A ma don't leave her kids. It ain't in 'em.”

“You told me that fox left her babies.”

“Yeah, but that vixen got 'er leg all tore up. She'd've starved to death if she'd tried to feed herself 'n' her kits. She was better off to leave 'em, heal herself up, then whelp more when she could raise 'em good. Ma ain't starvin', she'll be back.” Jodie wasn't nearly as sure as he sounded, but said it for Kya.

Related Characters: Jodie, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark) (speaker), Pa (Kya's Father), Ma (Kya's Mother)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this exchange, Jodie tries to reassure Kya, who's worried because Ma has just walked down the lane away from their house, carrying a suitcase. Sensing that Kya thinks Ma won't return, Jodie tells her that it's not in a mother's nature to leave her children, framing abandonment as something that mothers aren't even capable of practicing. However, Kya points out that she and Jodie recently watched a fox leave its young, thereby proving that leaving children behind *doesn't* go against the very nature of motherhood. In response, Jodie suggests that this fox only left her cubs because she was injured and knew she couldn't survive while also taking care of them. This idea calls attention to the novel's interest in survival. More specifically, Jodie's point underscores the fact that sometimes it's necessary to do unfortunate things in order to stay alive. And though he seems to grasp this concept, he refuses to apply it to his own mother's situation, claiming that she'll return because she isn't in danger. What he fails to consider, though, is that Ma is leaving in order to escape Pa's violence. In this regard, then, she actually *is* in a similar position as the injured fox, making it unlikely that she'll come back.

“Just like their whiskey, the marsh dwellers bootlegged their own laws—not like those burned onto stone tablets or inscribed on documents, but deeper ones, stamped in their genes. Ancient and natural, like those hatched from hawks and doves. When cornered, desperate, or isolated, man reverts to those instincts that aim straight at survival. Quick and just. They will always be the trump cards because they are passed on more frequently from one generation to the next than the gentler genes. It is not a morality, but simple math. Among themselves, doves fight as often as hawks.”



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the G.P. Putnam's Sons edition of *Where the Crawdads Sing* published in 2018.

Related Characters: Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Owens describes the people who first settled in the marsh where Kya and her family live. The marsh, she notes, is a place with its own laws and dictates, a place relatively uninfluenced by the surrounding society. Consequently, the people who live there—and who have *always* lived there—live their lives in adherence to a different kind of law: the law of nature. Indeed, their existence is dictated by the harsh realities of what it means to live in the wilderness, and because the marsh-dwellers have been here for a long time, certain necessary skills have been passed down from generation to generation—skills that increase the likelihood of survival. This is because humans always “revert” to certain survival “instincts” when they’re in danger, and these instincts help ensure their safety. Though it’s not yet clear in the novel why this is important to Kya’s story, what’s worth keeping in mind is the fact that such behavior—at least in the context of Kya’s life and the environment in which she has grown up—isn’t a matter of “morality;” it’s a simple matter of life and death. In turn, this mentality prepares readers to better understand why Kya doesn’t think about right and wrong when it comes to self-protection and survival.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ A gnawing hunger—such a mundane thing—surprised her. She walked to the kitchen and stood at the door. All her life the room had been warmed from baking bread, boiling butter beans, or bubbling fish stew. Now, it was stale, quiet, and dark. “Who’s gonna cook?” she asked out loud. Could have asked, *Who’s gonna dance?*

She lit a candle and poked at hot ashes in the woodstove, added kindling. Pumped the bellows till a flame caught, then more wood.

Related Characters: Pa (Kya’s Father), Ma (Kya’s Mother), Jodie, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis


After Ma, Jodie, and the rest of Kya’s siblings leave home,

Kya has nobody to truly care for her. Although Pa still technically lives in the shack, he comes and goes as he pleases and never concerns himself with feeding her. While lying in bed on the first night after Jodie’s departure, then, Kya finds herself overwhelmingly hungry, realizing that Jodie was the one to cook meals in the absence of their mother. When she asks herself who is going to cook now, she suddenly understands that this is an obvious question—*she* has to be the one to feed herself now, even though she’s only six years old. And though this might seem daunting, she lights a candle and starts a fire, preparing to cook her very first meal. In this moment, readers watch as Kya rises to the occasion of taking care of herself, proving that necessity drives even the youngest and most vulnerable people toward survival. This moment establishes Kya’s characterization as a resourceful, self-sufficient person early on, making it clear for the reader that she is intelligent despite what the townspeople say about her.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ When she was led into the school office, they found her name but no date of birth in the county birth records, so they put her in the second grade, even though she’d never been to school a day in her life. Anyhow, they said, the first grade was too crowded, and what difference would it make to marsh people who’d do a few months of school, maybe, then never be seen again.

Related Characters: Mrs. Culpepper, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28



Explanation and Analysis

This passage recounts Kya’s very first day of school, after the truancy officer, Mrs. Culpepper, finally convinces her to attend by promising that she’ll be able to eat chicken pot pie for lunch. Because she’s starving, Kya agrees to try school. Unfortunately, though, she doesn’t have a particularly smooth entrance, since the school administrators speak disparagingly about her socioeconomic standing before she even reaches the classroom. When they suggests that it’s not worth squeezing her into the first grade because she comes from “marsh people” and will most likely drop out of school, they effectively set her up for failure, making it clear that they have no expectation that she’ll actually succeed in this environment. In this way, they perpetuate Kya’s status

as an outsider, essentially guaranteeing that she will continue to exist on the perimeters of society because nobody is willing to treat her with the respect and kindness that she deserves. As a result, she never comes back to school, continuing her life of isolation largely because of the attitude that these administrators set forth.

●● Ma used to soak wounds in salt water and pack them with mud mixed with all kinds of potions. There was no salt in the kitchen, so Kya limped into the woods toward a brackish slipstream so salty at low tide, its edges glistened with brilliant white crystals. She sat on the ground, soaking her foot in the marsh's brine, all the while moving her mouth: open, close, open, close, mocking yawns, chewing motions, anything to keep it from jamming up. After nearly an hour, the tide receded enough for her to dig a hole in the black mud with her fingers, and she eased her foot gently into the silky earth. The air was cool here, and eagle cries gave her bearing.

Related Characters: Pa (Kya's Father), Ma (Kya's Mother), Jodie, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

While playing alone one day in the marsh, Kya jumps out of a tree and lands on a rusty nail, which badly cuts her foot. Remembering that Jodie once told her about someone he knew who got lockjaw from a rusty nail because he hadn't gotten a tetanus shot, she instantly fears that this will happen to her. What's worse, she's on her own, since Pa isn't around, and the rest of her family members have all left home for good. Once again, then, Kya finds herself in a situation in which she must fend for herself, despite the fact that she doesn't know how to do this. However, her survival instincts take over when she remembers that Ma used to treat wounds with mud from the marsh. With this in mind, Kya digs a hole and puts her foot inside it, letting the mud—replete with various natural medicinal elements—soothe and ultimately clean her wound. As she does this, readers see that she's not only resourceful and capable of taking care of herself when she's in trouble, but also that her relationship with the earth itself has the power to sustain her.

Chapter 7 Quotes

●● “Ah swanee, girl, what's a' this? Looks like ya went an' got all growed up. Cookin' and all.” He didn't smile, but his face was calm. He was unshaven, with dark unwashed hair hanging across his left temple. But he was sober; she knew the signs.

“Yessir. I fixed cornbread too, but it didn't come out.”

“Well, ah thankee. That's a mighty good girl. Ah'm plumb wore out and hungry as a wallow-hog.” He pulled out a chair and sat, so she did the same.

Related Characters: Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark), Pa (Kya's Father) (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

When Pa leaves for several days, Kya dares to take his boat out into the swamp, and she enjoys doing this so much that she wonders how she might convince him to let her do it on a regular basis. Thinking this way, she cleans the house and cooks a delicious meal, preparing everything so that it's appetizing and irresistible when he returns. In doing so, she endears herself to him, and he's genuinely surprised by her maturity, saying, “Looks like ya went an' got all growed up.” More importantly, though, he sits down next to her and behaves pleasantly, something that starkly contrasts his drunken fits of anger and violence. In this sense, then, Kya's decision to cook and clean the house is something of a survival tactic, since it mollifies her father and makes it less likely that he'll treat her badly. And given that he's a violent person, this is no small feat. Readers can see through this strategic effort to get on Pa's good side that Kya is capable of intuitively picking up on people's desires and influencing them—a skill that will prove to be relevant at the end of the novel when the reader discovers the truth about Kya's role in Chase Andrews's murder.

Chapter 9 Quotes

●● Kya had never eaten restaurant food; had never set foot inside. Her heart thumped as she brushed dried mud from her way-too-short overalls and patted down her tangled hair. As Pa opened the door, every customer paused mid bite. A few men nodded faintly at Pa; the women frowned and turned their heads. One snorted, “Well, they prob'ly can't read the *shirt and shoes required*.”

Related Characters: Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark), Pa

(Kya's Father)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 64



Explanation and Analysis

During the short period in which Pa is kind to Kya, he suggests that they go to a restaurant in Barkley Cove for dinner. This experience daunts Kya, since she has seldom left the marsh, let alone entered a restaurant and dined with the townspeople, who represent an entirely different way of life. When she walks inside, she immediately becomes self-conscious about the way she looks, trying to hide the knots in her hair. This indicates that the mere act of walking into a restaurant—an everyday act that shouldn't cause a person anxiety—throws Kya into a state of double-consciousness, as she suddenly sees herself through the eyes of the judgmental townspeople. To make matters worse, her fears are confirmed when she sees women turn their heads away from Pa and suggest that neither he nor Kya know how to read. This is one of the first times that Kya is forced to face the fact that her surrounding community sees her as an outsider unworthy of participating in society—a dynamic that will follow and haunt her for the rest of her life.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☝☝ “Lawd, we gotta do something 'bout that child. Ain't nobody gonna buy them fish; I can cook 'em up in stew. Our church can come up wif some clothes, other things for her. We'll tell 'er there's some family that'll trade jumpers for carpies. What size is she?”

Related Characters: Mabel (speaker), Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark), Jumpin'

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Mabel says this to Jumpin' when he brings home a bucket of smoked fish that Kya wants to sell him. Because other fishermen sometimes beat Kya to Jumpin's and sell him mussels before she can, Kya is forced to come up with another way to make money. Consequently, she catches as many fish as possible and smokes them, and Jumpin' tells her that he'll take them on consignment, despite the fact that they look disgusting. When he brings the fish to Mabel, they both agree that nobody will want them. Nevertheless,

Mabel expresses her desire to help Kya, saying that they need to “do something” about her, since she's alone and doesn't have any form of support. To help her, then, Mabel decides to call upon her own support network: the church. Without telling Kya, she collects clothing and various supplies to give to the young girl. In this moment, readers see that Kya isn't quite as alone as she thinks, since she has people like Mabel who are willing to go out of their way to help her. Because Mabel and Jumpin' later tell her that they traded the fish for these supplies, though, Kya continues to think that she has nobody to turn to in times of hardship.

Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ As Kya had crept closer, she saw it was a hen turkey on the ground, and the birds of her own flock were pecking and toe-scratching her neck and head. Somehow she'd managed to get her wings so tangled with briars, her feathers stuck out at strange angles and she could no longer fly. Jodie had said that if a bird becomes different from the others—disfigured or wounded—it is more likely to attract a predator, so the rest of the flock will kill it, which is better than drawing in an eagle, who might take one of them in the bargain.

[...]

Kya ran into the clearing, throwing her arms around. “Hey, what ya doing? Git outta here. Stop it!” The flurry of wings kicked up more dust as the turkeys scattered into brush, two of them flying heavy into an oak. But Kya was too late.

Related Characters: Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark) (speaker), Tate, Jodie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 88



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Kya comes upon a horde of wild turkeys destroying a member of their own flock. They do this, Kya knows, because the turkey in question is injured and might attract predators. And if predators are drawn to the injured turkey, they might also harm the other members of the flock. Consequently, the rest of the turkeys do what's necessary to survive. As Kya watches this play out, she's forced to confront the merciless brutality of nature. However, she is still young and unwilling to accept such harsh realities, so she runs into the carnage and tries to stop the turkeys. When Kya finds herself unable to do this, though, she sees that there are certain things that are out of

her power. Life, it seems, is sometimes inherently ugly and messy, and there's very little room for emotion in nature—a sentiment that Kya eventually takes to heart, accepting the fact that survival sometimes takes precedent over all else.

☛ But they backed down the steps, ran into the trees again, hooting and hollering with relief that they had survived the Marsh Girl, the Wolf Child, the girl who couldn't spell *dog*. Their words and laughter carried back to her through the forest as they disappeared into the night, back to safety. She watched the relit candles, bobbing through the trees. Then sat staring into the stone-quiet darkness. Shamed.

Related Characters: Pa (Kya's Father), Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 91



Explanation and Analysis

One night, Kya is in her shack when she hears voices approaching in the woods. Although her initial instinct is to slip out of the house, she realizes that a group of boys has already gotten so close that they'd surely see her trying to escape. As a result, Kya has no choice but to sit still while they run up to the shack one by one, slapping the door and sprinting away. This, it seems, has become something of a rite of passage in Barkley Cove, as teenage boys dare each other to venture out to the "Marsh Girl's" house. Of course, they know very little about Kya, except that she lives in the marsh and only attended one day of school, when she misspelled the word "dog." In fact, it is exactly because they know so little about her that they've created a narrative about her as a wild "Wolf Child," treating her like a strange mystery or a separate species instead of what she really is—a young girl who was abandoned by her family. However, what's most important about this passage isn't that a group of local boys has formed unfair assumptions about Kya, but that this makes her feel "shamed." In turn, readers see the devastating effect that this kind ostracization and prejudice can have on a person's sense of self.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☛☛ Her impulse, as always, was to run. But there was another sensation. A fullness she hadn't felt for years. As if something warm had been poured inside her heart. She thought of the feathers, the spark plug, and the seeds. All of it might end if she ran. Without speaking, she lifted her hand and held the elegant swan feather toward him. Slowly, as though she might spring like a startled fawn, he walked over and studied it in her hand. She watched in silence, looking only at the feather, not his face, nowhere near his eyes.

Related Characters: Tate, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 98



Explanation and Analysis

For the past few weeks, Tate has been leaving Kya gifts on a stump, giving her rare feathers and other small trinkets like an extra spark plug for her boat's engine. Eventually, she comes to look forward to these gifts, though she doesn't know who's giving them to her. In this passage, though, she comes face to face with Tate, realizing that he's the person who's been leaving her such wonderful gifts. Despite his obvious kindness, her first impulse is to run from him, since this is normally how she responds to encounters with strangers. However, something keeps her from doing this, something that she experiences as "a fullness she ha[s]n't felt for years." This "fullness" is the simple joy of connecting with another human. Furthermore, Tate has already proven with the feathers and gifts that he cares about Kya, thereby showing her a form of kindness that she hasn't received since Jodie and Ma left. Indeed, it is in this moment that readers see for the first time just how much Kya yearns for human connection, even if she also feels the need to isolate herself.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☛☛ She went around reading everything—the directions on the grits bag, Tate's notes, and the stories from her fairy-tale books she had pretended to read for years. Then one night she made a little *oh* sound, and took the old Bible from the shelf. Sitting at the table, she turned the thin pages carefully to the one with the family names. She found her own at the very bottom. There it was, her birthday: *Miss Catherine Danielle Clark, October 10, 1945*. Then, going back up the list, she read the real names of her brothers and sisters [...].

Related Characters: Tate, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 104


Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Kya marvels at her newfound ability to read. Now that Tate has become her teacher, he has given her the gift of knowledge, effectively opening entire worlds for her. Since Kya lives alone, doesn't go to school, and never ventures out into town, she has quite a bit of time to pore over the books she has always seen in her house. But reading is more than a mere diversion from her everyday life. In fact, it provides her with a way to better connect with her own life, since she can finally read what her mother wrote in the family Bible. In doing so, she learns the actual date of her birth. In addition, she learns the names of her brothers and sisters, thereby reaching back into her own past and gaining a small part of her family history that was previously unavailable to her. This is especially noteworthy because Kya has trouble simply remembering the way her siblings *looked*. In turn, readers see just how thoroughly Tate's lessons have enhanced her life, not only granting her the ability to enter various imaginative worlds through the act of reading, but also giving her the opportunity to more thoroughly engage with the details of her own life and lineage.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ She learned where the geese go in winter, and the meaning of their music. His soft words, sounding almost like poetry, taught her that soil is packed with life and one of the most precious riches on Earth; that draining wetlands dries the land for miles beyond, killing plants and animals along with the water. Some of the seeds lie dormant in the desiccated earth for decades, waiting, and when the water finally comes home again, they burst through the soil, unfolding their faces. Wonders and real-life knowledge she would've never learned in school. Truths everyone should know, yet somehow, even though they lay exposed all around, seemed to lie in secret like the seeds.

Related Characters: Tate, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Once Kya learns to read, Tate gives her an almanac that is

packed with information about the North Carolina coastline and, more specifically, the marshlands in which she lives. Needless to say, this book proves invaluable to Kya, who has spent her entire life in awe of the wilderness that surrounds her. Now that she can read, she can finally understand the science behind the many “wonders” that she has appreciated for so long. As she throws herself into this information, she feels as if this is crucial, “real-life knowledge,” since it directly relates to her immediate environment. Furthermore, she senses that she would never have learned this material if she'd gone to school, where her teachers would have forced her to learn things that don't have anything to do with her life in the marsh. This is partially because people tend to overlook the beauty of the natural world, assuming that there are more practical things to learn about in school. And yet, there's nothing Kya could learn that would be more practical than what she reads in the almanac about her very own surroundings, since this is information that not only guides her into her eventual career as a biologist, but also informs the ways in which she understands her own life.

☝☝ Kya dropped her eyes as her whole body blushed. Of course, there'd been no Ma to tell her, but indeed a school booklet Tate had brought explained some. Now her time had come, and here she was sitting on the beach becoming a woman right in front of a boy. Shame and panic filled her. What was she supposed to do? What exactly would happen? How much blood would there be? She imagined it leaking into the sand around her. She sat silent as a sharp pain racked her middle.

“Can you get yourself home?” he asked, still not looking at her. “I think so.”

“It'll be okay, Kya. Every girl goes through this just fine. You go on home. I'll follow way back to make sure you get there.”

Related Characters: Tate, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark) (speaker), Ma (Kya's Mother)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Kya gets her first period while sitting on a beach with Tate. At first, she doesn't know what's happening, since her mother hasn't been present to tell her about the various changes her body will undergo as she transitions from childhood into adolescents and young

adulthood. However, Tate has made an effort to prepare Kya to understand the process of menstruation, subtly bringing her some literature about the subject. What's tricky, though, is that Tate serves many different roles in Kya's life. Indeed, he's already her only friend, her teacher, and her love interest. Between these many roles, it's understandably difficult for him to also support Kya through something that only women experience. After all, he himself has never had a period. Plus, the fact that he's Kya's love interest complicates matters, since this particular subject is normally private and personal, not the sort of thing that a young woman talks openly about to people for whom she has romantic feelings. Still, Tate assures her that what she's going through is normal—an important message to convey to a young woman who is most likely daunted by changes she didn't see coming. In this moment, readers are invited both to admire Tate for trying to help Kya through this experience *and* to empathize with Kya because she has so few resources to call upon in times like these.

Chapter 20 Quotes


☝☝ Reading her message, the second male was convinced he'd found a willing female of his own kind and hovered above her to mate. But suddenly the female firefly reached up, grabbed him with her mouth, and ate him, chewing all six legs and both wings.

Kya watched others. The females got what they wanted—first a mate, then a meal—just by changing their signals.

Kya knew judgment had no place here. Evil was not in play, just life pulsing on, even at the expense of some of the players. Biology sees right and wrong as the same color in different light.

Related Characters: Tate, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

When Tate fails to come back to Kya on the Fourth of July like he promised, Kya waits in agony. As she does so, she watches a swarm of fireflies as they fly around her and mate. Knowing that each species of firefly has its own light patterns (which the females use to attract the appropriate mates), Kya watches as a female firefly has sex with a male and, when the female finishes, change her light pattern to

mimic that of a different species. Instantly, a male firefly approaches the female, thinking she wants to mate, but she eats him instead. This is an important moment for Kya, since it shows her that women need not be at the mercy of men. In fact, she realizes that power lurks in sex appeal. This realization comes at a good time, since Kya otherwise feels powerless over her own life because she's allowed herself to develop feelings for Tate, only to be let down once again. Furthermore, the fact that she doesn't think about the female firefly's aggression in terms of morality is worth pointing out, as it sheds light on what later happens between her and Chase.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ On some level he knew she behaved this way, but since the feather game, had not witnessed the raw, unpeeled core. How tormented, isolated, and strange.

[...]

Kya's mind could easily live [in the environment of a biology lab], but she could not. Breathing hard, he stared at his decision hiding there in cord grass: Kya or everything else.

"Kya, Kya, I just can't do this," he whispered. "I'm sorry."

After she moved away, he got into his boat and motored back toward the ocean. Swearing at the coward inside who would not tell her good-bye.

Related Characters: Tate (speaker), Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis



When Tate leaves to work in a biology lab before college starts, he promises Kya that he'll come see her on July 4th. However, he gets too wrapped up in his work, so he doesn't come until several days later. When Tate finally does make his way toward Kya's shack, he sees her from afar. Her boat is floating in the marsh, and he decides to watch her from afar, knowing that this is the sort of thing she has done to him. As Tate observes Kya, she hears some far-off sound and goes on high-alert, moving quietly through the water and going into hiding until she's sure the coast is clear. This kind of animalistic behavior unsettles Tate, who can't help but feel in this moment that Kya is undeniably "strange." In the past, it seems, this wouldn't be such a problem, since he's always appreciated her for being unique and in touch with nature. Now, though, he has experienced what it's like

to work in a biology lab, and he knows that he wants to be a biologist. This, in turn, will require him to live a life that exists outside the marsh, and he has trouble wrapping his head around the idea of Kya doing this with him. Even though she's intelligent enough to work alongside him in any lab, he can't picture her fitting in with other people. For this reason, he decides to abandon her like everyone else in her life, having subscribed to the narrative that Kya is unfit for anything but a wild, "strange" existence—a belief based on nothing but his own failure to trust that she, like any human, is capable of adapting to different environments.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ She knew from her studies that males go from one female to the next, so why had she fallen for this man? His fancy ski boat was the same as the pumped-up neck and outsized antlers of a buck deer in rut: appendages to ward off other males and attract one female after another. Yet she had fallen for the same ruse as Ma: [...] *sneaky fuckers*.

Related Characters: Ma (Kya's Mother), Tate, Chase Andrews, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis


In this passage, Kya considers the fact that she allowed Chase into her life even though she had promised herself that she'd never get close to another person after Tate let her down. Despite this resolution, she developed feelings for Chase, allowing him to woo her with the attention he gave her. Now, though, Kya discovers that Chase is getting married to another woman, and this makes her think about the ways in which men misrepresent themselves. This idea reminds her of something she has learned from reading about mating patterns in the wild. In particular, she thinks about "sneaky fuckers," a term for males that lack various desirable traits, which they try to make up for by pretending to be more genetically impressive—stronger or more dominant—than they actually are. Similarly, Chase pretended to be the kind of man who could make Kya happy when, in reality, he's not the sort of person with whom she could ever be in a long-term relationship.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝☝ "It happens in humans, too. Some behaviors that seem harsh to us now ensured the survival of early man in what ever swamp he was in at the time. Without them, we wouldn't be here. We still store those instincts in our genes, and they express themselves when certain circumstances prevail. Some parts of us will always be what we were, what we had to be to survive—way back yonder.

"Maybe some primitive urge—some ancient genes, not appropriate anymore—drove Ma to leave us because of the stress, the horror and real danger of living with Pa. That doesn't make it right; she *should have chosen to stay*. But knowing that these tendencies are in our biological blueprints might help one forgive even a failed mother. That may explain her leaving, but I still don't see why she didn't come back."

Related Characters: Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark) (speaker), Pa (Kya's Father), Ma (Kya's Mother), Jodie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

Kya speaks these words to Jodie when he finally returns as an adult and asks her about what her life has been like. She tells him that she has become accustomed to a life of loneliness and isolation, and their conversation turns to the reasons that Ma abandoned them. Kya tells Jodie that she has done quite a bit of reading about survival in nature and has learned that even humans have adopted certain behaviors that are aimed specifically at self-preservation, regardless of how ruthless these behaviors might be. With this in mind, she wonders if Ma left because she had a "primitive urge" to protect herself from the "stress" and "horror" of living with Pa. At the same time, though, Kya is a human with complicated emotions, which means she can't fully accept this as an excuse. After all, she had to suffer the consequences of Ma's decision to leave, which is why she still feels that Ma "should have chosen to stay." In this moment, readers see the ways in which Kya is torn between her individualistic instincts and her raw emotions.

Chapter 53 Quotes

☛☛ Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I grew up in Barkley Cove, and when I was a younger man I heard the tall tales about the Marsh Girl. Yes, let's just get this out in the open. We called her the Marsh Girl. Many still call her that. Some people whispered that she was part wolf or the missing link between ape and man. That her eyes glowed in the dark. Yet in reality, she was only an abandoned child, a little girl surviving on her own in a swamp, hungry and cold, but we didn't help her. Except for one of her only friends, Jumpin', not one of our churches or community groups offered her food or clothes. Instead we labeled and rejected her because we thought she was different. But, ladies and gentlemen, did we exclude Miss Clark because she was different, or was she different because we excluded her? If we had taken her in as one of our own—I think that is what she would be today. If we had fed, clothed, and loved her, invited her into our churches and homes, we wouldn't be prejudiced against her. And I believe she would not be sitting here today accused of a crime.

Related Characters: Tom Milton (speaker), Jumpin', Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 340

Explanation and Analysis

This is the closing argument that Tom Milton delivers on Kya's behalf during Kya's murder trial. As Tom speaks, he goes out of his way to emphasize the cruelty to which the townspeople of Barkley Cove have subjected Kya. This is because he wants to show the jury that their impressions of her are most likely informed by the region's lore about people who live in the swamp. According to this notion, the jurors have been predisposed to make certain assumptions about Kya because for years they've heard stories about how the "Marsh Girl" has eyes that glow in the dark, or about how she's "part wolf." In reality, though, Kya has never been anything but a lonely human who was abandoned by her own family. Anything that sets her apart from the rest of society is directly related to the fact that she has never been able to depend upon anyone but herself, which is why she's led a reclusive life. By spotlighting this dynamic, Tom tries to disabuse the jury of their implicit biases against Kya, ultimately arguing that she deserves the same kindness and empathy as anyone else. This, in turn, enables him to argue for her innocence based on facts and evidence, not prejudiced hearsay.

Chapter 57 Quotes

☛☛ The Firefly
Luring him was as easy
As flashing valentines.
But like a lady firefly
They hid a secret call to die.


A final touch,
Unfinished;
The last step, a trap.
Down, down he falls,
His eyes still holding mine
Until they see another world.

I saw them change.
First a question,
Then an answer,
Finally an end.

And love itself passing
To whatever it was before it began. A.H.

Related Characters: Chase Andrews, Tate, Amanda Hamilton, Kya (Catherine Danielle Clark)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

This is a poem written by Amanda Hamilton, a poet who is published in the local paper and of whose work Kya was a longtime fan. Tate finds the poem hidden in a secret compartment beneath one of the floorboards in Kya's shack in the aftermath of her death. As he looks it over, he sees that the handwriting matches Kya's, finally realizing that Kya was Amanda Hamilton—she had been publishing poetry under a penname. More importantly, though, this poem confirms that Kya actually did kill Chase, despite the fact that the jury found her not guilty in the case. When she writes that "Luring him was as easy / As flashing valentines," readers will recall the time that young Kya watched a female firefly attract a male firefly of a different species by posing as a potential mate before eating him whole. This, of course, was the fly's "secret call to die," which Kya herself sent to Chase when she "lure[d]" him to the fire tower, no doubt promising to have sex with him. Instead of actually engaging in intercourse, though, she gave him "a final touch" before encouraging him to come one step closer, at which point he fell through the open hatch in the tower.

That Kya based this murder on the behavior of female

fireflies is in keeping with her devotion to nature, since she always took cues from the things she observed in the marsh. Moreover, she clearly appreciated the female firefly's ruthless power, since she herself ended up using her sex appeal to eliminate Chase—an act that ensured her own

survival, since he was a threat to her safety. In the same way that the firefly ate her potential mate as a way of sustaining herself at any cost, then, Kya killed Chase as a means of self-preservation, viewing the matter not in terms of morality, but in terms of life or death.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE: 1969

Unlike swamps, which are murky and dark, marshes are open and airy, with water trickling through rustling grass. There are, however, patches of swampiness in each marsh, where things can be hidden and claimed by thick mud. It is in one of these soupy places that two local boys find Chase Andrews's dead body on the morning of October 30, 1969. Chase is in the swamp, which is (as a place teeming with life) familiar with death—a natural, common thing.

Even as early as the prologue, Delia Owens calls attention to the relationship between nature and survival, suggesting that the swamp—which represents the visceral, untamed side of life—is accustomed to death because it is so common. Survival, Owens intimates in this moment, is something bound for failure, something that can only last so long. After all, the fact that Chase's dead body isn't particularly out of the ordinary in the grand scheme of nature suggests that even humans, who are otherwise so good at survival, eventually succumb to death.



CHAPTER 1. MA: 1952

From the porch of her family's small, rundown shack deep in the North Carolina marshlands, six-year-old Kya Clark watches her mother walk outside in her nicest shoes with a suitcase in hand. Saying nothing, Ma makes her way down the long lane that leads away from their house. Though Ma normally turns at the end to wave goodbye to her children, she doesn't look back this time—a fact that disconcerts Kya, who is the youngest of the five Clark children.

In this scene, Kya watches apprehensively as her mother leaves, wondering if she will come back. By spotlighting Kya's discomfort in this moment, Owens invites readers to consider the ways in which children—and, for that matter, people in general—come to depend upon one another. Indeed, Kya doesn't want her mother to leave because she feels as if she needs her—a feeling that will subside as the novel progresses and Kya learns to embody independence and self-sufficiency.



Seeing her concern, Jodie, who is the closest to Kya in age, stands next to Kya and assures her that Ma will return because mothers never leave their children. In response, Kya reminds him that they recently saw a fox abandon her young, but Jodie says that was because the fox was injured and knew she'd die if she kept caring for her cubs. This, he says, is different, since Ma won't die if she stays.

Jodie and Kya's consideration of the fox who left her cubs aligns with their thoughts about abandonment. While Kya worries that her mother has deserted her, Jodie tries to remain optimistic by suggesting that this is unlikely. In fact, he argues, it goes against nature for a mother to leave behind her children. However, Jodie is only a child and therefore might not have the best sense of why his mother might be compelled to leave. After all, perhaps she really did leave as a means of survival.



The Clarks' shack stands behind a thrush of trees. Except for the ocean, which sits on the other side of a sandy bank, it's surrounded by marshland. This area was settled in the 1500s, though explorers initially ignored it and called it the "Graveyard of the Atlantic" because of its harsh conditions. For the most part, people who wanted good land overlooked the area, leaving it to renegades, runaway prisoners, tax-dodgers, violent sailors, and other nefarious types. Left to their own devices, these people lived according to their own rules, squatting in various locations and existing more or less apart from the rest of society. The only laws that govern this place are those of survival, which people resort to whenever they're desperate to stay alive. This is simply how life works, as the genes that increase the likelihood of survival triumph over others from generation to generation.

Owens's description of Kya's surroundings is important because it outlines the social geography of the region. By explaining the history of the marshlands, she makes it clear that Kya's family lives in relative isolation. Given that the area has historically been populated by criminals and people who have been rejected by mainstream society, it seems likely that the Clark family faces a certain amount of prejudice from people outside of the marshlands. And though this is an important dynamic to note as the novel progresses, what's even more significant about this description of the land is that Owens pivots from describing the geography to considering the fact that this is a place where only one thing matters: survival. Consequently, it's likely that Kya and her family are relatively unconcerned with how other people see them, instead focusing on simply staying alive—an instinct that Owens maintains is integral to human existence, since survival skills have been passed down through the ages.



To Kya's dismay, Ma doesn't return. Pa, for his part, barely notices, though he grumbles about wanting dinner when he sees that she isn't home that evening. When none of the children tell him where she's gone, he drunkenly stumbles away. Kya knows that her parents often get into fights and that Pa gets violent. This has sent Ma away before, but she has always come back. Now, though, it seems that she's gone for good, though Kya starts staring down the lane each day, waiting for her mother to return while her older siblings do the necessary cooking and house maintenance. Observing Kya's melancholy, Jodie offers to play with her, despite the fact that he recently told her he was too old to play childish games. Momentarily happy, they rush to the small beach near their shack, though Kya returns that evening to watch the lane.

That Ma and Pa's fights haven't driven Ma to leave before implies that Jodie is wrong to think that Ma's departure has nothing to do with survival. In fact, it's evident that she left for precisely the same reason that the fox left her cubs—to protect herself. Unfortunately, this leaves Kya and her siblings on their own, forcing them to come of age before they're ready because they now need to fend for themselves. And yet, Kya and Jodie still manage to revel in the joys of childhood, though even their innocent games are curtailed by the worry that comes along with Ma's absence.



CHAPTER 2. JODIE: 1952

In the ensuing weeks after Ma's departure, Kya's oldest brother leaves, too, followed by her two older sisters. They're tired of Pa's alcoholic rages and unpredictable violence, and they're almost old enough to leave home anyway. Over time, Kya finds it difficult to remember her siblings' ages and full names, recalling only that the family called them by nicknames. When it's finally just Kya, Jodie, and Pa, Jodie makes grits and scrambled eggs, and though Kya gets excited for a moment because she thinks Ma has returned to cook breakfast, she's disappointed to see that her brother is the one in the kitchen. As they eat, Kya says that they could run away together, but Jodie just tells her that everything will be all right.

As time passes, Kya comes to depend upon Jodie more and more. This is because her older siblings gradually slip away, leaving for the same reason that Ma left: to get away from Pa. Once again, then, readers see that humans will often do whatever they can to ensure their own safety and survival, even if it means leaving behind their loved ones.



That evening, Jodie finds Kya sitting on the beach and tells her that he, too, must leave. As he tells her that she'll understand when she's older, she can't bring herself to look at him. He then tells her to be careful and instructs her to run into the marsh if she ever hears anyone approaching, insisting that she use the knowledge he has taught her about hiding from intruders. As he walks away, she finally forces herself to look at him and sees him disappear into the woods. While lying in her bed (which is on the porch) later on, she wonders who is going to cook now that everyone but she and her Pa have left. Getting up, she prepares a sad, unappetizing bowl of leftover grits and waits for Pa to return, though he doesn't come home. She spends the rest of the night waiting.

Pa doesn't return for three days. While waiting, Kya eats turnips from Ma's garden for every meal. Finally, Pa comes back and drunkenly asks where everybody has gone, but Kya says she doesn't know and runs to the beach. When she returns to the shack, Pa is throwing Ma's remaining possessions into a bonfire, including her beautiful oil paintings of the marsh and the family. "No!" Kya yells, putting herself between Pa and the shack and trying to stop him from fetching more possession to burn. For a moment, he raises his hand to hit her, but then drops it and walks away. In the days following this incident, Kya learns to live with Pa without attracting his fury, avoiding him as much as possible as a means of self-protection.

Pa receives disability checks each week because he was injured in World War II. Slapping the small amount of money down on the table, he tells Kya that it should cover the cost of groceries, so she goes alone to Barkley Cove, the nearby town. Wearing dirty overalls and no shoes, she walks along the sidewalk, approaching a store called the Piggly Wiggly. Suddenly, three boys almost hit her on their bikes, speeding by until a woman named Miss Pansy Price yells at their ringleader, Chase Andrews, for biking on the sidewalk. Instead of scolding them for almost hitting Kya, though, she chews them out for nearly hitting *her*, and Chase tries to make an excuse by saying that they couldn't see her because of Kya. In response, Miss Pansy Price tells him not to blame "swamp trash" for his own mistakes.

Regardless of whether or not Pa returns, it's clear that Kya is now—for all intents and purposes—on her own. Because Jodie was the last person in her life who bothered to look after her, she now must inhabit her own sense of independence, though this is no small feat, since she's only six years old. Still, that she manages to prepare herself food despite her inexperience indicates that, left to her own devices, she will rise to the challenge of sustaining herself.



Kya is desperate to stop Pa from burning Ma's possessions because she wants to maintain the only connection she still has to her mother, which is through memory. Fearing that she'll soon forget Ma's face just like she has already forgotten her siblings', she puts herself in danger in order to keep Pa from further destroying the past. What's more, that she learns how to live with Pa without provoking him is a testament to her survival skills, since this is nothing but an act of self-preservation. In order to protect herself, she must adapt to her harsh environment, which means learning to tip-toe around her father's wrath.



This is the first time that Chase Andrews appears in the narrative since the prologue, when readers discover that he has been found dead in the swamp. The details of how he died lie at the center of the plot, infusing the story with a sense of apprehensive mystery. For now, though, the only thing to be discerned from this scene is that Chase comes from a much different background than Kya. Whereas Kya is treated unfairly because the townspeople see her as "swamp trash," Chase's bad behavior doesn't even get him into trouble, indicating that he can do no wrong in the classist world of Barkley Cove.



Once inside the Piggly Wiggly, Kya buys discounted grits. The cashier, Mrs. Singletary, asks where her mother is, but she lies and says that Ma is doing chores. When she pays, Mrs. Singletary helps her count out the right amount and then gives her change, explaining the math as she goes. Upon reaching home, Kya tries to remember how Ma used to make grits—she's never made them from scratch, since she's been eating the leftovers from the breakfast that Jodie made before he left. Now, though, she makes a pot of her own, and though they aren't particularly tasty, she learns over the next few days how to improve them, experimenting as she goes. She even includes some backbones for flavor the following week, boiling them with the grits and some collard greens. She also starts doing laundry and cleaning the house, all while avoiding Pa.

Summer turns to fall, and though Kya doesn't know the exact date of her birthday, she realizes that it must be around this time. Pa doesn't say anything, but Kya guesses that she must be seven now. She takes some grits to the beach and spreads them out for the **seagulls**, calling to them as she tosses the food into the sand. One gull in particular comes to a rest right next to her, so she turns to it and says, "It's my birthday."

CHAPTER 3. CHASE: 1969

Two 10-year-old boys named Benji Mason and Steve Long bike to the fire tower that stands tall above the marsh and forest. Climbing up the steps, Steve glimpses some denim below him in the mud, so he and Benji go investigate, finding Chase Andrews's dead body. Making their way back to town, they tell Sheriff Ed Jackson what they found, and he asks them to show him. With the two boys and Dr. Vern Murphy, Ed goes to the fire tower and finds Chase lying dead in the muck. Vern estimates that he's been dead for roughly 10 hours, and Ed speculates that he must have fallen from the fire tower the night before. Both of them know Chase rather well, since the young man used to be a star football player. At the time of his death, he was well-respected and happily married.

Looking around, Ed notices that there are no footprints in the mud other than the ones Benji and Steve made, along with his and Vern's. This suggests that Chase was alone when he fell, since his friends would have run to his body if they were there. However, the fact that he might have been alone doesn't explain why even *his* footprints are nowhere to be found. Examining the mud, Ed wonders why he can't see Chase's journey from the path to the fire tower.

Kya doesn't know how to count out her own change at the Piggly Wiggly because she lacks a formal education. However, it's apparent that she's learning different skills, like how to cook for herself. Needless to say, this isn't something that most six-year-olds know how to do, mainly because they don't need to. Kya, on the other hand, must rely on herself, so she has no choice but to learn to cook through a process of trial and error. In this way, she embodies a level of maturity beyond her years simply because she must do what's necessary to survive.



That Kya doesn't even know the exact date of her birthday emphasizes not only her lack of education, but how little attention she has received from the adults in her life. Indeed, she's forced to celebrate her birthday on her own, an illustration of the fact that she must depend upon herself.



The narrative jumps 17 years forward in this section, detailing the immediate aftermath of Chase Andrews's death. At this point, readers still don't know what to make of this development. The only thing Owens has revealed is that Chase led a much different lifestyle than Kya, enjoying the privileges of life in Barkley Cove while Kya fended for herself in the harsh conditions of the marsh. How this divide relates to the rest of the novel is as of yet unclear.



Since Where the Crawdads Sing is a novel that concerns itself with the natural world, it's worth noting that the circumstances surrounding Chase's death are out of step with what would normally occur in nature. To that end, the absence of footprints around his body suggests that something strange has happened, ultimately intimating that his death may not have been an accident. In turn, Owens slowly introduces the possibility of violence into the narrative.



CHAPTER 4. SCHOOL: 1952

Shortly after her seventh birthday, Kya is out in the marsh when she hears a car pull up to the shack. A truancy officer yells that she has come to take Kya—though she calls her by her legal name, Catherine—to school. Speaking loudly, the truancy officer promises that Kya will be able to eat a free lunch every day if she comes to school, adding that the cafeteria is making chicken pot pie that day. Because she's hungry and has only ever eaten chicken pot pie several times, Kya emerges from the woods, and the truancy officer introduces herself as Mrs. Culpepper before going inside to help her get dressed for school. When Kya's ready, Mrs. Culpepper extends her hand, and Kya hesitates to take it because she hasn't touched anyone else since Jodie left. After a moment, though, she puts her hand in Mrs. Culpepper's.

At school, the principal puts Kya in the second grade even though she's never had any education. He does this because the first grade classrooms are too full, but he also notes that it doesn't matter because she comes from "marsh people" and will probably only go to school for a couple of months before disappearing once more. Nervously, Kya enters the classroom and observes that, though some of the students are barefoot like her, most of them have shoes. They all stare at her when she finds her seat, and when the teacher later asks her to spell the word "dog," she hesitates before eventually saying, "G-o-d." Everyone laughs, and Kya slouches back into her seat, trying to make herself as small as possible.

At lunch, nobody sits with Kya. When a group of girls approaches her table, she becomes nervous until she realizes—with a slight sense of disappointment—that they're headed to a table behind her. Then, when nobody is looking, Kya wraps up some food, saving it for later. For the rest of the day, she doesn't speak even when the teachers ask her to, not wanting to subject herself to humiliation. Unfortunately for her, though, she doesn't manage to go unnoticed on the bus ride home, during which a group of children mock her and call her "marsh hen" and "swamp rat." When Kya finally gets home, she goes to the beach and calls out to the **gulls**, who circle around her. Though she's close to tears, she starts laughing when they gently peck her toes.

Although Kya is learning to be as independent as possible and clearly has a fear of outsiders, certain aspects of survival override her reclusiveness. Most of all, her desire to eat hearty food eclipses her impulse to stay away from Mrs. Culpepper, once more proving that survival often takes precedent over all else.



At school, Kya encounters the kind of classist attitudes that inform her desire to stay away from Barkley Cove. Not only do her fellow students disparage her for her lack of a formal education, but even the principal writes her off because she belongs to a group known as the "marsh people." By using this disparaging term, the principal ostracizes people like Kya from those who live in Barkley Cove, indicating that they are unworthy of respect simply because they live in poverty and don't lead the same kind of existences as everyone else.



Venturing beyond the confines of the marsh brings Kya nothing but humiliation and pain, as children don't hesitate to express their prejudiced ideas about people who live in poverty. In response to this intolerance, then, she tries to withdraw as much as possible, not wanting to speak to anyone and remaining uncomfortable until she finally returns to the wilderness of the marsh, where she can exist with the only beings that seem to accept her unconditionally: the seagulls.



Kya doesn't go back to school. When Mrs. Culpepper comes to fetch her, Kya slips into the woods, running in circles to confuse the man Mrs. Culpepper has brought to chase after Kya. Each time, Kya finds it almost too easy to lose him. For the rest of her life, she never attends another day of school, instead spending her time watching herons and collecting shells—activities she thinks can teach her something useful.

Kya's negative experience at school confirms her belief that it isn't worth leaving the marsh. It also reinforces her idea that humans can't be trusted, so she connects with animals and nature instead. On another note, it's worth pointing out that Kya is quite good at using the marsh to her advantage when trying to hide—a fact that will become important later in the novel, when people begin to get suspicious of her because of her alternative lifestyle.



While playing alone one day, Kya jumps from a tree and lands on a rusty nail. Instantly, she calls out to Pa, but he's nowhere to be found. As she reels in pain, she remembers what Jodie told her about lockjaw, suddenly worrying that the nail will give her tetanus, which is what happened to a boy Jodie knew. Limping toward the shack, she remembers that Ma used to put saltwater on cuts and then make a mixture of vitamin-rich mud onto the wound, so she puts her foot in a salty stream trickling through the marsh. After washing out the cut, she digs a hole in the mud and puts her foot into the earth, all while opening and closing her jaw so that it doesn't lock up. That night, Pa doesn't come home, and she falls asleep waiting for him, wondering if she'll ever wake up.

When Kya injures herself and has nobody to turn to for help, readers see just how dangerous it is for a seven-year-old to sustain herself like this in the wilderness. And yet, she once again rises to the challenge of caring for herself, jumping to action to ensure that the cut doesn't become infected. Of course, nothing that she does would prevent her from getting tetanus, but her efforts to clean her wound will at least do something to fight off infection. Furthermore, it's worth noting that she turns to the marsh itself to help her in this time of duress, a sign that the land is her keeper.



In the morning, Kya's jaw hasn't locked up, but she still makes her way back to the stream to treat her foot. She does this for the next several days, until it becomes clear that she doesn't have tetanus. Pa still hasn't come home, so she survives on Crisco and saltines. Meanwhile, she listens intently each morning for Ma, hoping to hear her in the kitchen, though this never happens. Pa, on the other hand, does come home, and fall turns into winter. Finally, Kya admits once and for all that Ma isn't coming home, deciding that her true mother will be the marsh.

It makes sense that Kya decides that her real mother will be the marsh, since she has already turned to the mud and water for help. Unlike her mother, upon whom she cannot depend, the earth itself has helped her get through a rather serious injury. In turn, Kya comes to see the marsh as something that will help her subsist on her own despite her trying circumstances.



CHAPTER 5. INVESTIGATION: 1969

After searching the area around the fire tower for clues, Sheriff Ed Jackson asks Dr. Vern Murphy to go tell Chase's parents that their son has died. As for Benji and Steve, Sheriff Jackson instructs them not to make new footprints, not wanting them to make it harder to discern what, exactly, happened the night before. In response, they ask Sheriff Jackson if he thinks that somebody murdered Chase, but he doesn't answer. When Deputy Joe Purdue arrives on the scene, the two colleagues discuss the situation, wondering why there are no footprints and why there doesn't seem to be any evidence that somebody covered them up, either. Finally, an ambulance arrives, and the men lift Chase into a stretcher to take him to a coroner.

The clinical aspect of this kind of investigation starkly contrasts the preceding chapters, which detail the naturalistic life Kya leads 17 years prior to Chase's death. And yet, there is a link between Kya's interest in nature and Chase's demise, since the latter is evidence of the most natural thing of all: death. After all, nothing anyone does will ever change the fact that all people are destined to die. Although humans are quite adept at finding ways to survive or overcome various obstacles, there is a limit to this resilience, as evidenced by Chase's untimely death.



Once Chase's body has been collected and Steve and Benji have been sent home, Ed and Joe climb the fire tower. At the top, there are a series of hatches that have to be pushed up in order to fully mount the tower. Once Ed and Joe do this, they notice that one of the other hatches has been left open, realizing that it's the one Chase fell through. This strikes Ed as odd, since this particular hatch is almost never left open—people often forget to close the one right above the stairs, but the one Chase fell through is always closed. For this reason, he wonders if somebody opened it and then pushed him through it. Beneath, there is a beam that Chase must have hit on his way down, and the two men decide to use ropes to inspect it more carefully.

Two hours later, Ed and Joe are still at the fire tower. They talk about who would want to kill Chase, and though Ed can't think of a reason for anyone to kill the most well-liked man in town, Joe points out that Chase was quite promiscuous, even after marrying his wife, Pearl. This means that there could be a number of women who might have been angry with him.

As Ed and Joe continue to examine the scene, it seems less and less likely that Chase's death was an accident. Consequently, the possibility of violence creeps into the narrative, though it's too early to say how, exactly, this factors into the larger story regarding Kya and her struggle to survive in the marsh as a child.



When Ed and Joe realize that Chase may have been murdered, they try to come up with a reason why anyone in town would want to kill him. As they think about this, they reflect upon the fact that he was something of a philanderer, ultimately suggesting that certain forms of human connection—especially those that transgress various social boundaries—can lead to violence and animosity (a fact that Kya herself learned early in her life).



CHAPTER 6. A BOAT AND A BOY: 1952

Pa dresses in his nicest clothes one morning and informs Kya that he will be gone for roughly four days because he needs to go to Asheville to ask the army to increase the amount of his disability checks. Without saying anything in return, she watches him walk down the lane, and though she doesn't expect him to, he turns back at the end of it and waves to her. Once Pa is gone, Kya walks to where Pa keeps his small, beat-up motorboat. Although she used to go out in the boat with Jodie, she has never taken it out on her own, though this doesn't stop her from getting in. Before starting the engine, she checks the gas, both to make sure there's enough and to know how much she'll have to refill so Pa won't know she used the boat.

Although Pa is violent and mean, it's noteworthy that he turns back at the end of the lane and waves farewell to Kya. He also tells her where he's going before he leaves, something that Ma neglected to do. In this small way, then, Pa comforts Kya by making sure she knows that he isn't abandoning her. This, it seems, is one of the only kind things he has ever done for his daughter, and though it's not much, it suggests that he is perhaps capable of connecting with Kya in some small way. All the same, though, Kya remains quite independent, as evidenced not only by her decision to use the boat by herself, but by her mature impulse to check the gas before leaving. The more she has to fend for herself, it seems, the more capable she is of navigating her way through an otherwise difficult life.



Kya starts the engine and putters into the marsh, remembering that Jodie instructed her to go left at every fork in the water in order to reach the ocean. As she goes, she notices that the tide is going out, knowing that this means she'll have to turn around before too long or else risk running aground on her way back. Upon finally reaching the ocean, she's daunted by the churning waves and a stand of dark clouds towering over the water, so she turns around and tries to find her way home. At one point, she passes a boy several years older than her. He's fishing in his own boat, and she would have avoided him if there were any other choice but to motor right by him. As she passes, he touches the bill of his baseball cap in a gentlemanly fashion.

Despite her ability to find the ocean on her way out, Kya doesn't recognize her surroundings. Lost, she sits in the boat for a moment and considers her options. She is running low on gas, and there's a storm coming. Begrudgingly, then, she turns around and motors back to the boy she saw fishing, and he greets her kindly, telling her that he hopes she isn't going out to the ocean, since a storm's about to hit. She only looks down and says that she isn't going to the ocean, and he senses there's something wrong. The boy asks if Kya is lost, and she nods and tries to hold back tears. He tells her not to worry about it, saying that he, too, gets lost sometimes. The boy also mentions that he knows Kya, since he used to fish with Jodie.

The boy Kya meets in the swamp knows where she lives because he used to fish with Jodie, so he leads her home in his boat. When they arrive, he introduces himself as Tate before leaving. On her own, Kya worries about how much gas she used, knowing that she'll have to fill it back up before Pa returns. She also thinks about how scared she was when she was alone and facing the ocean in the boat, though now this only registers as excitement. What's more, she can't stop thinking about Tate, who was so calm and levelheaded that simply being in his presence soothed her. Kya realizes that being with him was the first time since Ma and Jodie left that she felt something other than sorrow.

That afternoon, Tate walks through Barkley Cove and meets his father, Scupper, at his shrimp boat. Together, they work on the boat before going home for dinner. As they eat, Tate looks at a picture of his mother and sister and thinks momentarily about the fact that they would be alive if it weren't for him, though he doesn't say this to his father. Instead, they talk about school, and Tate complains about having to memorize a poem for his English class. Telling him not to be so critical of poetry, Scupper reads him a poem that his mother used to love, insisting that the entire point of reading poetry is to feel something. This aligns with his belief that a real man "cries without shame, reads poetry with his heart, feels opera in his soul, and does what's necessary to defend a woman."

Kya is unaccustomed to human interaction, especially with people outside her own family. For this reason, her impulse is to hide from the boy in the marsh, clearly wanting to preserve her independence. This makes sense, considering that her dealings with other people have only ever ended either in disappointment or emotional pain. In this moment, then, readers see how Kya has been impacted by familial abandonment, as well as by the intolerance of the townspeople—experiences that have had long-lasting effects in the guarded way she moves through the world.



Kya's past experiences with other people have been exceedingly negative, which is why she's hesitant to ask for help from a stranger. However, this boy's kindness seems genuine, since there's very little he could possibly gain by tricking her into trusting him. Consequently, this is one of the first interactions Kya has with a person from the outside world that doesn't leave her feeling abandoned or inferior, though she remains uncomfortable because she isn't used to putting her fate into the hands of someone else.



The reason that Kya feels so good after interacting with Tate is that he is one of the only people in her entire life who has gone out of his way to help her. Without Ma and Jodie, Kya has taught herself to distrust others, mostly because she no longer has anyone to turn to in times of hardship. Now, though, Tate's selflessness shows her that it's perhaps a bit too early to give up on trusting others.



The kindness that Tate showed Kya in the marsh makes sense, since his father goes out of his way to teach him to do "what's necessary to defend a woman." Moreover, Scupper emphasizes that it's all right for a man to be in touch with his emotions, which is perhaps why Tate finds it easy to empathize with Kya, a girl upon whom everyone else casts unfair judgment based on her socioeconomic status. In addition, Tate has apparently lost his mother and sister, and though the circumstances of this situation aren't yet clear, the fact that he has been separated from his loved ones puts him in a position to understand—to a certain extent—Kya's familial losses.



That night, Tate reads more poetry, coming across one poem that reminds him of Kya. This causes him to think about how lonesome and vulnerable she seemed when he saw her in the marsh. He then wonders how he would feel if his own sister was still alive and had been left alone in the wilderness. Thinking this way, he realizes that Scupper is right—poetry really does make people feel things.

Even at this early stage, it's rather clear that Tate and Kya will have a special connection, since they both spend time thinking about each other after only having interacted once. What's more, Tate's ability to empathize with Kya's situation despite the fact that he lives in town suggests that he's a sensitive and kind young man—the sort of person who empathizes with other people's experiences instead of judging them and focusing exclusively on himself.



CHAPTER 7. THE FISHING SEASON: 1952

After her encounter with Tate, Kya thinks about how it would be nice and useful to have a friend. She hardly has any contact with the outside world, except when she goes into town to buy necessities. Still, she talks to the **seagulls** more than any actual person, so she fantasizes about borrowing Pa's boat to see Tate from time to time, though she knows that Pa would never let her use the boat because it's his only form of transportation. However, she remembers that he used to let Jodie fish in it, and though Kya doesn't know how to fish, she wonders if she can perhaps think of something else she could do for her father to convince him to let her use the boat. Thinking this way, she cleans the entire shack, shines the boat, gets more gas from a nearby filling station, and buys groceries.

Kya's desire to see Tate again signals her gravitation toward the world beyond the marsh. More specifically, she finds herself yearning for human contact, thinking that having a friend would be a good thing. This is significant, since it means Kya is willing to open herself up to others even after having been hurt not only by children her age, but by her own family members, too. As Kya works hard to increase the likelihood that Pa will let her use the boat, then, readers see that human connection is quite meaningful even for somebody as individualistic and self-sufficient as Kya.



When Pa finally comes home after four days, Kya runs into the kitchen and presents him with a delectable meal. Surveying her work, he notes with amusement that she has suddenly grown up and learned to cook. She can tell that he's tired but sober, so she sits down to eat with him, explaining that she tried to make cornbread but that it didn't quite work out. Nonetheless, Pa slurps down the food and asks for seconds. He also suggests that Kya put the failed cornbread right into the stew, saying that he bets it's still quite good. After a moment, Kya asks Pa if he'll take her fishing, and though he hesitates at first, he says that he could perhaps take her at some point. The very next morning, they go fishing together, and Pa is visibly pleased when Kya catches a large bream.

Interestingly enough, Kya manages to interact with her father without sending him into fits of rage. This, it seems, is something that none of her family members were able to do. Notably, she elicits his kindness simply by showing him kindness, thereby demonstrating the power of human connection. After all, Pa is a human, too, and therefore needs just as much (if not more) compassion as anyone else. By showing him this kindness, then, Kya not only improves the quality of her own life, but actively creates a safe environment for herself. In this way, her benevolence becomes something of a survival tactic (though it's worth noting that Pa is still prone to abusiveness and most likely won't be permanently quelled by this behavior).



The next day, Kya and Pa go fishing again. Kya finds a rare feather from a horned owl floating in the water, so she plucks it from the surface and keeps it, along with a hummingbird nest she finds on an overhanging branch. That night, Pa makes fish for dinner and gives her his army-issued backpack, saying that she can use it to store her feathers and various other collections. By the time she remembers to thank him, he's already out on the porch, and she realizes that this is the first time he's ever given her anything.

As Kya shows her father kindness, he shows it to her in return. This underlines the fact that human interaction is based largely on the desire to be accepted, though there are of course a number of things that often complicate such dynamics. All the same, though, Kya's benevolence toward her father allows her to enjoy a period of safety and contentment.



Throughout the winter, Kya and Pa go fishing and Kya thinks about Tate, wishing they could be friends. One day, she sees him in the marsh, and when he waves at Kya, Pa tells her to be careful because most people in this area are “white trash.” On another occasion, Pa unexpectedly tells Kya about his family, saying that they weren’t always poor. In fact, they used to own land, where they planted tobacco and cotton. However, they lost all of their wealth during the Depression. Thinking about this, Kya wonders about her mother’s family history but knows better than to bring this up, since talking about Ma makes Pa furious. Forgetting the conversation, Pa reels in a large fish and says, “Looky here, hon, Ah got us a big un, big as Alabamee!” Later that night, Kya realizes with a start that Pa called her “hon.”

What Pa says about Tate is noteworthy because it suggests that he has internalized the very same prejudices to which the surrounding society has subjected him. Although most people in Barkley Cove would likely think of him as “white trash,” he goes out of his way to say the same thing about Tate, thereby perpetuating the divisiveness that has made it so hard for Kya to interface with the townspeople. Thankfully, though, this implicit bias doesn’t influence the blossoming relationship between Kya and Pa, as evidenced by the fact that he calls her “hon.”



CHAPTER 8. NEGATIVE DATA: 1969

Ed and Joe receive the first lab report, which reveals that Chase died between midnight and two in the morning on October 30th, and that there were no fingerprints left on the scene. This means that somebody wiped any prints, supporting the idea that the footprints were also purposefully obscured. Given this information, Ed declares that Chase’s death must not have been an accident. Deciding to go back out to the fire tower to investigate some more, the two men stop at the Barkley Cove Diner and listen to the many rumors about Chase’s death. As they wait for their food, they hear Miss Pansy Price speculate that the person who killed Chase must have been the woman who lives in the marsh, since she was apparently “involved” with Chase for a number of years.

It has already been established that Chase was something of a philanderer, even after he married Pearl. Now, though, it emerges that Chase had a relationship with a woman who lived in the marsh. Although Owens doesn’t specify who, exactly, this woman is, it seems likely that it’s Kya. In turn, readers are invited to wonder not only how Kya would have become the kind of woman to commit a murder, but also how she came to be in a relationship with Chase, a man from a completely different walk of life. That they were ever “involved” with each other suggests that Kya eventually ventures beyond the confines of her sequestered life, putting her trust in strangers—to disastrous effect, it seems.



CHAPTER 9. JUMPIN’: 1952

With Pa in the motorboat, Kya goes to get gas from a black man named Jumpin’, who owns a gas dock and bait shop between their shack and Barkley Cove. When Pa introduces Kya, Jumpin’ gives her a warm hello, but Kya is unable to say anything in return, unused to interacting with strangers. After filling up the tank, Pa suggests that he and Kya go to the Barkley Cove Diner. Kya has never eaten in a restaurant, but Pa takes her without any apparent sense of unease. As they walk in, Kya hears somebody speculate that they must not be able to read the sign that says “shirt and shoes required.”

Although this outing isn’t all that extravagant, it is monumental for Kya, who rarely interacts with other people. Not only does she meet Jumpin’, but she also ventures into Barkley Cove and dines in a restaurant. And all the while, she’s painfully aware of the fact that she and her father don’t fit in. When she hears somebody disparagingly comment that she and Pa probably can’t read the sign about shirts and shoes, she most likely thinks back to her humiliating day in school, which reinforced her desire to sequester herself from society.



After the meal, Kya goes outside while Pa pays. As she waits, a young girl says hello to her and reaches out for a handshake. Before anything else can happen, though, a woman comes barreling toward them, scooping up her daughter and telling Kya to go away. She then tells her daughter not to go near Kya because she's dirty, claiming that people from the marsh shouldn't come into town because they carry diseases.

Once again, Kya is forced to confront the fact that the townspeople are prejudiced against her and her family. Even though she's just a harmless young girl who has been brought up in poverty, people like this woman demonize her by suggesting that she shouldn't ever come to Barkley Cove because she carries diseases. In turn, this behavior reinforces her reclusive tendencies, confirming her belief that venturing beyond the confines of her sheltered existence only brings humiliation.



Pa and Kya start playing cards at night, and Kya fantasizes about her mother returning so that they can have a normal family life, now that Pa is behaving amicably. Of course, he still leaves for undetermined stretches of time and comes home drunk, but this happens less than it used to. In the past, he would come home and beat Ma, shouting at her whenever he was drunk. Once, Kya tried to stop him, so he grabbed her, yanked down her pants, and whipped her with his belt.

It's clear in this period that Kya is actively trying to see the best in her father. This is because showing Pa kindness is the only way to ensure her own safety, since he evidently responds well to her benevolence. And yet, Kya hasn't forgotten his abusive ways, perhaps because she knows that she still needs to be on her guard when she's in his presence.



The seasons pass, and it's September again when Kya finds a letter in the mailbox. She can't read the words, but she identifies Ma's handwriting, so she rushes home to show it to Pa. Because he's not there, though, she sets it on the table and waits for him to return, wishing all the while that she could open it, though she knows she wouldn't be able to read it. Finally, Pa returns and reads the letter before storming outside with a bottle of liquor and zooming away in the boat. Kya emerges from her room, runs into the kitchen, and sees that Pa has burned the letter. Devastated, Kya scoops the ashes from the trash bin and puts them in a small cigar box.

Kya's lack of a formal education puts her at a disadvantage in this scene, as she finds herself unable to read her mother's letter. Considering that she has been waiting for more than a year to know why Ma left, this moment must frustrate her enormously, especially since Pa burns the letter in a fit of rage. If only Kya could have read it herself, she could have kept it from her father and thereby preserved the peace that had crept into their daily lives. Now, though, Pa has flown off the rails once again, and Kya is no closer to understanding why Ma left.



Pa stays away for two days, and when he finally returns, he's drunk and mean. Kya asks him what Ma said in her letter, but he yells at her to mind her own business, telling her to forget about Ma because she isn't coming back. During this period, Kya tries to pray but doesn't know how, having trouble remembering the few prayers she learned from Ma. Pa, for his part, never takes Kya fishing again.

The brief period of peace between Kya and Pa officially ends after the arrival of Ma's letter. This, it seems, is why Kya never allowed herself to forget Pa's abusive ways, sensing that he could return to his embittered worldview at any moment. Once again, then, she must learn how to adapt to her environment, somehow figuring out how to coexist with Pa without sending him into violent rages.



CHAPTER 10. JUST GRASS IN THE WIND: 1969

Ed and Joe return to the fire tower and conduct another thorough search of the surrounding marshlands. Whenever Joe thinks he sees something in the mud that might be out of the ordinary, though, it soon becomes clear that it's just an odd pattern created by animal tracks or blowing grass. They even visit some nearby sandbars, but this proves useless because sand and shells are even better at keeping secrets than mud.

As Ed and Joe continue their search to find out who murdered Chase Andrews, it becomes clear that whoever did the deed is quite good at covering their tracks. This, in a way, is a form of self-preservation, since a murder conviction can lead to the death penalty. In turn, the culprit's ability to escape undetected is actually a means of survival.



CHAPTER 11. CROKER SACKS FULL: 1956

By the time Kya is 10, Pa comes home less frequently. Entire weeks go by without him returning to the shack, and when he does, he's always drunk. For this reason, Kya hardly notices when he fails to come back for an entire month, and it isn't until another month passes that she realizes he must be gone forever. She wonders what happened to him, thinking that he might have gotten into a bad poker fight or perhaps passed out and died in the mud. Kya doesn't feel particularly sad, but she suddenly feels even more alone than before. She also realizes that she will have to work extra hard to avoid being put in an orphanage. For this reason, Kya decides to pretend that Pa is still alive when she visits Jumpin' for gas.

Pa's disappearance doesn't bother Kya all that much because he rarely gave her any kind of support. In fact, his violent ways actually posed a threat to her wellbeing, so she has—in a way—escaped one of the sources of danger in her daily life. However, Pa's presence still tied Kya to another human's existence, whereas now she must come to terms with the fact that she is completely on her own.



The one saving grace about Pa's disappearance is that he left on foot, leaving Kya the boat. This proves helpful, since it enables her to go out into the marsh and collect mussels for dinner. As Kya eats dinner, though, the kerosene lamp goes out, causing her to wonder if she'd be better off turning herself in to Social Services after all—at least that way she would be able to enjoy food and electricity. After a moment of considering this, though, Kya decides she can't leave the heron and the **gulls** that visit her on the beach near her shack. The marsh, she thinks, is her only true family.

In the absence of true human connection, Kya forms a bond with the land itself. This makes sense, since the marsh has proved itself to be the only constant in her life, since all of her loved ones have left her. Consequently, leaving her shack and the gulls and the surrounding area is unthinkable, since it would feel like severing the only emotional connection she still has.



Kya gets up at the crack of dawn and collects mussels before motoring to Jumpin's. When Kya arrives, she says that she heard that Jumpin' purchases mussels, and he tells her that he can pay 50 cents for each of her bags. As Jumpin' fills Kya's gas tank, Kya goes into his shop and buys some groceries and necessities, eyeing a piece of candy she wishes she could have, though she refrains from splurging. Before leaving, Kya tells Jumpin' that she intends to keep bringing him mussels, and he says this sounds good to him, since he buys them every three days or so. However, other people often bring Jumpin' mussels, so he tells her to come as early in the morning as possible. When Kya gets home, she finds the piece of candy she wanted mixed in with the rest of her groceries.

Although Kya doesn't have anyone in her daily life who takes care of her, this scene makes it clear that Jumpin' wants to do what he can to help her. Not only will he make it possible for her to earn money by buying her mussels, but he will also go out of his way to show his support—a fact illustrated by his kind attempt to give her Kya piece of candy even though she didn't have enough money to purchase it. In this way, readers see that Kya is perhaps not as alone as it seems.



CHAPTER 12. PENNIES AND GRITS: 1956

Kya starts getting up early to collect mussels. She then spends her days hoping to see Tate. When she finally sees him from afar, though, she can't bring herself to raft up next to him, even though she feels drawn to him. In this way, she develops a habit of watching him from afar, quiet and still as a heron. When she's not doing this, she collects shells and feathers, amassing an impressive collection in the shack.

One day, Kya is in the woods near a beach when she hears voices and sees Chase Andrews and a group of his friends playing in the sand. From the protection of the trees, she stares at them, paying particularly close attention to the girls in the group as they laugh. Kya wishes she could be one of them, but instead of emerging from her hiding place, she slinks farther back into the woods, making sure they won't see her.

One morning, Kya goes to Jumpin's only to find that somebody else has already sold him mussels. Because of this, Jumpin' kindly advises Kya to think of other ways to earn money, saying that she shouldn't depend upon just one source of income. For the rest of the day, then, Kya catches as many fish as she can and then smokes them in the smokehouse that Pa used to use. The following day, she brings a large bucket of smoked fish to Jumpin' and asks if he'll buy them, and he agrees to take them on consignment, explaining to her that he'll give her money if he sells them but that he'll have to give them back if he doesn't.

That night, Jumpin' takes the bucket of Kya's smoked fish back to his home in "Colored Town," a black village near Barkley Cove. When he shows the fish to his wife, Mabel, she says they look like something a dog would bring home, but he explains that Kya brought them to him. In response, Mabel says they need to find a way to help Kya, adding that nobody will buy the smoked fish. Mabel then decides to try making a stew with the fish and says that their church will be able to provide Kya with clothes and supplies.

Again, readers see Kya's desire for human interaction. Although she's too timid to approach Tate, the mere fact that she can't help but watch him from afar suggests that she naturally gravitates toward the possibility of connecting with another person. This, in turn, implies that even the most reclusive people inevitably seek out others.



As Kya watches Chase and his friends from a remove, Owens reminds readers that—despite her unconventional lifestyle—she is just a young girl who wants to have friends and play with other children. Just like anyone else her age, she yearns for camaraderie and attention. What's tragic, though, is that she's cut off from this kind of companionship both because of her own fears and because of the prejudices that the townspeople hold against her.



As Kya navigates her way through life, she's forced to embody a certain kind of economic savviness that most children her age don't need to consider. Because her livelihood depends upon whether or not Jumpin' buys whatever she's selling, she realizes that it's in her best interest to have a back-up plan if he has already purchased mussels for the day. This thinking leads her to use the few resources available to her, once again proving her ability to take care of herself in a pinch.



That Jumpin' and Mabel live in an area known as "Colored Town" serves as a reminder of the time period in which the novel takes place, and consequently of the prejudice and division that runs rampant throughout Kya's surrounding community. After all, this is the American South in the 1950s, meaning that racism and segregation are still very much alive. It is perhaps because Mabel and Jumpin' have experienced discrimination and injustice that they're capable of empathizing with Kya, who—although she doesn't deal with racism—also grapples with society's intolerance because of her socioeconomic standing.



The next morning, Mabel goes to work with Jumpin' and introduces herself to Kya, telling her that they know a family who wants to trade clothes and other necessities for her smoked fish. Jumpin' also says that he'll give her gas for the boat as long as she keeps bringing mussels. Going on, Mabel tells Kya to come back the following day to collect her new clothes and supplies. Thanking her, Kya adds that she wants to start a garden but doesn't know how, so Mabel walks into the bait shop and fetches tomato, pumpkin, and squash seeds, gives them to Kya, and explains what she should do to make them grow. That very evening, Kya plants a garden, and the following day she returns to Jumpin's to pick up her new clothing and supplies, marveling at how much Mabel has given her.

The clothes that Mabel promises to give Kya aren't actually from a family that wants her smoked fish. Readers know this because Mabel has already told Jumpin' that she'll try to make a stew with the fish, in addition to the fact that she plans to collect clothing for Kya from their church. In turn, it becomes clear that Mabel simply wants to help Kya, who she recognizes is in desperate need of support. To that end, she also gives Kya seeds and teaches her how to garden, thereby demonstrating that sometimes people need the support of others to help them increase their own self-sufficiency.



CHAPTER 13. FEATHERS: 1960

Kya is 14 and spending an afternoon on the beach feeding the **gulls**. She's wearing one of Ma's old dresses that didn't used to fit her but now stretches tightly across her chest. While paying attention to the gulls, she hears something behind her and quickly tries to determine what it was. Sneaking into the woods, she tracks what she thinks is the source of the sound, eventually seeing a boy moving through the trees. For a moment, they make eye contact before she ducks behind a bush and then runs, her face low to the ground.

As time passes, Kya enters adolescence. This means that she has successfully navigated her way out of childhood with very little support, a testament to her survival skills. Part of the reason she has been able to maintain her solitary life in the shack has to do with her ability to avoid other people—a skill that has enabled her to dodge authorities who might want to put her into an orphanage. Now, though, she uses these skills out of habit, instinctively hiding from anyone who comes near. In this way, she resembles a cautious animal in nature, effectively imitating the creatures that surround her.



After avoiding the area for the rest of the day, Kya creeps back to where she saw the boy and finds a feather sticking straight out of a mossy stump. The feather, she sees, is rare because it comes from the "eyebrow" of a great blue heron. As she inspects it, she realizes that the boy must have left it for her. Not sure what to do, she leaves it in the stump, but she spends all night thinking about it. The following morning, she returns and takes it from the stump, wondering why exactly a boy would give her this gift.

Because Kya has had very limited experiences with other people, it's almost unfathomable for her to think that a stranger would be interested in reaching out to her. Simply put, she's not used to people wanting to connect with her in any manner. What's more, Kya finds it hard to stop thinking about the boy because he has chosen to interact with her on her own terms, giving her feathers and thereby endearing himself to her.



The next day, Kya finds yet another rare feather in the stump, identifying it as a tailfeather from a tropical bird that isn't even from the area. That night, she lights two candles—burning more oil than usual—so she can paint the beautiful feather.

It's clear that this boy's attempt to connect with Kya is working, based on the fact that she enthusiastically uses more oil than normal to paint the feathers he gives her. Finally, it seems, she has found a kindred spirit, though she has yet to actually interact with him.



For an entire week, no more feathers appear. Then, Kya finds a turkey tailfeather on the stump. She's delighted by this, though it makes her think of a time roughly one year earlier when she was walking in the woods and came across a flock of turkeys murdering one of their own because it had gotten injured. She knew from what Jodie had told her that turkeys kill each other if they're hurt because incapacitated birds are more likely to attract predators. Despite this knowledge, though, she couldn't stand by and watch this gory ritual, so she chased the turkeys away, but it was too late—the damage had already been done.

When Kya witnesses a group of turkeys murdering one of their own, what she sees is the harsh reality of life in the natural world, where survival takes precedent over all else. Because the injured turkey ultimately puts the others in danger, it is in the flock's best interest to kill it. Of course, this is a rather devastating thing to observe, which is why Kya tries to save the injured turkey before it's too late. However, the turkey is already too injured to survive by the time she gets to it, so this experience becomes something of a lesson that there is very little room for emotion or even mercy when it comes to matters of survival in the natural world.



While thinking about the mangled turkey the night after watching its flock members kill it, Kya hears voices in the woods and freezes. "Here we come, Marsh Girl!" one voice says, and she realizes that there's a group of boys in the surrounding woods. The boys have dared each other to come out to the marsh in the middle of the night and run up to Kya's shack. As she braces herself, she hears them slap the house with their hands before darting away again, laughing and calling her unseemly names. When they're gone, her fear subsides somewhat, leaving an intense feeling of shame.

Kya has spent her entire life separated from her surrounding community, but she has rarely had to confront this fact. Normally, she only experiences the townspeople's prejudices when she ventures beyond the confines of the marsh. Now, though, she's forced to acknowledge the ostracization that people from Barkley Cove have forced upon her. Notably, this feeling of otherness makes her ashamed, ultimately demonstrating how destructive intolerance can be on a person's sense of self.



Although the turkey feather in the stump reminds Kya of the violent turkeys and the group of boys who ran out to her shack a year earlier, she's still pleased to find it, since it confirms that the unknown boy is still thinking about her.

Despite Kya's negative experiences with people from Barkley Cove, she finds herself excited by the idea that this boy cares enough about her to give her such extraordinary feathers. In turn, it becomes clear that she still has faith in the value of human connection.



CHAPTER 14. RED FIBERS: 1969

Ed and Joe receive more lab results, which indicate that Chase died from his fall and that he smacked his head on the beam beneath the fire tower's open hatch. More importantly, though, the lab report says that there were a number of red fibers on his jacket. The fibers are made of wool and don't match any of his own clothing. Holding up a small plastic bag, Ed looks at the small collection of red threads and tells Joe that they'll have to find whatever article of clothing matches the sample.

As it becomes more and more clear that Chase's death was not an accident, readers are invited to consider the violence that led to his death and, moreover, why somebody would find it necessary to kill him. Even still, though, there isn't enough information about his death to make any definitive conclusions about what happened, though it's worth remembering that he seems to have had a relationship with a woman who lives in the marsh. The only person in the narrative so far that matches that description, of course, is Kya.



CHAPTER 15. THE GAME: 1960

The day after finding the turkey feather, Kya walks to the stump but finds nothing there. Thinking for a moment, she realizes that she should leave something for the boy, so she sets down a tail feather from a bald eagle. While in bed that night, she thinks about how her family abandoned her, leaving her alone in the marsh. And yet, there is somebody out there—a boy—who has started coming to her and leaving her gifts. The more she thinks about it, the more she senses that this boy must not want to harm her. The following morning, Kya gives herself a haircut, cleans her fingernails, and puts on Ma's old lipstick. Looking in the mirror, she notes that she looks pretty, though she wipes off the lipstick.

Kya goes to the stump the next day and finds not only a beautiful feather, but a milk carton. Inside the carton there are packets of seeds, a note, and a spark plug for her boat's motor. This last gift dizzies her, since she realizes that now she won't have to worry when her current spark plug dies—she has never had extra supplies in her life. Turning her attention to the note, she wishes she could read the words.

Kya turns back to her shack, having forgotten to bring something to leave for the mysterious boy. That evening, she puts a feather in her pocket and gathers blankets so she can sleep next to the marsh in order to wake up early to collect mussels. After filling two sacks with mussels the next morning, she carries them one by one to her boat. On her way, she stops at the stump to leave the feather, but when she enters the small clearing, she comes face to face with the boy, whom she recognizes as Tate. Before she can leave, he asks her not to run away. As he says this, he speaks slowly, as if he doesn't know whether or not she understands English.

Tate can't stop himself from staring at Kya. She's only 14, but he finds her extremely beautiful. Kya, for her part, wants to flee but decides to stay because of all the feathers Tate has left for her. Thinking of this, she hands him the swan feather that she intended to leave on the stump. When he takes it, he expresses genuine gratitude and identifies the feather as having come from a tundra swan. Unsure of what to say, she tells him that she can't read his note, so he explains that it merely says that he has seen her around the marsh, which is why he wanted to give her some seeds and an extra spark plug. Plus, he thought she would be able to appreciate the feathers. Avoiding his eyes, Kya thanks him.

As Kya wraps her head around interacting with the unknown boy, she gets more and more comfortable with the idea of opening herself up to the possibility of human connection. In doing so, she also changes the way she views herself, beginning to think of herself not just as a child, but as a young woman who might even be pretty. In this regard, readers watch as Kya matures, noting that the possibility of human interaction informs her coming of age process.



Kya has already begun to benefit from her developing relationship with this unknown boy, who makes it easier for her to sustain herself in the marsh by giving her an extra spark plug. Unfortunately for her, though, she can't fully reap the rewards of this budding friendship because she doesn't know how to read, thereby missing out on whatever he has to say to her. In this moment, then, readers see the ways in which Kya's lack of a formal education puts her at a disadvantage.



Although Kya has decided to embrace her developing friendship with Tate, she's unprepared to do so in person. Leaving feathers and other gifts for one another is, for her, a perfect way to connect with another human without actually having to interact with anyone. Now, though, she must face Tate, a fact that clearly unnerves her because she's so unused to interfacing with others.



Tate puts Kya in an uncomfortable position by actually meeting her in person. However, he tries to relate to her on her own terms by speaking about the marsh and reminding her of their shared interest in bird feathers. By doing this, he helps her see that he means her no harm, effectively convincing her not to listen to her impulse to run away—an impulse that she has developed simply as a means of survival.



Tate privately notices that Kya's surprisingly mature body doesn't match the somehow childish way that she speaks. In contrast, he thinks, all of the girls her age in Barkley Cove are less physically developed but have adopted excessively adult personas. Bidding farewell to Kya, he says that he might come see her every now and then, as long as she's all right with that. Kya doesn't respond. Just before Tate is about to leave, he turns once more and offers to teach Kya how to read.

*While it is somewhat uncomfortable to consider Kya's sexual maturity because she is only 14, her development is indeed one of Owens's focuses in *Where the Crawdads Sing*, as the author charts Kya's transition from childhood to adulthood. This dynamic emerges when Tate notices Kya's body and notes that her physical maturity clashes with her otherwise childish demeanor—a consideration that will be important to bear in mind as their relationship progresses. On another note, Tate's offer to teach Kya how to read once more emphasizes his unbridled kindness, proving that he truly means her no harm and simply wants to connect with her.*



CHAPTER 16. READING: 1960

Tate doesn't come back right away to teach Kya how to read, and she gets tired of waiting for him. Consequently, Kya decides to visit Mabel to give her some jam, though the real reason she wants to see Mabel is simply that she wants to spend time with another person. On her way to "Colored Town," Kya hears voices, jumps into the woods, and watches as a group of white boys walk down the road, taunting a black man ahead of them by calling him racial slurs and throwing rocks at him. Suddenly, Kya realizes that the man is Jumpin', so she bursts out of the woods just after he turns a corner, cutting off the boys and hitting them with her sack, which is full of jam jars. She easily takes them on, and they go running in the other direction. Flustered, Kya goes home, too.

Once more, readers see that the area in which Kya lives is plagued by discrimination and intolerance. Moreover, though, Kya's decision to defend Jumpin' is quite noteworthy, since it indicates that she feels strongly for him. Given that she's such a reclusive person who has very few human relationships, her willingness to physically defend Jumpin' is especially significant, suggesting that she is loyal to the few people in her life upon whom she can count. It also indicates that she has no sympathy for people who are prejudiced or intolerant of others and is willing to take violent measures when she thinks it's necessary to do so.



In the coming weeks, Tate comes whenever he can to help Kya learn to read. One day, she asks if he lives with his family in town, and he says he lives alone with his father. Thinking that Tate's mother must have abandoned him, Kya wishes she could reach out and touch his hand, though she can't bring herself to do this, instead simply gazing at the complex and delicate veins that run just beneath the surface of the skin on his wrist. Each night, she practices her lessons and wonders why Tate bothered to seek her out, though she decides not to ask him this question because she doesn't want to do anything to discourage him from coming. Above all, she's excited to label the many insects, shells, and feathers she's collected over the years, looking up their names and writing them beneath her paintings of each specimen.

Tate serves a dual purpose in Kya's life. As her teacher, he gives her the gift of knowledge, enabling her not only to read, but to interact with the world around her more deeply—something that makes her very happy and allows her to more thoroughly concentrate on life in the marsh. As Tate teaches her, though, he also becomes her closest human connection. That Tate, too, has lost his mother resonates deeply with Kya, who suddenly feels as if she has found somebody who might actually understand her. And in feeling this way, Kya experiences the first pangs of romantic attraction. In turn, it becomes clear that her relationship with Tate informs her entire coming-of-age process, both in terms of her intellectual education and her emotional development.



Kya asks Tate what comes after the number 29 one day, and after he answers, he tells her that he'll teach her some basic math. She is now quite good at reading, so she takes the family Bible off the shelf one night and flips to the back, where Ma wrote the full names and birthdates of all her family members. First, she looks for her own name, learning that she was born on October 10th, 1945. She also learns the full names of her siblings (whom she only ever knew by their nicknames) and those of her parents.

As Tate continues to teach Kya, he grants her the ability to get to know her own familial history. In this way, her education is an integral part of her identity formation, as she suddenly finds herself better able to make sense of her own life.



CHAPTER 17. CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: 1960

As Kya pulls up to Jumpin's one morning, he tells her that several men from Social Services came looking for her. He gave them false information, but he warns Kya that they're still searching for her. That afternoon, Kya asks Tate if they can meet somewhere more secretive, and though he agrees, he asks why. She explains that men from Social Services are looking for him and that she fears they'll try to put her in a foster home. "Well, we better hide way out there where the crawdads sing," Tate says, and when Kya asks what this expression means, he tells her that it means they should go as far into the woods as they can, where the creatures are still wild and uninfluenced by human activity. With this in mind, she takes him to a dilapidated cabin in an area that's even more secluded than where she lives.

Kya's determination to stay away from the Social Service agents underscores how committed she is to living on her own in the marsh. Although she has opened herself up to Tate (and, to a certain extent, Jumpin'), she's unwilling to embrace a life outside the isolation of the marsh. Recognizing how much this means to her, Tate suggests that they go out "where the crawdads sing," thereby aligning himself with Kya's vision of an off-the-grid lifestyle amongst wild creatures.



That summer, Kya and Tate spend a lot of time in the remote cabin, which Kya refers to as the "reading cabin." Together, they work their way through a book Tate gives her called [A Sand County Almanac](#), which is full of information about nature and marshlands—information that directly applies to the world surrounding Kya, giving her knowledge that she can actually use, unlike what she imagines she would learn in school. Eventually, Tate brings her poetry and tells her that poems make people feel things. By way of explanation, he reads her several pieces, and she finds herself pleasantly surprised by how much she likes listening to the rhythm of language. So begins her love of poetry, which she reads whenever she gets the chance.

One of the reasons that Tate is so successful in his attempt to educate Kya is that his lessons bring themselves to bear on her lived experience. Rather than studying superfluous subjects that have little to do with life in the marsh, Kya is able to learn about the building blocks of nature that make up her own environment. In addition, Kya experiences something of an emotional education when Tate introduces her to poetry, which teaches her how to tap into the universal feelings that characterize humanity and which she might not have encountered or acknowledged if she didn't read about them in poetry.



Tate begins his senior year of high school, so he's unable to see Kya as often as before. Still, he comes when he can, bringing her books that are beyond her reading level, though he assures her that she'll soon understand everything she reads. When she's not with Tate, Kya busies herself by reading [Rebecca](#) by Daphne du Maurier, which Ma kept on her bookshelf. Imagining herself as the female protagonist, she puts on Ma's sundress and twirls before the mirror, wondering what it would be like if Tate asked her to dance.

Once more, Kya's education informs her coming-of-age process. This time, she reads Daphne du Maurier's novel [Rebecca](#), allowing the book to influence the way she thinks about Tate and, more importantly, herself. Indeed, Kya begins to think about her own appeal and ponders the possibility that her connection with Tate could someday become romantic.



While Kya's filling up at Jumpin's one morning, Mabel tells her to come into the bait shop, where she gives her a beautiful outfit. She also hands Kya a bra, telling her not to be shy and that she needs it. Going on, she tells Kya to come to her if she ever needs to talk or ask questions about anything at all. Grateful for these gifts, Kya thanks her and leaves.

Shortly after talking to Mabel, Kya's sitting on the beach waiting for Tate when her stomach suddenly cramps in a way it never has before. Confused, she wonders if she's about to have diarrhea and, because of this thought, is mortified when she sees Tate approaching in his boat. Although she tries to act normal when he greets her, he immediately senses that something's wrong, and she admits that she's sick. She then suggests that he should go, but he insists on staying to make sure she gets home all right. After a moment, he asks if her discomfort feels different than the other stomach aches she's had in her life, and when she says that it does, he asks, "You're almost fifteen, right?" Going on, he tells her that she might be menstruating, reminding her that he brought her a pamphlet about this.

Embarrassed, Kya avoids looking at Tate and thinks about the fact that she's sitting right next to a boy while becoming a woman. As she worries how much blood will come out of her, Tate tells her that she'll be all right, assuring her that every young woman gets through this. He then tells her that he'll follow her home in his boat to make sure that she gets there safely, and when they arrive, she waves at him from land. The next morning, she goes to Jumpin's and asks to speak to Mabel. When Mabel arrives, Kya shyly tells her that she had her first period, and Mabel reaches out and hugs her. At first, Kya doesn't know what to do, but soon she relaxes into Mabel's embrace, and Mabel tells her that she has become a woman.

The day after Kya gets her first period, Tate brings her a new book, along with several baked goods—which make her very happy—and neither of them say anything about what happened the day before. As summer turns to autumn, Tate continues to visit. One day, Kya finally works up the courage to ask him why he bothers to come all the way out into the marsh just to see her and teach her to read. She also asks if he has a girlfriend with whom he'd rather spend time. In response, he says that he doesn't have a girlfriend, though he has been in relationships in the past. Going on, he says that he *likes* being in the marsh, and he likes Kya's interest in the surrounding nature. Nobody else in his life bothers to think about such things, he says.

As Kya comes of age, she has almost nobody to help guide her through the various trials and tribulations of adolescence and early adulthood. Thankfully, Mabel recognizes that Kya lacks this, which is why she goes out of her way to emphasize that Kya can always talk to her about anything she wants, no doubt sensing that Kya has already started to notice changes in her body.



Kya is lucky that, although she doesn't have many people in her life, she can depend upon people like Mabel and Tate to help her make sense of the changes her body undergoes as she enters young adulthood. At the same time, though, it's probably embarrassing for Kya that the boy about whom she's started having romantic thoughts is the one to talk her through her first period. To give credit where credit is due, though, Tate is quite kind and sympathetic in this moment, somehow managing to tell Kya what he knows about menstruation without seeming patronizing, condescending, or judgmental (which is commendable because, as a male, he doesn't actually know what it's like to menstruate). This, it seems, is the kind of support Kya needs and deserves, though it's obviously not optimal that it has to come from Tate.



Tate is able to tell Kya what's happening to her body, but he isn't capable of fully comforting her. This is because his empathy and understanding can only go so far, since she feels awkward talking about this subject with him. For this reason, Kya finds Mabel's empathy soothing, even if she doesn't know how to relax into her embrace right away. During this interaction, she remains on her guard until she finally lets herself simply enjoy Mabel's compassion, which helps her see not only that there are people in the world who care about her, but also that what's happening to her body is nothing out of the ordinary and is, in fact, a beautiful thing.



Because Kya's entire life plays out in the marsh, she doesn't know what Tate's existence is like in Barkley Cove. Accordingly, she tries to determine whether or not he has a girlfriend, clearly not wanting to become too committed to him if he himself isn't invested in their developing relationship (which, at least thus far, hasn't crossed into romantic territory). In this regard, readers see how wary Kya is of letting herself become close with another human, no doubt remembering how painful it is to put trust in a loved one only to be let down and abandoned.



What Tate *doesn't* tell Kya when she asks why he comes to see her is that he feels bad for her. He doesn't like the fact that people in Barkley Cove refer to her as the "Marsh Girl." They also tell tall tales about her and dare each other to run out to her shack. Worse, some young men have already started taking bets on who will be the first one to have sex with Kya. This infuriates Tate, but it isn't the sole reason he visits her in the marsh. Indeed, the primary reason is that he has complicated feelings for her—feelings that are like a mixture of those he might have for a sister and those he might have for a lover.

After asking why he visits her, Kya asks Tate about his mother, and he explains that both she and his sister died in a car accident. They were on their way to buy him a birthday present, he tells her, or at least this is what he thinks. In this way, he sees their death as his fault, though he knows he shouldn't think like this. Sensing his distress, Kya leans toward him without actually touching him. Just then, the wind picks up and blows throngs of leaves off the trees, and Tate springs to his feet and tells Kya to see how many she can catch before they hit the ground. As they do this, they laugh and spin around until suddenly Kya runs into Tate. They both stop and gaze at one another for a moment, and then he plants his hands on her shoulders and kisses her.

After they kiss, Kya asks Tate if she's his girlfriend now, and he asks if this is something she wants. When Kya says yes, Tate worries aloud that she might be too young, but Kya dispels this idea by pointing out that she knows more about feathers than any other girl Tate could find. Considering this for a moment, Tate agrees that she's right and kisses her again.

That Tate finds himself so enraged by the insensitivity of his fellow townspeople is yet another sign that he's a genuinely kind and compassionate person. Rather than seeing Kya as strange and mysteriously alluring simply because she comes from a different background, he approaches her as a kindred spirit, someone who likes the same things that he likes and appreciates the marsh in the same way as him. By outlining this dynamic, then, Owens not only spotlights Tate's kindheartedness, but also calls attention to the insensitive ways in which the surrounding community treats Kya.



Although Tate's mother and sister didn't purposefully abandon him like Kya's family members abandoned her, Kya is able to empathize with the fact that he has experienced loss. It is perhaps for this reason that they kiss right after having this conversation, clearly feeling close to each other because of their different yet surprisingly similar pasts.



For the first time in her life, Kya is in a romantic relationship. And though it's clear that her connection with Chase is positive and emotionally gratifying, it's worth noting that Tate's concern about her age is valid. After all, she is several years younger than him, to say nothing of the fact that her emotional maturity is likely underdeveloped because of her limited access to the outside world. At the same time, though, Kya addresses this worry by reminding Tate that she knows a lot that most girls her age don't know, ultimately pointing out that just because she hasn't had the same exposure to the outside world as other people doesn't mean she's not as emotionally or intellectually capable of engaging in romantic relationships. (Though this, of course, doesn't change the fact that she's quite young.)



CHAPTER 18. WHITE CANOE: 1960

Tate and Kya spend as much time as possible together, savoring each moment. They laugh and twist into each other's arms, and Tate teaches Kya multiplication. One day, he arrives with a picnic basket and wishes her a happy birthday, telling her that he knows she's 15 today because he saw her birthdate written in her family Bible. Overcome, Kya relishes the beautiful cake Tate brought and is astonished to discover that he also came with presents: a magnifying glass, a barrette for her hair, and a collection of paints and brushes, which he tells her she can use for the illustrations she makes of her feather and shell collections.

Tate and Scupper go to dinner after working on Scupper's boat. Scupper has started paying Tate to work for him when he's not in school, and though this cuts into his time with Kya, he doesn't say anything because he hasn't told Scupper about their relationship. Nevertheless, Scupper mentions this at dinner, saying that he's heard gossip about Tate seeing "that girl in the marsh." Although he claims to not believe the stories people tell about her, he warns Tate to be careful not to start a family before he's ready. This comment upsets Tate, who thinks it suggests that Scupper actually *does* believe that Kya isn't all that "innocent." As Tate talks about how she's more "pure" than the girls in town, Scupper insists that he's just doing his job as a parent, urging Tate to stop arguing with him because he's only trying to guide him.

Whenever he can, Tate goes to the marsh, where he and Kya lie in one of their boats or go for walks on the beach. They spend their time holding hands and kissing, and though Tate desperately wants to see her naked, he holds back because he worries that she's too young. He knows that if something between them goes wrong, the experience might negatively affect Kya. Instead of focusing on the physical aspects of their relationship, then, he continues to bring her books, primarily about biology, which she likes best. On her own, Kya pores over these books, learning about the building blocks of her immediate surroundings. As she reads, she also tries to find an answer for why a mother would ever leave her children, but she finds nothing of the sort.

It's worth remembering at this point that Kya has been forced to celebrate her birthday by herself for the past eight years, starting when her mother left just before her seventh birthday. Accordingly, the fact that Tate not only remembers her birthday but also goes out of his way to give her presents is significant, since it indicates to Kya that she finally has somebody in her life who cares enough about her to do such things.



Tate becomes defensive when Scupper starts talking about Kya because he's all too aware of the unfair and disparaging things that people say about her in Barkley Cove. Not wanting to hear his father perpetuate the various prejudices that surround Kya's public image, he's desperate to stop talking to Scupper about the matter. However, Scupper isn't actually interested in saying mean things about Kya. Rather, he simply wants to make sure that his son doesn't accidentally start a family before he's ready, ultimately showing Tate the kind of guidance and support that Kya herself lacks because she doesn't have parents to help her navigate her way from childhood to adulthood.



Tate doesn't want to engage physically with Kya because he worries that she—as a young person—is too impressionable. This concern is something that comes along with the nature of their relationship, since he is simultaneously her boyfriend, her only companion, and the person who mentors her in both intellectual and emotional capacities. Simply put, Tate recognizes that he has an outsized impact on Kya's life, which is why he's cautious to stifle his physical urges. Meanwhile, Kya focuses on learning biology, searching for ways to apply this newfound knowledge to her own life. In doing so, she tries to understand why her mother abandoned her. Unfortunately, though, biology doesn't necessarily take human emotion into account, so Kya finds it difficult to grasp why her mother did what she did.



Tate visits Kya the day after Christmas. They go to her shack and have a warm, cozy meal. When Kya goes to the sink to do the dishes, he comes up behind her and puts his arms around her. As she leans into him, he lifts his hands under her shirt and feels her breasts, and a completely foreign feeling sweeps over her body. It is, she thinks, a sudden sense of passionate emptiness that she desperately wants to fill, but because she doesn't know what to do, she pushes back against Tate's advancements, and he stops. "It's okay," he says, and then they simply stand there together, their breathing heavy and slow.

By this point, it's clear that Kya knows what it feels like to experience sexual desire. Like most young people who have never felt this way before, though, she doesn't know what to do with these desires. Because she doesn't have any adults to tell her about these things, she is especially unaware of how sexual experiences normally unfold. Thankfully, though, Tate is cognizant of this and remains mindful of Kya's inexperience, backing off when she indicates that this is what she wants. In doing so, Tate shows Kya that he's willing to follow her lead, thereby strengthening their connection and her willingness to invest in their relationship.



One spring day, Tate and Kya kiss against a tree trunk. Leaning against her, Tate unbuttons her shirt and looks at her breasts, then takes off her pants and reaches between her legs. She is surprised by how pleasurable this is, but Tate suddenly backs away and apologizes. She tells him that she wants to keep going, but he refuses. He says that he, too, wants to have sex with her but that she's too young. When she points out that he's only four years older than her, he responds by saying that he can't get pregnant and doesn't stand to get hurt by the experience. He then tells her that he loves her, but she complains that he thinks of her as a little girl and asks when they'll be able to have sex. "Just not yet," he says.

Tate's feelings of discomfort regarding his and Kya's age difference continue, this time making their way into the open when Kya asks why they can't have sex. When she asks this, Tate is forced to admit that he's worried he might emotionally hurt her. While this might seem like Tate is patronizing Kya, it's worth pointing out that he has good reason to refrain from letting their relationship advance physically. After all, he is 19 and she's 15, and though four years might not seem like very much of a difference in age, Tate knows that the latter years of adolescence hold quite a bit of emotional development for most people. This, in turn, means that Kya has yet to fully mature into an adult, which is why Tate worries about doing something for which she might not be ready.



In May, Tate tells Kya that he will be going to college soon. He has already told her that he'll be leaving, but she hasn't paid much thought to this development because she thinks it won't happen until the end of the summer. Now, though, he tells her that he got a job for the summer in the college's biology lab, meaning that he'll be leaving in just a few weeks. He tells Kya that he'll come back as often as possible, but this does little to comfort her. Kya asks why Tate can't stay in Barkley Cove and become a shrimper like his father, but he insists that he wants to become a research biologist. In turn, Kya points out that there aren't any research biology jobs in this area, meaning that Tate will leave her forever once he finishes college. Nonetheless, he promises to never leave her.

The fact that Tate is leaving to go to college underscores why it was wise of him to suggest that he and Kya wait to have sex. After all, sex is something that often intensifies a couple's emotional bonds, meaning that it would be even harder for Kya to say farewell to Tate if they had actually had intercourse. To add to this dynamic, Kya has been abandoned by loved ones in the past, and Tate's departure most likely threatens to recall this heartache. Accordingly, he is right to stop their physical relationship from advancing too far, though it's worth noting that he utterly fails to do anything to slow down their emotional relationship. In turn, it seems likely that Kya will be just as upset about his departure as she would have been if they actually did have sex (though this is certainly not to say that they should have done so).



Kya jumps up and runs away from Tate after they talk about him going to college. He tries to follow her, but she quickly and easily loses him in the woods. The next week, Tate visits Kya and delivers the unfortunate news that he has to leave even earlier than expected. He has, he says, come to say farewell. Kya worries that he'll forget her, but he assures her that this would never happen. He also gives her two big bags of library books and promises that he'll be back in little more than a month's time, since he's coming home for the Fourth of July. Promising to see her then, he says goodbye, kisses her, and gets back into his boat.

Once again, Kya watches an important figure in her life disappear. However, Tate has promised to come back, which isn't something anyone else—not Ma, Pa, nor Jodie—ever promised. In this way, Tate gives Kya something to hope for, easing the pain of his departure, though it's likely that Kya still feels as if he's leaving her behind, since her daily life will once more become isolated and lonely.



CHAPTER 19. SOMETHING GOING ON: 1969

Eight days after finding Chase's body, Joe learns from several townspeople that Chase used to go out to the marsh on his own quite frequently. Explaining what he's heard to Ed, Joe says that Chase started taking secretly his boat to the marsh about four years ago. Accordingly, Joe wonders if Chase had gotten mixed up in drugs, but Ed doesn't find this plausible, since Chase wasn't the type to do drugs. Still, this is important information, and Ed hopes that Patti Love—Chase's mother—will be able to add to the story when she comes in that afternoon, since she called and said she has something crucial to tell them about the case. Whatever it is, Ed tells Joe, Patti Love said it has to do with a **shell necklace** that Chase used to wear at all times.

As Ed and Joe investigate the circumstances surrounding Chase's death, it comes to seem more and more likely that he had a relationship with Kya. After all, why else would he disappear into the marsh, if not to pay her a visit? What's more is that Ed and Joe have already heard rumors that Chase had a secret relationship with a woman who lived in the marsh. Given that Owens hasn't yet introduced any characters other than Kya who live in the marsh, it seems reasonable to assume that she is the one whom Chase used to visit on his boat. This, in turn, suggests that Kya eventually learned to accept people other than Tate into her life, ultimately opening herself up to human connection.



CHAPTER 20. JULY 4: 1961

On July 4th, Kya waits for Tate. She reads as she waits, but time goes by and there's still no sign of him. The next day, she continues to wait, listening for his boat. That evening, she watches **fireflies** dash around her, frantic as they mate. She knows there are different species of fireflies and that only a male and a female of the same species can mate. For this reason, the females flash their lights in a pattern that is distinct to their species, thereby attracting the appropriate mates. As Kya watches this play out, she observes one female firefly attract a male and mate with him. After doing this, though, the same female changes her light pattern, attracting a different male from another species and eating him when he gets close. By noon the next day, Kya understands that Tate isn't coming back.

Kya's observance of firefly mating rituals is important to note, since the behavior of this particular female firefly shows her not only that nature is full of merciless survival tactics, but also that females can use sex to their benefit. In fact, that the female firefly attracts a male and then eats him shows her that sex can be wielded as a form of power. Given that Tate has failed to make good on his promise to come back, this is an especially important realization, since it helps Kya see that—although she might feel helpless in this moment—she, too, could someday live the empowered, individualistic life of a female firefly.



CHAPTER 21. COOP: 1961

Kya stays in bed for three days. She wonders why everyone in her life has left her, and she laments that she thought Tate was different from all the other people she's loved. She then decides that there's nobody in the world she can depend upon, so she makes a promise to herself to never love or trust anyone ever again. Shortly after making this vow, she looks out of her shack and sees a Cooper's hawk standing on the porch and looking straight at her. Seeing this, she finally gets out of bed and walks down to the beach, where the **gulls** fly around her in swarms.

Kya stays to herself for the following month. When she finally has to go to Jumpin's for supplies, she doesn't linger to talk to him, determined to avoid building yet another relationship that she depends upon, since such relationships only lead to pain. Several days later, she sees the Cooper's hawk on her porch again, so she names him Coop. This inspires her to go back to exploring the marsh, collecting shells and feathers like she used to. Sometimes she thinks about Tate, but for the most part she tries to focus on her immediate existence. She leads a lonely existence, but time passes, and soon it has been a year since Tate left, and then two more.

In this section, readers see the negative impact that abandonment has on Kya's worldview. Time and again, her loved ones have proven to her that she can't put her trust in other humans, so she finally commits to an individualistic life, resolving to never trust anyone. Instead of thinking about Tate, then, Kya refocuses on the only thing that has been a constant source of support and happiness in her life: nature. This, however, does nothing to quell her feelings of loneliness and isolation, which ultimately underscore the importance of human connection.



As Kya moves on with her life in the aftermath of her relationship with Tate, she focuses not on building new human connections, but on committing herself to the marsh. During this time, Kya takes pleasure in simple things like exploring nature and collecting various specimens, devoting herself to an existence that brings her happiness without exposing her to the possibility of emotional pain. In this way, she protects herself from heartbreak by further isolating herself from the surrounding community, even avoiding Jumpin' as much as possible despite the fact that he has only ever showed her kindness and support.



CHAPTER 22. SAME TIDE: 1965

Now 19, Kya sits on the beach and hears voices, so she slinks into the woods. From her hiding place, she sees Chase and his friends. Watching them from afar, Kya feels as if very little has changed since she was a child, when she observed this same group whenever they came near. At one point, the football that Chase and his friend have been throwing lands near the tree line, so Chase jogs over to retrieve it. Just before he throws it back, he looks up and sees Kya. After tossing it, he turns and looks directly into Kya's eyes but doesn't say anything. For a moment, they simply peer at each other, and Chase almost smiles before turning around and rejoining his friends. In the days after this encounter, Kya returns to the beach in hopes of seeing Chase.

Despite her hesitance to seek out new connections after having been hurt by Tate, Kya can't help but gravitate toward Chase. This is most likely because he doesn't tell his friends when he sees her, ultimately indicating that he doesn't want to scare her away and, therefore, that he might be interested in pursuing some kind of relationship—either platonic or romantic—with her. That Kya can't stop herself from trying to see him again in the days after this fleeting encounter implies that it's quite difficult to live a life of total isolation, even for somebody like Kya who has every reason to be wary of others.



Kya starts going to Jumpin's more frequently, hoping to encounter Chase. When this finally happens one morning, Chase introduces himself to her. He speaks slowly, as if she is perhaps unable to understand English. Eventually, he invites her to go on a picnic that weekend, and they arrange for him to pick her up in his boat. On her way back home, she recites several poems in her head, recalling one by an obscure poet named Amanda Hamilton, whose poetry was recently published in a local newspaper. This particular poem is about how love must be "free to wander." It makes Kya think of Tate.

When Kya accepts Chase's invitation to go on a picnic, readers see just how eager she is to connect with another human in spite of her previous resolution to never put her trust in anyone else. And yet, it's possible that Kya isn't breaking this promise to herself, at least not yet—after all, simply spending time with Chase doesn't mean she will automatically fall in love with and open up to him. Furthermore, Kya appears cognizant of the human need for love, judging by the fact that she recites a local poet's words about how it's necessary to set love "free to wander." In this period, then, readers watch as Kya slowly makes herself emotionally available to the world again, even if she does so cautiously and tentatively.



What Kya doesn't know is that Tate actually *did* come to see her. He was unable to come on the Fourth of July because the professor who gave him a job in the college's biology lab invited him to go birding, and he felt he couldn't say no. Several days later, though, he motored through the marsh toward Kya's shack. On his way, he saw her in her boat, so he turned off his motor and watched her, knowing that this is something she often did to him in the past. He observed her as she quietly looked for shells on the beach, but then she suddenly went stiff, listening to something Tate couldn't hear, though he soon identified the soft hum of a distant motor. In response to this sound, Kya crept into the tall grass, obscuring herself and peering out like an animal.

When Tate comes several days late to visit Kya, he sees a side of her that he has always known existed but has never actually witnessed—namely, the instinctual and somewhat animalistic aspect of her identity, the part of her that enabled her to survive in the marsh as a mere child. Needless to say, this level of alertness is uncommon amongst humans, since most people don't think much about surviving in the wilderness. In turn, it makes sense that Tate might be somewhat unnerved by Kya's behavior, which seems more in keeping with a creature in the wild than with a human.



Unnerved, Tate can't help but think of Kya's behavior as odd and deeply out of the ordinary. He then considers the fact that his studies will lead him to a life as a research biologist in a lab, and though he knows that Kya's intelligence would fit into such an atmosphere, he can't imagine her actually fitting in anywhere except the marsh. Whispering that he's sorry, he turns his boat around and leaves, cursing himself for being too cowardly to give her a proper farewell.

Even though Tate was originally drawn to Kya because he appreciated her unique connection to nature and the wilderness, he now finds himself making excuses for why he shouldn't return to her. Afraid that she won't fit into the life he hopes to lead, he decides to abandon Kya like everyone else in her life has, knowing full well that this is exactly what has made her so weary of other humans in the first place. In this regard, then, Tate's decision to abandon Kya only feeds into the exact kind of behavior that he finds unnerving.



CHAPTER 23. THE SHELL: 1965

Kya replays the way Chase looked at her when they spoke at Jumpin's, thinking that nobody—including Tate—has ever gazed at her like he did. As she thinks this, she moves her hands over her body and dances amongst the trees. The following morning, she meets Chase and gets into his boat, at which point he takes her to a stretch of beach. Saying little, they walk along the white sand, letting their hands graze each other from time to time. When they stop to sit for a moment, Chase takes out a harmonica and plays several songs before looking at the ground and finding a pretty shell, which Kya tells him is somewhat rare. She also tells him facts about this shell, awing him with her knowledge. Of everything he's heard about the "Marsh Girl," he never would have thought she'd know so much about shells.

Chase gives Kya the shell, which she puts in his pocket. They then walk back to the boat and set up for a picnic on the sand. The food is so delicious and well-prepared that Kya suspects Chase's mother must have made it, and she wonders if the woman knew that her son would take the meal to the "Marsh Girl." After they finish eating, they begin to kiss, and suddenly Chase is on top of her, pressing her into the sand and trying to undress her. Frantically, she scrambles out from underneath him, and when he tries to tell her that everything's all right, she flinches from his touch. She had thought the night before that she was ready to have sex, but this moment with Chase is too sudden and emotionless, as if he thinks he can do whatever he wants to her.

Breaking the silence, Chase apologizes to Kya and offers to take her back, but she refuses. Standing up, she begins to walk away, and though he tells her that it's too far for her to reach home on foot, she ignores him. For hours, she cuts through the woods, swearing out loud because she feels angry, ashamed, and sad. She had only wanted to be touched, she thinks, but Chase seemed as if he wanted to *take* something from her. Finally falling to her knees, she cries and cries. Then, calming herself down, she stands and continues home.

Chase and Kya's relationship starts innocently enough, though it's worth noting that it is predicated on a look that Kya has never experienced before. This suggests that Chase's gaze was full of sexual desire, a kind of lust that even Tate didn't let her see. After all, Tate was interested in Kya for multiple reasons, not just because he found her attractive. Chase, on the other hand, has very little upon which to base his interest in Kya other than her looks, considering that he isn't—like Tate—interested in wildlife or the natural world, nor is he interested in teaching Kya to read or do math. Furthermore, Chase's thoughts about the "Marsh Girl" remind readers that he still sees Kya as a strange outsider rather than as her own unique person.



Unlike Tate, who was so concerned about respecting Kya's boundaries that he refused to have sex with her even when she wanted to, Chase tries to satisfy his own desires without paying much attention to anything else. For this reason, Kya reacts strongly to his heavy-handed sexual advance, realizing that she doesn't actually want to have sex yet. Considering that she's so hesitant to let people into her life, it's unsurprising that she doesn't want to have sex with Chase on the very first day they spend time together. Already, it seems, her decision to open up to human connection again isn't going particularly well.



In this moment, Kya feels violated and betrayed, and for good reason, too—Chase has just tried to use her for sex without even making an effort to discern whether or not she's interested in him romantically. Once again, then, Kya finds that interacting with others only leads to pain and regret—an unfortunate confirmation of her belief that it's best to keep to herself.



CHAPTER 24. THE FIRE TOWER: 1965

Ten days pass before Kya sees Chase again. This time, she spots him on the beach with his friends, and though her impulse is to run away before he sees her, she doesn't because of a sense of deep loneliness. As Chase and his friends leave, he spots Kya and circles back to talk to her, apologizing again for what happened between them. He also tells her that he wants to show her the fire tower, taking off in his motorboat as she follows in hers. Once they arrive, they climb the tower and look out over the marshlands—something Kya has never done. As she surveys her home from above, two red-tailed hawks swoop by at eye-level. Chase apologizes once more for what happened, and though she doesn't respond, she feels a desire to kiss him.

Kya tells Chase that she made a **necklace** for him, taking it out of her pocket and handing it to him. The necklace has the shell that he found on their picnic on it and is strung with rawhide. Kya originally told herself that she was making the necklace for herself, but now she understands that she was secretly hoping to give it to Chase whenever she got the chance. Self-consciously, she tells him that he doesn't have to wear it, but he thanks her and puts it on. Chase then asks if Kya will show him her house, so they return to her shack, where he looks at her collection of shells and feathers with a sense of idle, unenthused curiosity. Privately, Chase wonders why Kya would collect things she can see just outside her window, but he doesn't say this.

Chase compliments Kya's ability to live alone in her shack for so long. Just when she thinks he's about to kiss her, she asks what exactly he wants with her, and he truthfully answers by saying that he finds her attractive and "free." However, he acknowledges that he was wrong to come on so strongly, adding that he just wants to spend time with her. He hopes, he says, that they can get to know each other. And even when they're better acquainted, he promises, he won't do anything she doesn't want. When it's obvious that Kya finds this arrangement agreeable, Chase suggests that they go to the beach, so Kya takes some bread and feeds the **gulls** while he watches.

Somewhat surprisingly, Kya finds it within herself to forgive Chase. Or, at the very least, she decides to give him another chance, which isn't necessarily the same as forgiving him, since she will most likely remember his aggression because this is a way to gauge whether or not he poses a threat to her wellbeing—a calculation she's used to making because of her finely tuned survival skills. Either way, though, what's most clear is that Kya's loneliness is beginning to overwhelm her, ultimately encouraging her to seek out human company even though doing so goes against her better judgment.



It's odd that Kya makes a keepsake out of the shell that Chase found on their picnic, since doing so ultimately commemorates his insensitivity and lack of regard for what she wants. In this sense, then, the necklace itself serves as a reminder of the kind of person Chase is capable of being, even if he shows Kya kindness in this moment. In keeping with this, the fact that Chase doesn't understand Kya's interest in nature underscores the notion that he and Kya are vastly different from one another. All the same, Kya allows him to enter her life because she's lonely—a testament to just how far people will go to avoid feelings of isolation.



When Chase says that he finds her beautiful and "free," he inadvertently reveals that part of his attraction to her has to do with a somewhat fetishized notion of who she is. Indeed, he has bought into the town's conception of Kya as the "Marsh Girl," but instead of finding this persona revolting, he finds it intriguing. Instead of gravitating toward her because he's genuinely interested in engaging with her as her own person (like Tate did), he finds himself coming to see her simply because he's fascinated by the mere idea of her. Still, though, Kya has nobody else in her life, so she agrees to keep seeing Chase.



CHAPTER 25. A VISIT FROM PATTI LOVE: 1969

Patti Love pays a visit to the police department, telling Ed and Joe that she and her husband had dinner with Chase the night before he died. In fact, he went straight from their house to the fire tower. At dinner, Patti says, he was wearing **the shell necklace** that he always used to wear. However, the necklace wasn't on his body when he was found dead. This piques Ed and Joe's interest, and they ask why Chase used to wear it all the time. Feeling uncomfortable, Patti Love tells them that the necklace was a gift from the "Marsh Girl," with whom Chase had a relationship before—and, Patti Love thinks, possibly even after—he married his wife, Pearl. Providing the officers with her own hypothesis, Patti Love speculates that Kya killed Chase because he ended their relationship in order to marry Pearl.

Ed and Joe ask Patti Love for more information about Chase's connection to Kya, but she's unable to give them anything more because he was so secretive about their relationship. After Patti leaves, Ed and Joe discuss this new development, pointing out that it would make sense if someone who lives in the marsh was the one to kill Chase, since "marsh people" know how to cover their tracks. Deciding to go to Kya herself, Ed and Joe go looking for her shack, but by the time they find it, she has fled. As they stand outside the small structure, they feel as if she's most likely watching them from somewhere nearby. Because they see that it'll be impossible to find her, they decide to leave, figuring that they can always try to get a warrant later on in the process.

CHAPTER 26. THE BOAT ASHORE: 1965

Kya and Chase start spending more time together. Although Chase doesn't understand Kya's interest in the marsh and why she likes to paint the things she sees in it, he likes her unique perspective. On her way home from spending time with Chase one afternoon, Kya sees Tate's boat and discerns that he has come home from college. He looks good, but she turns off her motor and hides until he's gone. Several weeks later, Chase and Kya kiss for the first time since their incident on the beach. This time, Chase is respectful of her space and doesn't pressure her to do anything more, which makes it easier for Kya to enjoy the simple pleasure of being close to another person.

At this point in their investigation, Ed and Joe finally have a concrete reason to suspect Kya of foul play. And though the disappearance of the shell necklace does seem to implicate Kya in some way, it's worth noting that Patti Love's confidence that Kya was the one to kill Chase seems to be informed not just by facts, but by her pre-formed ideas about Kya. This is made evident when she refers to Kya as the "Marsh Girl," using the unkind name that the townspeople have assigned her. Given that so few people in Barkley Cove have any respect for Kya, it becomes clear in this moment that she will have an especially hard time defending herself against allegations that she killed Chase.



When Ed and Joe suggest that it would make sense if "marsh people" were responsible for Chase's death, readers see the ways in which their socioeconomic prejudices inform their detective work. Unfortunately for Kya, her identity as an outsider makes her an especially vulnerable suspect—a dynamic that she ultimately exacerbates by running from Ed and Joe when they come to see her, though this response to their arrival is in keeping with her ordinary habits, since she's so wary of outsiders and intruders.



During this period, Kya relaxes into the pleasant feeling of being with another person. Once again, she experiences the benefits of human connection, which she hasn't allowed herself to embrace since Tate let her down. However, it's unlikely that she has forgotten the pain that can come along with human relationships, especially since she compares her first kiss with Chase to the day on the beach, when he tried to push her beyond her comfort zone. This, it seems, will remain in Kya's mind as a reminder of what could happen if she lets herself get too wrapped up in their relationship.



By now, Tate is in graduate school. He has spent the past four years thinking about Kya and regretting that he abandoned her like everyone else in her life. Having returned to the swamp, he wants to apologize to her and, eventually, ask her to marry him. In fact, he has their whole life planned out in his head, knowing that a research lab is soon to be built nearby. In his fantasy, he will work in this lab and live with Kya in the marsh. He goes over this idea as he drives his boat toward Kya's shack to talk to her, but before he arrives, he sees Chase's fancy boat roaring through the water. He then watches as Kya motors over to Chase and reach across to touch his fingers, and he realizes that the rumors he's heard are true: Kya and Chase are secretly dating.

Several days after Tate sees Kya and Chase together, Kya goes reads some scientific literature she checked out from the library. Sitting outside her shack, she peruses an article called "Sneaky Fuckers." The article notes that males in nature with "the most prominent secondary sexual characteristics"—like large antlers or strapping muscles—tend to dominate other, less powerful males. Observing this, females mate more often with these alpha males. Interestingly enough, though, some of the less impressive males find ways to trick females into *thinking* that they're the alpha males, doing so by strutting about loudly with their bodies puffed up to look larger than they actually are. These males, the article explains, are known as "sneaky fuckers," a term that reminds Kya of a time when Ma warned her to be careful of boys who try too hard to look tough.

Although certain male species try to trick females into mating with them, Kya knows that many females actually have all of the power. For instance, many female insects eat their potential mates. Thinking about this, Kya considers the fact that this is simply how nature works, since all beings are simply trying to get by in life.

It's obvious that Tate has done some thinking in the years since he wronged Kya. However, he has effectively given up his place in her life, and because this left her feeling lonely, she has replaced him with Chase. Though it might be the case that Tate is a better match for Kya, there's no changing the fact that he abandoned her, ultimately fulfilling her worst fears about human relationships.



The article that Kya reads about male animals who trick females into mating with them serves as yet another example of the ways in which nature and zoology parallel certain aspects of human life. Of course, Kya hasn't yet experienced this particular phenomenon, but the fact that she finds it so compelling suggests that she's actively thinking about how it pertains to her own life, perhaps wondering if Chase is a true alpha male or a "sneaky fucker." This aligns with her constant attempt to discern whether or not the people in her life pose a threat to her well-being.



Kya doesn't cast judgment on the merciless aspects of nature. This is because she herself has experienced what it's like to do anything necessary to survive, knowing that sometimes one must simply rise to the occasion of sustaining oneself, no matter the moral consequences—this, at least, is what it's like in the animal kingdom, though it's worth pointing out that humans have developed various moral standards that preclude people from acting so individualistically.



Kya begins to fantasize about marrying Chase, though she recognizes that this might be nothing but a biological impulse to increase the likelihood that she'll have children. All the same, Kya likes thinking about establishing a life with him. However, she can't bring herself to ask Chase to introduce her to his parents, and he never brings it up. Instead, he focuses on other things. While fishing one day, Chase says that they should go swimming, promising not to look when Kya takes off her clothes. And yet, he stares at her when she takes off her shirt, eventually reaching out and touching her breasts. When Kya doesn't pull away, Chase unzips her shorts, and they lie down in the boat. Unthinkingly, Kya bends toward Chase, wanting badly to have sex but stopping him when his hand moves toward her crotch.

Disappointed, Chase asks why he and Kya can't have sex, saying that they've waited for a long time and adding that he has been patient. In response, she reminds him that he promised not to make her do anything she didn't want to do. Still, he doesn't understand what she's waiting for, so she asks what would happen after they had sex. How, she wonders aloud, does she know he won't abandon her? In turn, Chase promises that he won't leave because he's falling in love with Kya. This stuns her, especially since she doesn't know if *she* loves *him*. And yet, Kya is happy when she's with Chase, glad to be rid of her loneliness. Thinking this way, she tells him that she'll be ready to have sex soon, and he lets the matter go.

After Chase's parents pretend not to see Kya when she passes them in town one day, Kya asks Chase when he's going to introduce her. She asks if they even *know* about their relationship, but Chase assures her that they do and that he'll introduce her soon. As the weeks pass, Kya and Chase come closer and closer to having sex, but never actually do. Meanwhile, the townspeople start gossiping about them, often seeing them floating about in Chase's boat or catching a glimpse of them on the beach.

Again, readers see that Kya can't help but gravitate toward human connection. This is made especially clear when she starts entertaining the idea of marrying Chase, something that would go against her individualistic worldview. Indeed, Kya relishes the opportunity to grow close to another person, though it's apparent that she still wants to respect certain boundaries, as evidenced by the fact that she stops herself from having sex with Chase even though she wants to.



Although Chase assured Kya early in their relationship that he would never pressure her into doing anything she's not ready for, he now tries to guilt her into having sex with him. To do this, he acts like she owes him for being patient. In reality, though, she doesn't owe him anything, since it's not her duty to have sex with him, regardless of how long he waits. All the same, Chase charms Kya by saying that he loves her, thereby endearing himself to her simply by declaring something that seemingly nobody else in her life has ever said to her. Once again, then, Kya lets down her guard, allowing herself to grow closer to Chase despite her previous hesitation.



Despite everything Chase has promised Kya about their relationship, it seems rather obvious that he doesn't want to fully integrate her into his life. Instead, he wants to drop by her shack whenever it's convenient for him, thereby only ever interacting with her in secret. After all, he wouldn't delay introducing her to his parents if this weren't the case. Because of this dynamic, Owens intimates that Chase and Kya's relationship is most likely bound for heartache, since Chase is no more committed to Kya than any of the other people who have abandoned her throughout her life.



CHAPTER 27. OUT HOG MOUNTAIN ROAD: 1966

It's been a year since Chase and Kya started seeing each other. These days, Chase makes casual references to what life will be like when they're married and live together. He says they shouldn't live in the center of town because that would be too much of a change for Kya, adding that they could perhaps build a house somewhere close to the marsh. When he talks like this, Kya is overwhelmed that he wants her to be part of his life. Though Chase hasn't actually asked Kya to marry him, the way he talks about the future gives her the impression that he takes it for granted that they will soon become husband and wife. However, she isn't positive that she loves him enough to be his wife, but pushes this out of her mind because their relationship at least *feels* like it has love in it.

Chase tells Kya that he needs to go to Asheville to buy supplies for Western Auto, the store in which he works and which his parents own. He suggests that Kya should come with him, since it would be a good opportunity to get out of the marsh for a change and experience the outside world. She would, Chase tells her, be able to see a number of mountain ranges on the way, and it's a good idea for her to start getting used to public life if they're going to get married. Just after Kya agrees, Chase tells her that they'll have to stay in a hotel overnight, and though this gives her pause, she doesn't change her mind.

When Kya and Chase open the door to the hotel in Asheville, Kya immediately understands that he brought her there to have sex. Turning to her, he says, "It's time, don't you agree, Kya? It's time." Her body, she notes, has wanted to do this for a long time, so she decides to go along with what Chase wants, especially since he has been talking so much about marrying her. Accordingly, they have sex for the first time. Kya experiences nothing but discomfort, though this doesn't bother Chase, who rolls off her with a smile and falls asleep.

For the next few weeks, Kya and Chase continue to have sex, but Kya's experience doesn't improve. As Christmas approaches, Kya asks if she can spend the holiday with Chase's family, but he insists that she wouldn't want to do this, since his relatives are so boring. When she points out that she needs to start integrating into his life outside the marsh, he tells her that what they have is better than everything that exists in town. Everything else, Chase says, is stupid and fake. Saying this, he kisses Kya before leaving, and she spends yet another Christmas alone.

Kya doesn't scrutinize whether or not she loves Chase because what she mainly wants is companionship. Of course, she has strong feelings for him, but she isn't confident that she actually loves him. However, this doesn't particularly bother Kya because even a loveless arrangement will give her the kind of human connection and devotion that she has long desired. Unfortunately, though, Chase only talks about the future, failing to actually go through with any of his promises. In turn, it becomes clear that he isn't quite as devoted to Kya as she'd like to think.



Chase invites Kya to Asheville because he wants her to experience what it's like to venture beyond the confines of the marsh. At first glance, this seems like a good sign, one that might indicate that Chase actually wants to start integrating her into his own life. However, as soon as he mentions that they'll have to stay overnight in a hotel, it's clear that what he really wants is to spend the night with Kya so they can have sex. Once again, then, Chase endears himself to Kya by telling her something she wants to hear, simply so that he can get what he wants.



By this point in their relationship, it's evident that Chase and Kya don't have a particularly healthy or mutually rewarding bond. Chase, for his part, is almost exclusively interested in satisfying his own sexual desires, and though he pretends to respect Kya's boundaries, he has no problem trying to push her out of her comfort zone by manipulating her emotions. To do this, he uses Kya's loneliness and desire to be accepted to his advantage, talking about marrying her as a way to convince her to let down her guard.



Again, Chase fails to live up to his promise to integrate Kya into his life outside the marsh. This only confirms what has already become painfully obvious: he's not interested in having a genuine relationship with her. Instead, he simply wants to see her on his own terms, keeping their relationship a secret so he can benefit from their connection without having to tell the intolerant townspeople that he's with the "Marsh Girl."



In the days following Christmas, Chase doesn't return to the marsh. This infuriates Kya, who hates waiting for him. Finally, she hears a boat four days after Christmas and thinks he has finally come to see her. When she runs out to see, though, she comes face to face with Tate, who is steadily approaching in his boat. At first, Kya wants to run away, but then she tells herself that this area belongs to her and that she should stand her ground, so she starts hurling rocks at Tate, telling him to get away from her. While he pleads and asks if they can just talk a little bit, she continues to berate him. Still, he tells Kya that he knows she's with Chase and that he's sorry.

When Kya calms down, Tate tells her that Chase often sees other women in town. Going on, he says that he even saw Chase go home with another woman after a party several nights ago. For this reason, Tate insists that Chase isn't good enough for Kya, but this comment enrages her. She reminds Tate that he's the one who broke his promise and abandoned her. Whatever Chase has done, at least he didn't leave her without a word. Accepting this, Tate says that Kya is right, adding that her relationship with Chase is none of his business. He also says that he'll never bother her again, but that he just wants to apologize and explain himself, since he has spent the past few years regretting that he left her.

Giving her a rare feather, Tate tells Kya that he was wrong to leave her and that he thinks about her every day. Abandoning her was the worst mistake of his life, he says. When Tate finishes, Kya says nothing, but this doesn't bother him because he simply felt that he needed to tell her how he felt. Then, to break the ensuing silence, he informs her that he's now a graduate student in protozoology. Still, Kya doesn't respond, instead looking behind him to see if Chase is coming. This causes Tate to recall the fact that he saw Chase the week before at a local dance. Chase was dancing with another girl before taking a break to stand with some friends. As Chase stood there, Tate overheard him talking about Kya, calling her a "she-fox" and bragging about how "wild" she is.

Tate asks if he can come to Kya's shack to see her collection of feathers and shells. Instead of answering, Kya turns around and leaves, so Tate follows. When he sets eyes on the collection, he sees that it has grown magnificently, each specimen perfectly labeled and painted. Marveling, he tells her that she could publish multiple books with these illustrations, since scientific books documenting this aspect of the area are in demand. Because of this, Kya lets Tate take a sample to show to publishers, since he tells her that it could be a good way to make money without having to stop doing what she loves. Before Tate leaves, he touches Kya's shoulder and asks if she can forgive him, but she tells him she doesn't know how. Thanking her for listening, then, Tate leaves.

Finally, Tate tries to make amends with Kya. That he actually comes back to her is worth noting, since he is thus far the only person in Kya's life who has returned to apologize after abandoning her. However, Tate's failure to return back years ago has done a significant amount of emotional damage, which is why Kya is unable to simply accept him back into her life.



What Tate says about Chase isn't particularly surprising, given how clear it has become that Chase is primarily interested in having sex with Kya rather than actually establishing a loving and mutually rewarding relationship with her. However, because Tate himself has wronged Kya, he's hardly in a position to help her see Chase's flaws, having essentially given up his right to tell her anything about her own life.



In this moment, Tate's experience at the dance confirms any suspicion that Chase isn't interested in Kya for the right reasons. Instead of loving her like he says and appreciating her personality, he has fetishized the idea of having sex with a "wild" young woman who lives in the marsh and behaves like a "she-fox." And though Tate himself has wronged Kya, he deeply regrets it in a way that frames him as much more empathetic and kind than Chase, whose interest in Kya only perpetuates the prejudiced narratives about her that run throughout Barkley Cove.



Again, there's no doubt that Tate was wrong to abandon Kya. At the same time, though, he seems genuinely remorseful for what he's done, and he also demonstrates that he still cares about her by offering to show her illustrations to publishers. However, Kya has been hurt too many times by her loved ones to simply forget what Tate did by leaving her, so she finds herself unable to forgive him.



CHAPTER 28. THE SHRIMPER: 1969

Ed and Joe go to the Dog-Gone Beer Hall to listen to what the townspeople are saying about Chase's death. At one point, a shrimper named Hal Miller pulls Ed aside and tells him that he and some of his fellow crew members were coming into shore on the night of Chase's murder when they saw a boat speeding toward the fire tower. The person driving that boat, Hal thinks, was the "Marsh Girl."

Now that readers know that Kya and Chase had a relationship and that Chase cheated on her during this time, it seems overwhelmingly likely that Kya is in fact the person who murdered him. One of the only questions that remains, then, is whether or not Kya is actually the kind of person who would violently lash out at somebody for wronging her, though it's also possible that she killed Chase (if indeed this is what happened) out of necessity in a moment of self-defense.



CHAPTER 29. SEAWEED: 1967

Chase continues to visit Kya throughout the winter, occasionally talking about their future together. However, when Kya goes to Jumpin's one day for gas, she sees Chase standing with a group of his friends, his arm around a young blond woman. Upon seeing Kya, he immediately drops his arm. Kya doesn't want to go to them, but she has no choice but to walk toward them because they are directly in her path on the dock. Pleasantly enough, Chase says hello and introduces her to his friends, indicating that the one whom he had his arm around is named Pearl. His friends give Kya disinterested greetings before turning and walking away, at which point Chase says that he'll come see her on Sunday. After parting ways, Kya walks to the Piggly Wiggly and buys a newspaper because it has a headline about a new local biology lab.

Even though Kya now has ample evidence that Chase has been cheating on her, she continues to see him. This proves how desperately she yearns for human contact, even if this contact isn't as genuine as she'd like to think. For somebody who is quite individualistic, she ultimately sacrifices her own dignity simply to maintain her connection to a man who blatantly disrespects her.



At home, Kya opens the newspaper. Inside, there's an announcement that Chase is getting married to Pearl. As Kya stares at this in disbelief, she hears Chase's motor, so she quickly leaves the shack and hides in the trees until he gives up looking for her. Alone again, Kya walks to the beach and feeds the **gulls**, cursing in a rage.

Finally, Kya can no longer deny Chase's lack of respect for her. Now that he has officially announced his engagement to Pearl, there's no way for Kya to ignore the fact that he isn't exclusively in love with her. In fact, that Chase even allowed this announcement to run in the newspaper demonstrates that he views Kya as a completely separate part of his life, clearly assuming that he can do whatever he wants in Barkley Cove because Kya is isolated and will never find out.



CHAPTER 30. THE RIPS: 1967

After feeding the **gulls**, Kya jumps in her boat and goes as fast as she can toward the ocean, blasting into the open waters and making her way straight for an area known as “the rips,” where vicious currents churn and threatened to overcome anyone who enters them. With waves crashing over her boat, she feels no fear and even revels in the elemental tug of the natural world. Soon, though, Kya’s boat whips around, and fear creeps in as she loses her sense of equilibrium. She does all she can to save herself, somehow managing to beach her boat on a lone sandbar near the rapid currents. Flinging herself onto the sand, Kya pants, thinking about Chase and how everyone in her life has abandoned or rejected her.

Kya thinks once more that she must live a solitary life. With this in mind, she recites an Amanda Hamilton poem, which begins, “I must let go now. / Let you go.” As the sun sets, Kya looks at the shells on this small sandbar, appreciating them and recognizing that the waters will soon overtake this small sliver of land. Accordingly, she sets off once more, making her way toward safety.

CHAPTER 31. A BOOK: 1968

A year after the announcement of Chase and Pearl’s engagement, 22-year-old Kya receives an advance copy of her own book in the mail. The book is called *The Sea Shells of the Eastern Seaboard* and is full of her own illustrations and descriptions of the many shells she has found over the years. Kya’s editor, Robert Foster, was able to fast-track the publishing process because Kya had already completed the entirety of the book’s contents, and she already has plans to write another book about birds. Moreover, she has received \$5,000 as an advance payment—a staggering amount of money for her. Grateful for everything Tate did to help make this happen, Kya sits down to write him a letter, but she can’t find the right words to express her gratitude, since the money from the book will allow her to live a better life.

Tate has recently started working at the new biology lab that is nearby, and though Kya has seen him from afar, they haven’t interacted since he last came to her shack and suggested that she publish a book. When she finally finishes her thank-you letter, she includes a postscript that tells him to pay her a visit next time he’s in the area. The following week, she hires a man to make improvements on the shack, installing various new appliances including a toilet, a water heater, and a bathtub. At the same time, though, she makes sure to preserve the shack’s rustic integrity.

Reeling with emotional pain, Kya tries to distract herself by refocusing on the one thing she knows takes precedent over all else in life: survival. Because Kya’s immediate environment doesn’t pose a threat to her wellbeing, she seeks out danger by taking her boat to “the rips,” wanting to reframe her sorrow by making it seem insignificant in comparison to the power of the natural world and its ability to destroy her.



Once again, Kya has found that opening up to another human results in nothing but sorrow and pain. Accordingly, she makes yet another resolution to lead an independent, individualistic life, forcing herself to “let go” of connections to people like Chase (and for that matter, to Tate).



Kya finds it difficult to thank Tate because she has devoted herself to leading a solitary life, one in which she doesn’t depend upon other people. Despite this, there’s no denying that she has benefited from Tate’s kindness, and the fact that she’s made so much money as a result implies that sometimes putting faith in another person is actually worthwhile and beneficial. After all, Tate not only helped Kya find a publisher, but taught her how to read and write, ultimately making it possible for her to do this kind of work in the first place. Because this notion goes against Kya’s determination to lead an individualistic lifestyle, though, it is especially hard for her to express her gratitude to Tate.



That Kya not only manages to finish her thank-you letter but also invites Tate to visit her is noteworthy, since it suggests once again that she can’t help but embrace the possibility of human connection even though she has resolved to live an independent life.



One day, Jumpin' tells Kya that a group of developers plans to cut down trees and drain parts of the marsh to build hotels. Kya is terrified they'll encroach upon her land, since she doesn't know if her family ever legally owned the area surrounding her shack. To address this, she goes to the Barkley Cove courthouse to check the public records. To her surprise, she discovers that her grandfather bought the land in 1897. However, there are years of back taxes to be paid, and the courthouse clerk tells her that anyone who pays them will have rightful ownership of the land. Nervously, Kya asks how much it would be to pay off all of the taxes and is relieved to hear that it will only cost \$800 because the area is considered "waste-land." Using the earnings from her book, she pays the back taxes in full.

Tate visits Kya that afternoon, and she gives him a finished copy of her book. When he thanks her, she tells him that he's largely responsible for her newfound success. In response, Tate says he hopes Kya will reach out to him next time she sees him in the marsh, and she assures him that she will. Later, Kya goes to Jumpin's and gives him the book, thanking him and Mabel for all of their help over the years. Filled with emotion, Jumpin' wants to hug her but cannot, knowing that an old black man and a young white woman could get into trouble for showing affection in public. Instead, he puts the book on display in his shop, showing it off with the pride of a father.

Part of Kya's ability to lead an independent, self-sufficient life depends upon whether or not she can exist undisturbed by people outside of the marsh. Consequently, cementing her ownership over her land is crucial, ultimately enabling her to lead the life she wants because she doesn't have to worry about getting kicked out of her own home. Now, it seems, she can fully embody the kind of individualistic existence she has decided to embrace, though this doesn't change the fact that she clearly still yearns for some kind of human contact but doesn't yet know how to fit this into her otherwise autonomous lifestyle.



Slowly, Kya allows herself to feel fondly for the people in her life. Set against a backdrop of disappointment, mistreatment, and abandonment, her relationships begin to develop, and she learns to appreciate the various kindnesses that people like Jumpin', Mabel, and even Tate have done for her. Unfortunately, though, there are things that hold Kya back from fully expressing her emotion. With Tate, it is their rocky relational background that keeps her from completely rekindling their connection. With Jumpin', it is the racism and intolerance that runs throughout Barkley Cove and the South that make it harder for her to properly express just how much it means to her that Jumpin' and Mabel have treated her so well over the years.



CHAPTER 32. ALIBI: 1969

Ed and Joe are unable to track down Kya, but they learn from Jumpin' that she was out of town on the night of Chase's murder. When Jumpin' tells Joe this, Tate happens to be in the bait shop, and he corroborates the story. Apparently, Kya was in Greenville on the night Chase died because she had a meeting with her editor. Because of this, Ed and Joe realize that Kya has a good alibi, though they also have conflicting stories, given that Hal Miller told them he saw her driving her boat toward the fire tower on the very night of Chase's death. And yet, Miss Pansy Price visits the police station and tells them that she and her coworkers at a local shop—which looks out over the bus station—saw Kya board the bus for Greenville two days before Chase's death and return the day after.

Again, it isn't clear yet whether or not Kya is a legitimate suspect in the case of Chase's murder. Although their relationship seems to have ended on an unamicable note, it would be surprising if she killed him simply to get revenge on him for cheating on her. After all, there has been very little evidence that Kya is a violent person, though it does seem plausible that she would resort to violence as a way of protecting herself. However, Kya was apparently out of town on the night of Chase's death, rendering it unlikely that she would have needed to resort to violence in order to defend herself from him, since she was hours away.



CHAPTER 33. THE SCAR: 1968

By the winter of 1968, Kya has already finished her book about birds and is working on another about mushrooms. As she sits at the table in her shack working on her illustrations, she hears a truck approaching but doesn't have time to run away. Stuck, she sees a man in a military uniform step out of the truck and make his way onto the porch. When she sees him up close, she recognizes a scar on his face and knows instantly that it's Jodie, whom Pa once slashed across the face with a fire poker when Jodie tried to protect Ma from his wrath. When Jodie enters the shack, he sees Kya's collection of shells and feathers and smiles, saying that he saw her book in a store. He then tells her that he did two tours in Vietnam before getting a degree in mechanical engineering.

Jodie apologizes to Kya for abandoning her, saying that he shouldn't have left her with their violent father. She accepts his apology and reminds him that he was only a kid, but he insists that he should have come back, though he assumed that she too ran away. Going on, he tells her that he doesn't know the whereabouts of their siblings, but that he found out some news about Ma. Apparently, Ma's sister contacted Jodie last week and told him that their mother died two years ago. She also told him that Ma was in the middle of a mental breakdown when she left home, at which point she returned to New Orleans to live with her parents. For months, Ma said nothing at all, locking herself in a room in her parents' home. A year later, she realized she'd abandoned her children, and her mental health further deteriorated.

Ma's sister helped her write a letter to Pa, Jodie tells Kya. The letter implored him to let their children come to New Orleans to live with her, but he never responded. As Jodie tells this to Kya, Kya remembers her father receiving this letter and burning it before going back to his alcoholic lifestyle. In the ensuing years, Jodie says, Ma only ever talked about her children, but she was afraid that Pa might hurt them if she ever tried to contact them, since Pa wrote to her saying that if she ever reached out again, he would beat them senseless. This is why Ma disappeared and never tried to come back, and Jodie adds that she didn't leave them for another man or anything like that, but because she had been "driven to madness" and didn't know what she was doing.

Jodie is now the second person in Kya's life to return after having initially abandoned her. In this regard, he follows in Tate's footsteps, showing Kya that not everyone who leaves her behind has forgotten about her. This is an important message, since it suggests that Kya's loved ones still care about her even though she has assumed that they must not truly love her. In turn, she will now have to reconsider the relational dynamics that have so thoroughly defined her life and informed individualistic worldview.



It's surprising that Kya forgives Jodie for abandoning her, considering that she threw rocks at Tate when he came to apologize for doing the same thing. Upon further reflection, though, it becomes clear that Jodie left Kya for entirely different reasons. Indeed, he ran away from home not because he didn't want to be with Kya, but because he was trying to protect himself from Pa's violent ways. As someone who has been forced to fight for her own survival, Kya can understand her brother's act of self-preservation, whereas she finds it harder to empathize with Tate's selfish decision to disappear, which had nothing to do with survival. Furthermore, the news about Ma that Tate delivers contextualizes the circumstances surrounding her departure, and though it is undoubtedly hard for Kya to hear that her mother is dead, at least she now knows that Ma wouldn't have abandoned her if she'd been thinking clearly.



This new information about Ma is important because it will most likely help Kya come to terms with her feelings of abandonment. Ma was the first person in Kya's life to leave without notice, so it's quite meaningful to learn that she wasn't particularly cogent or clear-headed when she made this decision. Knowing this will perhaps help Kya accept that her mother was acting on a fundamental instinct, one that drove her away from Pa to ensure her own safety. Simply put, Ma didn't want to leave Kya behind.



Jodie tells Kya that Ma died of leukemia, which might have been treatable if she hadn't refused medication. Instead of trying to get better, Ma became frail and succumbed to the illness. Having said this, Jodie brings Kya out to his truck and shows her a collection of oil paintings that Ma did while living in New Orleans. This, Jodie says, is all Ma did with her time, painting the marsh and her children over and over. One painting in particular catches Kya's eye. In it, Kya crouches over a butterfly while a slightly older boy shows her something about its wings, one hand touching her arm. This boy, Jodie says, is Tate. When Kya asks why Ma would paint Tate, Jodie explains that Tate used to come around quite often. Once, he even tried to defend Kya against Pa, and Pa hit him in the face.

When Jodie asks Kya about her life and how she learned to read, she tells him about Tate. Over dinner, they fill each other in on their lives, and Jodie asks if he can stay for several days. The next evening, Jodie notices how many of Kya's stories involve Tate, so he asks about their relationship. When she tells him what happened between them, Jodie urges her to forgive Tate, saying that he seems genuinely sorry for leaving her. It was, after all, seven years ago, Jodie says, pointing out that Tate is back now and wants to make things right. Though Kya doesn't necessarily agree with Jodie, he urges her to give Tate a chance if she loves him. Before Jodie leaves the next day, he reiterates this idea and says he'll come by whenever he can, since he doesn't live very far away.

CHAPTER 34. SEARCH THE SHACK: 1969

Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Joe return once more to Kya's shack to find it empty. This time, though, they have a warrant, meaning that they can enter and search for evidence that she murdered Chase. As they look around, Joe gets distracted by Kya's impressive collection of feathers and shells, admiring the illustrations. At first, they don't find anything important, but then Joe finds a red hat hanging on a coatrack. When Ed holds the hat up next to the plastic baggy full of the red fibers found on Chase's coat, the colors match.

It is especially sad that Ma died because she refused medication, since this suggests that she had given up her will to live after fighting so hard and making such monumental sacrifices throughout her life to survive. However, Kya doesn't dwell on this thought because she's too distracted by the painting of herself and Tate, which shows her that he has been an integral part of her life for much longer than she ever knew. In this moment, Kya realizes that her connection with Tate is stronger than any other relationship she's ever had.



With Jodie's return, Kya regains one of her lost loved ones, ultimately proving that not everyone from her past has abandoned her forever. Now that Kya has recognized this, one might think she would forgive Tate, which is exactly what Jodie urges her to do. However, this is easier said than done, especially since Jodie abandoned Kya out of necessity, whereas Tate left her behind for entirely selfish reasons that had nothing to do with survival. Consequently, it will be harder for Kya to let Tate back into her life in the same way that she embraces Jodie.



As the narrative progresses, it seems increasingly likely that, even if she didn't murder Chase herself, Kya had something to do with his death. However, it remains unclear why this might be the case, since Kya hasn't yet proven herself to be especially violent, though it's worth noting that she sees self-protection and survival as justifiable and ubiquitous throughout nature. If Chase happened to put her in a position in which she had to kill him or risk her own wellbeing, then, it's plausible that she would respond violently.



CHAPTER 35. THE COMPASS: 1969

In the summer of 1969—shortly after she receives the final copy of her second book—Kya finds a milk carton on the stump where Tate used to leave feathers for her. Inside the carton she finds a beautiful old compass and a note from Tate explaining that it was his grandfather’s in World War I. He says that he thought Kya could make good use of it and signs his letter with the word “love.” This delights Kya, though she still can’t bring herself to make things right with Tate, despite Jodie’s advice to forgive him. That evening, Kya sees Tate in the marsh but doesn’t approach, simply watching until he passes. Later, she recites an Amanda Hamilton poem about sunsets, which the poet believes disguise both “truths” and “lies.”

When Kya recites an Amanda Hamilton poem that examines “truth” and “lies,” readers see that she’s still unsure of what to think about the fact that Tate has apologized for abandoning her. Even though Tate claims that leaving Kya was the worst decision of his life, she doesn’t know if she can trust him. After all, he promised never to abandon her, but this is exactly what he did. Furthermore, Chase also made a number of promises that he failed to keep, effectively teaching Kya to distrust her loved ones’ intentions. Accordingly, Kya keeps her distance from Tate even though she clearly wants to reestablish their connection.



CHAPTER 36. TO TRAP A FOX: 1969

Ed and Joe send the hat from Kya’s cabin to the lab. When the results come back, they confirm that the hat matches the fibers found on Chase’s coat. Reviewing the evidence against Kya, they note that Hal Miller saw her take her boat to the fire tower on the night of Chase’s death. They also recall that Patti Love told them Kya made Chase a **shell necklace**, and that this necklace disappeared the night he died. However, they aren’t sure about Kya’s motive. As they try to decide what to do next, Rodney Horn enters and tells them he saw Kya and Chase in a place called Cypress Cove in August. After he tells his story and leaves, Joe and Ed think they’ve formulated a reason why Kya would want to kill Chase, so they decide to bring her in for questioning.

As the evidence stacks up against Kya, readers—and Ed and Joe, too—are left wondering why she would want to kill Chase. Because she hasn’t exhibited many violent tendencies, it’s hard to imagine the circumstances that would lead her to kill Chase, even if he did wrong her by marrying Pearl. This sense of mystery sustains the narrative, inviting readers to scrutinize Kya’s behavior, which has thus far only illustrated that she’s a lonely young woman who wants to be loved but also wants to ensure her own survival and wellbeing. Now, though, it seems there’s new information to suggest that she’s guilty, though Owens doesn’t reveal the underlying truth quite yet.



CHAPTER 37. GRAY SHARKS: 1969

Shortly before Christmas, Kya goes to Jumpin’s earlier than usual because she knows that Ed and Joe might be looking for her, since they’ve been poking around her shack recently. As Kya approaches, she sees Jumpin’ very subtly shake his head, so she abruptly turns her boat around and speeds in the other direction, but it’s too late, and she finds herself facing two police boats. However, she tries to escape them by roaring between them, and though she makes it through, they eventually catch up to her and force her to stop, telling her that she’s under arrest for the murder of Chase Andrews.

In this scene, it’s hard to tell why, exactly, Kya tries to escape from the police. On the one hand, this makes her look even more guilty than she already did, since most people would only try to run away if they’d done something wrong. On the other hand, though, Kya has spent her entire life hiding from strangers as a means of self-preservation, so the fact that she tries to evade Ed and Joe isn’t particularly out of character. On another note, it’s worth pointing out that Jumpin’ tries to save Kya by shaking his head, a reminder that he is one of the few people she can count on to help her when she’s in trouble.



CHAPTER 38. SUNDAY JUSTICE: 1970

It has been two months since Kya was arrested. Having spent this time in a jail cell, she's desperate to look out the window as the jailers take her to sit next to her attorney, Tom Milton, in the courtroom. Although she doesn't turn to look, she can feel the imposing presence of the many people who have come to watch her trial, knowing that they relish seeing her in handcuffs. Feeling her nervousness, Tom tries to distract Kya from worrying about everybody watching her. For the past couple of months, he has spent his time visiting her in jail and trying to build a defense, though this has been difficult because Kya was initially unwilling to say much to him—unwilling, that is, until he brought her a book about shells, which encouraged her to open up a bit.

Judge Sims announces that the state prosecutors will be seeking the death penalty if Kya is found guilty. He then asks the jury members if any of them have concerns about their ability to be objective. Mrs. Culpepper—the truancy officer—raises her hand. When she does so, Kya remembers a time when Mrs. Culpepper came to bring her to school. Her partner parked and went searching while Mrs. Culpepper stayed in the car. Easily confusing the man (sending him running in the wrong direction), Kya looped back to the car and scratched the door with a branch, catching Mrs. Culpepper's eyes through the window. Kya thought at that moment that she detected a faint smile on Mrs. Culpepper's face, and Mrs. Culpepper didn't say anything when her partner returned. Now, Judge Sims asks her if she can make a judgment based only on evidence, and she says yes.

When Kya enters the courtroom and feels as if the townspeople are happy to see her in handcuffs, readers come to sense the extent to which she has been ostracized by society. Indeed, it's apparent that the people of Barkley Cove are all too eager to think the worst of Kya simply because she is different. For years, they have spoken disparagingly about her, calling her the "Marsh Girl" and telling tall tales about her life. Now, as Kya enters the courtroom, these prejudices are palpably present and threaten to inform the way the jury rules on the case.



The vast majority of people in Barkley Cove are unsympathetic toward Kya because she's different—a daunting fact, since many of these people make up the jury that will decide Kya's fate. Mrs. Culpepper, however, seems to have a soft spot for Kya's wily intelligence and craftiness. Although it was her job to make sure that Kya conformed to the rules of society by attending school, she managed to recognize that Kya was an independent and smart child. As a result, it seems as if there will be at least one juror capable of putting unfair assumptions aside in order to determine whether or not Kya is guilty.



CHAPTER 39. CHASE BY CHANCE: 1969

In August of 1969, Kya takes her boat to a peninsula called Cypress Cove to work on her mushroom book. As she works, Chase comes up behind her and says, "Well, look who's here. My Marsh Girl." When she turns, he says that he saw her while he was fishing and figured he'd say hello. In response, she asks him to leave, but he doesn't, instead putting his hand on her and saying he's sorry about what happened between them. She yells at him, telling him not to touch her, but he persists, saying that she should have known that they'd never be able to get married, since she wouldn't fit into life outside the marsh. He then says nobody will ever be like her, and he gets closer despite her repeated request to be left alone.

Readers already know that Rodney Horn will eventually tell Ed and Joe that something has happened between Chase and Kya at Cypress Cove—something that makes it seem like Kya would have a reason to murder Chase. As Chase approaches Kya now, then, readers brace for some sort of altercation, especially when Chase refuses to back off when Kya asks to be left alone. In this moment, it's clear that Chase doesn't care if he makes Kya uncomfortable. After all, he has only ever cared about what he wants out of their interactions.



Chase takes Kya by the shoulders, and she screams to be let go. When he tries to kiss her, she knocks his hands away and leans back, yelling at him. “There’s my lynx,” he says. “Wilder than ever.” With this, he forces her to the ground and puts himself on top of her. She begs him to stop, but he knees her in the stomach and unzips his jeans. Still, she tries to stand, but he punches her in the face and then holds her down. Just when he’s about to rape her, she summons an elemental strength and rises up, pushing him off and hitting him in the face until he falls, at which point she kicks him in the groin and kidneys. Frantically fastening her shorts, she gets into her boat and motors away, making eye contact with two staring fishermen as she goes.

If it wasn't already clear that Chase only cares about his own desires, it becomes painfully obvious when he tries to rape Kya. That he would do this to anybody—let alone someone he claimed to love—demonstrates his violent cruelty. Unfortunately, his behavior also confirms once more to Kya that it's dangerous to let people into her life, since doing so has only ever led to turmoil and pain. And though Kya thankfully escapes, she's forced to live with the grave emotional implications that come along with such aggressive and traumatic encounters.



CHAPTER 40. CYPRESS COVE: 1970

After a short break for lunch, Eric Chastain—the prosecutor—calls his first witness to the stand. The witness is Rodney Horn, who testifies that he was fishing on August 30th when he and another fisherman heard a commotion coming from Cypress Cove. Getting closer, they heard a woman shouting. By the time they got close enough to see what was happening, he says, they saw the woman kick the man in the groin and then in the back. That woman, Rodney asserts, was Kya, though he calls her the “Marsh Girl”—a phrase Judge Sims rejects, instructing Rodney to call Kya “Miss Clark.” Going on, Rodney says that Chase Andrews was the man Kya was kicking. Furthermore, he claims that Kya shouted, “Leave me alone, you bastard! You bother me again, I’ll kill ya!”

Rodney Horn's use of the name “Marsh Girl” reveals that he's already biased against Kya simply because of the narrative about her that prevails in Barkley Cove. Thankfully, Judge Sims tries to correct this by insisting that Rodney use her proper name, but this most likely does little to change the way Rodney—and, in turn, the majority of the jury members—see Kya. In this way, the town's prejudiced view of Kya and her lifestyle threatens to impact the outcome of her trial.



When Eric finishes questioning Rodney, Tom takes the floor and asks several questions, getting Rodney to establish that Kya’s screams could have been a sign that Chase was attacking her. Going on, Rodney admits that it’s possible that Kya was simply defending herself against Chase, who was burly and athletic.

In this moment, Tom tries to reframe the perception of Kya that Rodney has just provided. Instead of seeing her as a wild and uncontrollable “Marsh Girl,” he attempts to show the jury that Kya is just a human who was trying to protect herself from danger. Indeed, what he wants Rodney to admit is that Kya may have been fighting for her own survival, not trying to harm Chase for no reason.



CHAPTER 41. A SMALL HERD: 1969

Having escaped from Chase, Kya worries that he’ll come back for her. Despite her fear, she decides not to tell anyone about what happened because she doesn’t want the authorities to find out. After all, the police would believe Chase over the “Marsh Girl.” Thinking this way, Kya avoids going to Jumpin’s for as long as she can and spends the next few nights in the cabin that she and Tate used to visit to read. This cabin is much different than it used to be, since Tate has recently started using it as a place to stay when he’s out in the field doing research. Accordingly, he has fixed it up and even put a bed inside, which Kya uses while in hiding from Chase.

Kya doesn't go to the police because she doesn't think they would believe her when she told them that Chase tried to rape her. This is a perfect example of the fact that the town's prejudiced ideas about her negatively impact her safety and wellbeing. Rather than using resources that are supposed to be available to anyone who needs them, she shies away from the police and forces herself into isolation, forced once again to rely on herself to ensure her own safety.



Living in the remote cabin, Kya suddenly understands why Ma left, and she feels sad that she was unable to do anything to help. Determining not to live her life in fear, she returns to her shack, though she still puts off going to Jumpin's for as long as possible. While sitting on the porch that evening, Kya watches two praying mantises mate. As the insects have sex, the female praying mantis turns around and bites the male's head off. Despite this, the male continues to mate with her, his lower half still working even as she chews and swallows his head.

Now that Kya has experienced physical abuse from a (former) lover, she finds herself capable of more thoroughly understanding why her mother left home. Rather than letting this experience plunge her into a permanent state of fear and helplessness, though, she decides to focus on the power dynamics that come along with sex appeal—something she has observed in nature while watching the merciless practices of certain female insects. Given that Kya later stands accused of murdering Chase, her interest in the female praying mantis's method of devouring her mate is rather portentous, suggesting that she might like the idea of using her powers of attraction to destroy Chase.



CHAPTER 42. A CELL: 1970

The county jail is attached to the courthouse and is where Kya has been staying ever since Ed and Joe arrested her at Jumpin's. Since then, she has languished in the half-darkness of the cell, yearning for the outdoors. When she stands on a crate, she can just barely see out the one window and turn her head toward the marsh. As she does this, she remembers an Amanda Hamilton poem about a **gull** with a broken wing, which ends with the couplet, "A broken heart cannot fly, / But who decides the time to die?"

Perhaps the worst thing for Kya about spending two months in jail is the fact that she's forced into isolation but doesn't get to enjoy the kind of freedom that she normally associates with being alone. For somebody who covets her individualistic lifestyle but also yearns for human connection, this is the worst possible combination. Left to her own devices, she has nothing to do but think about the marsh and recite poems about death, clearly considering the fact that a jury will ultimately decide whether or not she lives.



CHAPTER 43. A MICROSCOPE: 1969

A week after Chase attacks Kya, she receives an invitation to meet her editor in Greenville, since he'll be there for business. While in the marsh one day, Kya encounters Tate and momentarily panics because she doesn't want him to see what Chase did to her face. Because there's no way to avoid Tate's boat, though, she drifts up to him and he invites her onboard to see his new microscope. As they talk, Kya keeps one side of her head turned away. When Tate shows her a slide of pond water under the microscope, she can't believe her eyes and appreciates how many tiny creatures and organisms she can see. As she does this, Tate admires how thoroughly in touch she is with the natural world.

Again, readers watch as Kya keeps herself from getting too close to Tate again, afraid that he'll hurt her once more. At the same time, though, she can't quite resist spending time with him, though this means hiding her wounds from him because she knows he'd probably want to address what happened if he knew what Chase did to her. And because Kya is sure that very few people would take her side on this issue, she decides that it'd be easier if Tate simply remained unaware of the entire incident, effectively distancing one of the few people who genuinely wants to help her.



Eventually, Tate sees Kya's bruised face and asks what happened, and she tells him that she ran into a door in the night. Instantly, he knows this is a lie, intuiting that somebody must have hit her and that it must have been Chase, though he doesn't know if they're still seeing each other. Aware that his concern will drive Kya away, though, he asks her about her current book project, and she tells him that she's going to meet her editor at the end of October. Hearing this, Tate tells her to go to Jumpin's to look at the bus schedule. She thanks him and prepares to go, but before she leaves, he insists that she take his red hat because it's cold. At first, Kya declines, but Tate throws it into her boat. For a moment, they pass it back and forth before Kya speeds away.

After leaving Tate, Kya goes to the beach near her shack. As she relaxes, she hears the distinct sound of Chase's motorboat, and she knows she has to leave. From dealing with Pa, she understands that men like Chase always need to have the final say in an argument. Since Kya left him keeled over in the sand the last time they saw each other, Chase surely wants revenge. Getting in her boat, Kya motors away and hides until Chase leaves the area. That night, she sleeps on the beach, ready to jump up and leave at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER 44. CELL MATE: 1970

Tom Milton comes to visit Kya in jail after her first day in court. He explains that they should discuss her "options," saying that, though he doesn't know what the jury will decide, she will face the death penalty—or at the very least life in prison—if they find her guilty. Because of this, Tom wants to know if Kya would be willing to say that she did indeed meet Chase at the fire tower, but that he fell to his death in an accident. Tom says that this confession would end the trial, and she would most likely only be sentenced to 10 years in prison. Hearing this, Kya tells him that she would never say anything to imply that she's guilty.

Tate's concern for Kya is quite genuine, but he knows that she'll retreat from him if he makes a big deal about her injury. This illustrates just how well he knows her, in addition to the fact that he's a very sensitive and caring person. On another note, it's worth pointing out that the red hat that eventually becomes evidence against Kya in Chase's murder trial appears in this scene, but it's unclear whether or not Kya ends up taking it home or if she manages to throw it in Tate's boat before leaving. In this way, Owens invites readers to question if Tate is perhaps the one who really killed Chase.



After Chase attempts to rape Kya, she is on high alert, constantly looking out for the slightest sign that he has come back to harm her. As a result, it becomes clear that Kya is in survival mode, feeling as if there's an imminent threat to her safety. Considering that she prizes survival over all else and even thinks of violence in nature as a necessary means of self-preservation, the fact that she feels threatened by Chase aligns with the notion that she might kill him to protect herself.



Kya's unwillingness to take a plea deal to ensure that she won't receive the death penalty suggests that she's telling the truth about her innocence, since she's the kind of person who would normally do anything to avoid dying. However, it's also in line with her character to reject the possibility of spending 10 years in prison, since this would be a torturous existence for somebody who has lived a life of freedom in the wilderness. As a result, it still remains unclear whether or not she killed Chase. The only thing that is clear, it seems, is that she's in a very difficult situation.



Jacob, the jailer, leads Kya back to her cell, where she finds a package from Jumpin' including paints, brushes, and paper, along with some muffins. As Jacob tries to convince her to eat more (saying that she has hardly had anything to eat as a prisoner), he opens the door that leads to the rest of the courthouse. Just when he does this, the courthouse cat, Sunday Justice, slips into the row of jail cells and finds his way to Kya, squeezing through the bars and curling up in her lap. All of a sudden, Kya is at peace, stroking Sunday Justice and listening to him purr. He stays with her that night, and it's the first time in a long while that she actually manages to get good sleep. Because of this, she asks Jacob to let Sunday Justice into the cells whenever he sees him, and Jacob agrees.

The next day, Tate comes to visit Kya in jail. It's not the first time he's come, but Kya has refused to see him until now. Because Jacob encourages Kya, though, she agrees to speak with Tate. When Kya is sitting across from Tate in the visiting room, he tells her that he sat right behind her in court, though she didn't turn around to notice. He also promises to be in that exact spot for every day of her trial. When she's finally released, he says, they can explore the marsh together. Hearing this, Kya urges Tate to forget her because she'll never fit in with the rest of the world. For this reason, she says, she's too afraid to get close to another person ever again. Tate begins to protest, but she reminds him that everyone in her life—including him—has abandoned her.

Knowing not to argue with her, Tate tells Kya that he understands why she doesn't want to grow close with anyone. He then changes the subject by telling her he's been feeding the **gulls** near her shack, and that a Cooper's hawk landed right in front of her porch the other day. This brings a smile to Kya's face, so Tate promises to keep feeding the birds and to bring her books to read.

CHAPTER 45. RED CAP: 1970

During the next day of Kya's trial, there is a disruption in the courthouse when Jumpin' and Mabel walk into the "white area" of the seating and sit next to Tate, directly behind Kya. When the bailiff tells Judge Sims what has happened, Sims forces him to make an announcement that anybody can sit anywhere in his courthouse and that if there are people who dislike this, they can leave. Hearing this and seeing Mabel and Jumpin', Kya experiences a rare feeling of hope and resilience.

One of the most devastating things for Kya about spending so much time cooped in a cell is the fact that she can't interact with nature and animals in the way that she's so used to doing. For this reason, she finds great comfort in Sunday Justice's company, finally feeling as if she has a companion who not only ties her back to her life in the wilderness of the marsh, but also a form of support. And though Kya focuses on Sunday Justice, it's worth noting that Jacob is also quite supportive, since he's the one who allows Sunday Justice to spend time with her in the first place—a sign that he cares about making Kya as happy as possible.



In this scene, Tate's devotion to Kya shows readers that she isn't quite as alone as she thinks. After all, he has promised to sit behind her for as long as the trial takes. However, Kya doesn't let herself embrace this kind of support because she has been hurt too many times by people she trusted. In fact, she's only on trial for murder because she allowed herself to become close with Chase—a decision that ultimately led to this terrible situation.



Although Kya refuses to rekindle her relationship with Tate, he remains a supportive presence in her life. In a way, he is making up for having abandoned her, and though it's unclear whether or not she'll ever let herself trust him again, he insists upon helping her in any way he can. As a result, it seems as if Tate genuinely wants to make Kya's life better, regardless of whether or not this convinces her to let herself develop feelings for him again.



Again, Barkley Cove's racism and intolerance comes to the forefront of the novel, as people are scandalized simply because Jumpin' and Mabel want to sit near Kya to show their support. That Judge Sims scolds the spectators for making a big deal out of this is significant, since it suggests that he has no tolerance for discrimination—a fact that might bring itself to bear on Kya's trial, since Kya herself faces certain forms of prejudice.



Eric calls his second witness to the stand. His name is Dr. Steward Cone, the coroner who examined Chase's corpse. Throughout the questioning, Eric establishes not only that Chase died between midnight and two in the morning on October 30th, but that Dr. Cone found a collection of red fibers on his coat. These fibers, Eric demonstrates, match the red hat that Ed and Joe found in Kya's home. Once he establishes this, he cedes the floor to Tom, who asks Dr. Cone how long these fibers could have clung to Chase's coat. Following this line of questioning, he gets Dr. Cone to make clear that the fibers could have been attached to the coat for as long as four years. Tom also manages to get Dr. Cone to say that Chase's injuries made no indication that anyone pushed him through the hole in the tower.

Tom's main line of defense is to establish that none of the points Eric brings up during the prosecution serve as concrete evidence that Kya murdered Chase. In keeping with this, he proves that the red fibers found on Chase's coat don't actually implicate Kya at all, since they could have rubbed off on him as long as four years ago. However, what readers know that nobody else does is that Kya didn't have the red hat until shortly before Chase's death, since Tate gave it to her not long after Chase attempted to rape her. Still, without any actual facts, it's impossible to say whether or not Kya killed Chase, let alone why she would do this in the first place.



CHAPTER 46. KING OF THE WORLD: 1969

In October of 1969, Kya goes to Jumpin's to look at the bus schedule. As she copies down the times, she tells him that she's thinking of meeting her editor in Greenville. At one point, Jumpin' looks closely at Kya's face and asks what happened, and she realizes that the bruise from where Chase punched her hasn't faded as much as she hoped, so she lies and says that she ran into a door. However, Jumpin' tells her not to deceive him, pressing her to tell him who hit her. Finally, he guesses that it was Chase, and she admits that it was. This infuriates Jumpin', but Kya implores him not to tell anybody, especially the sheriff. Still, Jumpin' insists that something has to be done to teach him a lesson, though Kya reminds him that nobody will get a man like Chase in trouble for assaulting the "Marsh Girl."

Once again, readers see the ways in which the various prejudices against Kya interfere with her life, this time preventing her from going to the authorities in the aftermath of Chase's violence toward her. In the absence of institutional support, then, Kya has Jumpin' and Tate, though both of them know better than to act on her behalf, respecting her autonomy by letting her respond how she wants to this unfortunate event.



CHAPTER 47. THE EXPERT: 1970

In the courtroom, Eric questions Ed, who recounts finding Chase's body and explains why he thinks the young man's death wasn't an accident, emphasizing that there were no footprints surrounding his body. Furthermore, there were no fingerprints on the fire tower, indicating that somebody wiped the scene of the crime clean. When it's Tom's turn to question Ed, he points out that Chase's footprints might have been washed away by the rising tide, since this often happens in the marsh. Considering this possibility, Ed agrees that it could have happened. Furthermore, Tom shows the jury the tide table for the night Chase died, and it reveals that the tide would have risen at some point after his fall. He then criticizes Ed for not experimenting to see if it would be possible for a set of footprints to completely disappear with the tides.

While questioning Ed, Tom destabilizes his credibility by scolding him for jumping to conclusions. Indeed, the prosecution's main evidence in this case is actually the absence of evidence, since Ed has based his suspicions not on clear indications that Kya killed Chase, but on the fact that there were no fingerprints or footprints at the scene of the alleged crime. That Ed and his colleagues use this lack of concrete evidence to suggest Kya killed Chase only emphasizes how eager they are to pin the murder on the easiest possible target—which is, of course, Kya.



Going on, Tom shows the jury a letter written to the U.S. Forest Service several months before Chase's death. The letter urges the Forest Service to either close the fire tower or make the hatches safer, stating that somebody might fall through the hatches and die because they're left open so frequently. When Tom asks Ed who wrote this letter, the sheriff is forced to admit that it was him.

Tom further attacks Ed's logic by showing the jury that the sheriff himself has long been worried about an accident like this taking place. Now that it has happened, though, Ed has rashly drawn conclusions about Kya, getting swept up in the excitement of placing blame on an outsider and basing the majority of his suspicions on her mysterious reputation as the "Marsh Girl."



CHAPTER 48. A TRIP: 1969

Kya goes to Jumpin's on the morning of October 28th, 1969. She says farewell because Jumpin' had asked her to check in before and after her trip, and then she goes to the bus stop and waits to board. Kya returns several days later and takes her boat home as everyone watches her, wondering why the "Marsh Girl" left the marsh. The next morning, she visits Jumpin' to tell him that she's back. When she arrives, Jumpin' informs her that Chase Andrews died while she was in Greenville, and he tells her that the entire town is deeply unsettled. He also mentions that the sheriff thinks that Chase might have been murdered. Hearing this, Kya asks why he thinks this, and Jumpin' explains that Chase's **shell necklace** was missing when Sheriff Jackson found him. This mention of the necklace makes Kya's mouth parched, but she says nothing.

Kya has a rather solid alibi to prove that she didn't kill Chase, since she went to Greenville before he died and didn't come back until after he was murdered. However, the fact that her mouth goes dry when Jumpin' mentions the disappearance of the shell necklace should give readers pause, since it suggests that this piece of information has unnerved her, perhaps because it ties her to the crime. At the same time, though, it's possible that she simply doesn't like hearing about the shell necklace because it reminds her of a time when she felt strongly for Chase and trusted him enough to let him into her life.



CHAPTER 49. DISGUISES: 1970

In court, Eric calls a new witness to the stand. This man is the driver of the Trailways bus, which operates between Barkley Cove and Greenville. He is also the driver who was on duty the night that Chase died. Answering Eric's questions, the driver confirms that it would have been possible for Kya to take the bus to Greenville in the daytime, then bus back to Barkley Cove at night, kill Chase, and return to Greenville on the final bus. Moving on, the bus driver says—at Eric's urging—that there was a thin passenger on the 11:50 p.m. bus on the night of Chase's murder. Although this passenger appeared to be a skinny man, the driver says that it's *possible* it could have been Kya in disguise.

The driver's testimony threatens to upend Kya's alibi by suggesting that she might not have actually been in Greenville when Chase died. If this is true, though, there arises a question: would she really go so far out of her way—creating false alibis, dressing in disguises—just to take revenge on Chase? On the one hand, this meticulous devotion to violence doesn't necessarily accord with her identity as a rather meek person who likes to keep to herself. On the other hand, though, readers have already seen that she believes in using whatever power is available to her to protect herself from anything that might pose a threat to her wellbeing. With these two considerations in mind, then, it remains unclear whether or not Kya killed Chase.



When Tom questions the driver of the 11:50 p.m. bus from Greenville to Barkley Cove, he asks if he's sure that the skinny passenger was Kya dressed up as a man. Somewhat disoriented, the driver admits that, now that he thinks about it, he doesn't think he can recall accurately enough to say whether or not Kya was really on the bus. He also notes that he felt surer of this possibility when he initially spoke to Ed, who helped "jog" his memory. Now, though, it seems too hard to say one way or the other.

Once Tom sits back down, Eric calls his next witness—the driver of 2:30 a.m. bus from Barkley Cove to Greenville. There are no other buses between 11:50 p.m. and 2:30 a.m., so Kya would have had to murder Chase in this window of time. Eric asks the driver of the 2:30 a.m. bus if it's possible that Kya was on his bus disguised as a small old woman. "Yes, I guess," the driver replies. When Tom approaches the bench for cross-examination, he says that the word "guess" has no place in a murder trial. The only questions he asks is whether or not the driver saw Kya on the bus, and the driver says that he did not.

CHAPTER 50. THE JOURNAL: 1970

In the courtroom the next day, Kya experiences a moment of hope and private joy upon seeing Jodie, who is sitting next to Tate, Mabel, and Jumpin'. At the same time, though, Kya feels ashamed that he now knows she's on trial for murder. However, there isn't much time to dwell on such thoughts, since Eric calls Patti Love—his next witness—to the stand. Looking at Chase's mother, Kya feels foolish for letting herself think that the woman would ever have accepted her as a daughter-in-law. The conversation that follows between Patti Love and Eric has to do with Chase's **necklace** and how it disappeared on the night of his death. Eric also holds up a small book that Kya once gave Chase, and Patti Love explains that the pages contain illustrations of their relationship together. In one illustration, Kya gives Chase the necklace atop the fire tower.

Either intentionally or not, when the driver says that Ed helped "jog" his memory, he gives the jury the impression that the sheriff asked him leading questions. In other words, Ed's investigation comes to seem biased against Kya, perhaps because Ed himself has bought into the mysterious lore surrounding Kya and her alternative lifestyle.



Once again, Tom frames the prosecution's arguments against Kya as nothing more than biased speculation. Given that Kya's life is on the line, he implies, the jury should not base their judgment on a bus driver's best "guess" as to what happened on the night of Chase's death. By pointing this out, Tom reminds the jury to approach the case with objectivity instead of falling prey to various biases and prejudices that people have about Kya.



One unexpected benefit of Kya's trial is that it shows her once and for all who supports her. When she enters the courtroom, she has a visual representation of the fact that there really are people in her life who care about her, since Jodie, Tate, Mabel, and Jumpin' have all taken the time to sit right behind her in a show of solidarity. Unfortunately for her, though, this does little to make up for what Patti Love tells Eric, since the illustration of Kya and Chase on the fire tower is—it seems—quite incriminating.



CHAPTER 51. WANING MOON: 1970

Kya's trial slowly unfolds, and as it does, she observes the various power dynamics at play, recognizing certain similarities between nature and the legal process. Eric questions Hal Miller, the shrimper who claims to have seen her driving her boat toward the fire tower on the night of Chase's murder. When Tom cross-examines Hal, though, he destabilizes the man's certainty, getting him to admit that it was dark and that the boat was far away. As this line of questioning unfolds, Sunday Justice jumps down from his perch on the windowsill and curls in Kya's lap. Eric, for his part, wants to make an objection because this development might make the jury unduly sympathetic toward Kya, but he says nothing because there are no rules forbidding such a thing.

Even in the lifeless environment of the courtroom, Kya manages to find a sense of connection to nature. Not only does she recognize similarities between the power dynamics in court and those that play out in the animal kingdom, but she also finds solace in Sunday Justice. Meanwhile, Tom does a good job of further revealing the fact that Eric's witnesses have been encouraged to incriminate Kya even though they're not actually sure of what they're saying. This, of course, is quite unfair, ultimately reflecting the way that the people of Barkley Cove have long mistreated Kya and assumed the worst of her.



CHAPTER 52. THREE MOUNTAINS MOTEL

Finally, Tom Milton starts calling his own witnesses to the stand. He begins by speaking to Sarah Singletary, an employee at the Piggly Wiggly who saw Kya board the bus to Greenville on October 28th and return on October 30th. When Judge Sims asks Eric if he'd like to cross-examine Mrs. Singletary, he declines, saying that the prosecution accepts that Kya went to Greenville. For this reason, he says, there's no need to hear from the next several witnesses that Tom intends to call upon, since these witnesses will only further prove this point. Because the prosecution's case rests on the theory that Kya secretly returned during the night—not that she never went to Greenville in the first place—he has no argument with what Tom is trying to establish. In response, Tom agrees not to call his next few witnesses to the stand.

As Tom calls his first witness to the stand, it's worth remembering that Sarah Singletary used to help Kya count her change when the young girl came to the Piggly Wiggly to buy grits. This serves as a good reminder that there are people in Barkley Cove who are willing to treat Kya with kindness and acceptance, something that is made even clearer by the fact that Mrs. Singletary has agreed to testify to corroborate Kya's alibi.



Tom calls the owner of the Three Mountains Motel to the stand. His name is Lang Furlough, and he says that Kya stayed in his hotel in Greenville from October 28th to October 30th. Furthermore, he says that he was working both nights and never saw her slip out of her room, making it impossible for her to have snuck back to Barkley Cove to kill Chase. However, Eric's cross-examination reveals that Mr. Furlough was quite busy on both nights, often dealing with customers or stepping away from the desk at the hotel's reception area to attend to various matters.

The interesting thing about Kya's trial is that it's quite hard to discern whether or not she's guilty. Although there's ample reason to believe that she's innocent, Eric manages to poke holes in her defense, causing readers to wonder if she is, in fact, capable of having exacted violent revenge upon Chase. In this moment, Eric makes Mr. Furlough seem rather unreliable, thereby reopening the possibility that Kya could have secretly returned to Barkley Cove to murder Chase.



When Kya's trial resumes after a lunch break, Scupper enters the courtroom and sits next to Tate, feeling bad that he didn't support his son—and the woman his son loves—sooner. As the trial continues, Tom calls Kya's editor, Robert Foster, to the stand and asks him to confirm that he met Kya for dinner on the night of Chase's murder. He explains that he dropped her off at her hotel at 9:55 p.m. and met her for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. the following day.

During Eric's cross-examination, Robert says that Kya specifically requested that her publisher book her a room at the Three Mountains Motel instead of the fancier Piedmont, which is where Robert himself stayed. Eric claims that this must be because Three Mountains is close to the bus station, making it easy for Kya to return to Barkley Cove in the middle of the night to kill Chase. When Tom is given a chance to respond to this, though, he reminds the jury that Kya has always lived a private life. Establishing that the Piedmont Hotel is always swarming with guests, he argues that it makes sense for Kya to want to stay in a hotel that exists off the beaten path. Plus, he says, Kya isn't accustomed to navigating public transportation, which is why she would have liked having the option to walk from the station to her hotel.

Tom calls Ed as his next witness. Before he begins to question him, though, he notices Kya begin to slump in her chair. She is exhausted, partially because she has just realized that Ed is one of the last witnesses, meaning that there isn't much more time before her fate will be determined. Quickly, then, Tom calls for a short recess and whisks Kya into a private room. She tells him she doesn't want to be present for the trial, but he informs her that this isn't an option. When he tries to soothe her by saying that everything will be over soon, she says this does nothing to make her feel better. After all, the idea of appealing a guilty verdict overwhelms her, and though she doesn't fear death in and of itself, she hates the idea of somebody else deciding when she will die.

Back in the courtroom, Tom talks to Ed about the prosecution's main argument, ultimately suggesting that the time frame they have presented is highly questionable. Going on, he says that the time Kya would have had to commit the murder wouldn't have given her enough time to get from the bus station to the fire tower. To make this clear, Tom outlines the fact that Kya would have to somehow make up 20 minutes. In response, Ed presents theories for how Kya could have gotten to the fire tower quickly, but Tom discounts his speculations, saying that only facts and evidence matter in a murder trial.

The vast majority of Where the Crawdads Sing focuses on whether or not Kya can find people to support her in life. Now, though, Owens calls attention to Tate's relationship with his father, suggesting that it's important for the people supporting Kya to feel as if they, too, have their own support networks. In other words, in the same way that a worldview of division and prejudice easily spreads from one person to the next, love and encouragement perpetuate themselves if people are willing to emotionally support each other.



In this moment, Tom uses the very things that the townspeople usually hold against Kya to argue for her innocence. Rather than treating her reclusive nature as a bad thing, he calls upon it to explain why she wouldn't want to stay at the Piedmont Hotel, thereby challenging the idea that the only reason she chose to stay at Three Mountains Motel is because it would have made it easier for her to return to Barkley Cove to kill Chase. In this way, Tom repurposes the prejudiced and disapproving narrative that the townspeople have created so that it actually works in Kya's favor.



It's unsurprising that Kya detests the idea that other people might have the power to decide when she will die. She has spent her entire life depending upon herself and fighting for her own survival, prospering against all odds. Now, though, she's forced to sit idly by while strangers—who have never even bothered to try to understand her or the things she's been through—determine her fate. Above all, this strikes Kya as deeply unfair and troubling.



Once more, Tom rejects any kind of speculation when it comes to whether or not Kya is guilty. In doing so, he subtly urges the jury to consider the various biases that might be informing Ed's imprecise and unlikely calculations, ultimately encouraging them to approach the case with a sense of complete objectivity that is uninfluenced by the myriad speculations and prejudices that have surrounded Kya ever since people started calling her the "Marsh Girl."



CHAPTER 53. MISSING LINK: 1970

The following day, Tom calls Tim O’Neal—his last witness—to the stand. Tim is a shrimper and is, incidentally, Hal Miller’s boss. Tim says he saw the same boat that Hall saw on the night of Chase’s murder, but he upholds that it didn’t belong to Kya, whose boat he has seen multiple times and would have recognized. Furthermore, Tim informs the jury that many people in town have boats that are roughly the same size and shape as Kya’s.

Now that Tom is finished questioning his witnesses, Eric delivers his closing statement. In doing so, he reminds the jury that Kya was heard shouting the words, “I will kill you!” at Chase. He also brings up the red fibers found on Chase’s jacket, as well as the fact that Kya is quite capable of taking her boat out at night and doing everything necessary to cover her tracks—this, he says, is made evident simply by the way she has lived her life. He then encourages the jury to do their “duty” by finding Kya guilty.

In Tom’s closing statement, he emphasizes that everyone in Barkley Cove has mistreated Kya for her entire life, calling her the “Marsh Girl” and making up scary stories about her reclusiveness. However, he says, none of these stories have been true or accurate. In fact, they’ve only obscured the truth about Kya, which is that she was abandoned as a child and left to survive on her own in the marsh. Instead of reaching out to help her, the townspeople have rejected and excluded her. This, Tom says, is the only reason that Kya is on trial for murder—because everyone has made unfair assumptions about her. After all, there is no hard evidence that she was present on the night of Chase’s murder. Consequently, he entreats the jury to finally show kindness and compassion to the “Marsh Girl” by finding her not guilty.

CHAPTER 54. VICE VERSA: 1970

Tom lets Tate, Jodie, Scupper, and Robert Foster wait for the verdict together in a small room in the courthouse while Kya herself feels unbearably lonely in her cell. That afternoon, the jurors reach a verdict. Tate worries that their turnaround time wasn’t very long, but there’s nothing to do but file into the courtroom. When Judge Sims asks Kya to stand, she needs Tom to help hold her up. However, his support isn’t enough, because her knees suddenly give out when the jury reads out its decision, saying, “We the jury find Miss Catherine Danielle Clark not guilty as charged in the first-degree murder of Mr. Chase Andrews.”

Once again, the primary defense that Tom tries to build for Kya is that the witnesses who have testified against her are all jumping to unfair conclusions. In this moment, Tim suggests that it would be impossible to know for sure if Kya was really the one in the boat speeding toward the fire tower on the night of Chase’s death. Because Hal Miller has been influenced by various prejudices against Kya, though, he assumed the worst of her.



Eric’s argument rests on the very prejudices and assumptions about Kya’s life that Tom has been trying to dispel. When he says that Kya would have been capable of sneakily murdering Chase and then covering up her actions, he frames her as somebody who’s accustomed to carrying out nefarious deeds—a conception of Kya that is heavily informed by the fact that nearly everybody in Barkley Cove is suspicious of her simply because she has led a unique life on the outskirts of society.



Tom’s closing statement is strong because it invites the members of the jury to rectify the callous way they’ve treated Kya by believing in her innocence. Reminding them that Kya was left to her own devices as a child, Tom makes the jury members feel ashamed for not reaching out to help her survive such intense hardship. In turn, he challenges the narrative that Kya is a violent and mysterious person, effectively framing her as a tragic, resilient, and mistreated individual.



Once more, it becomes clear that Kya has a decent support network, despite the fact that she has lived a life of isolation and independence. When Tate, Jodie, Scupper, and Robert Foster stay in the courthouse to wait for the verdict, they represent the fact that Kya is not alone. This dynamic is also reinforced by the fact that Tom physically supports Kya as she stands to hear the verdict. Then, when the jury announces that it has found her not guilty, Kya senses—perhaps for the first time in her life—that not everyone in Barkley Cove is against her.



Immediately, spectators erupt in anger, shouting that the jury has made a mistake. People speak loudly to each other about the case, but soon enough they leave the courtroom to return to their jobs or go home. As this happens, a single tear runs down Mrs. Culpepper's cheek, followed by a faint smile as she thinks about the fact that Kya—the “little swamp truant”—has escaped once more. As for Kya herself, she lets Jodie drive her home, though not before grazing Sunday Justice's tale with her hand and appreciating that he ignores her, since she admires that he doesn't feel the need to say farewell.

Although the jury has proved that people are clearly sympathetic toward Kya, it's obvious that not everyone in Barkley Cove is ready to accept her. This is apparent when certain spectators start speaking out against the jury's decision. However, what matters most is that there are people like Mrs. Culpepper who care enough about Kya to believe that she didn't kill Chase, basing their opinions not on biases or prejudices, but on the facts of the case (and, in Mrs. Culpepper's case, on a certain personal affinity for Kya). And yet, Kya still admires Sunday Justice's independence, suggesting that although Kya has benefitted from the support of her community, she can't help but maintain the individualistic mindset she's been cultivating her entire life.



CHAPTER 55. GRASS FLOWERS: 1970

Jodie tells Kya on their way back that she'll soon be fine, adding that she just needs time to recover. As Jodie speaks, Kya wishes he would be quiet so she could listen to the sounds of nature out the window. When Kya goes to the beach for the first time, the **gulls** encircle her, and she wonders if now people will finally leave her alone to live her life. When she walks back to her shack, she finds that Jodie is still there. He wants to talk to her, but she says that she wants to be alone, reminding him that he has lived alone for almost her entire life. Now, Kya says, she knows once and for all that everyone is “against” her. Hearing this, Jodie urges her not to begrudge people, but she points out that nobody has ever treated her well.

Although the people of Barkley Cove—or, at least, the jury members—have just proven that they're somewhat sympathetic toward Kya, she is unwilling to forget the mere fact that she had to go to court to prove her innocence in the first place. This, Kya thinks, is a perfect representation of the ways in which others distrust her simply because of her alternative and reclusive lifestyle. Instead of seeing this experience as proof that people aren't as “against” her as she might have thought, then, she sees it as proof that she was right all along to want nothing to do with public life.



Jodie finally leaves, though not before making Kya a chicken pot pie and leaving it on the stove. Once alone, Kya feels sorry for being so harsh to Jodie, finding it hard to understand why she's suddenly so angry at the world. The next morning, she decides to spend the entire day in the marsh, collecting whatever she finds. On another level, she hopes to see Tate, whom she decides she'll invite over to eat the chicken pot pie. Meanwhile, Tate makes his way into the marsh in the hopes of seeing Kya. He doesn't know what he'll tell her, but he's determined to make her see that they should be together.

Kya's trial has only emphasized to her that she can't trust other people. However, this isn't necessarily the case when it comes to Tate—after all, she told him in their last conversation that he should forget about her, but now she wants to invite him over to eat chicken pot pie. In this way, then, Kya has apparently embraced the idea of letting Tate back into her life, perhaps because she recognized during the trial how devoted he is to her.



Finally, Kya spies Tate from afar, but just as she's about to approach, she sees Sheriff Jackson and two other men pull up to his boat and shout something at him. After a moment, Tate drops his head and gets in the sheriff's boat, which speeds off in the other direction. As she watches this, Kya is distraught, finally admitting that the chance of seeing Tate has always been a large part of why she ventures into the marsh. For years, she has thought that a person can't get hurt if she loves someone from afar, but now she wonders if this is untrue.

When Sheriff Jackson pulls up to Tate's boat and tells him to get in, readers are invited to wonder if perhaps Tate was the one to have killed Chase. This would make a certain amount of sense, given that he owned the red hat that matched the fibers on Chase's coat, in addition to the fact that Tate knew Chase hurt Kya and therefore probably wanted to take revenge. Regardless of what happened, though, the most notable aspect of this scene is that watching Tate get into the sheriff's boat forces Kya to finally realize just how strongly she feels for him, admitting to herself that he's an integral part of her life.



CHAPTER 56. THE NIGHT HERON: 1970

Tate visits his father's grave in the cemetery. For the past few months, he has been focusing only on Kya, which is why he didn't notice the decline in Scupper's health. Instead of recognizing that his father's heart was getting weaker, he fixated on his own form of heartbreak. Speaking to his father's grave, he apologizes for not paying more attention to Scupper's health. As he says this, he understands that his father would forgive him, since Scupper always said that a true man is someone who will "do whatever it takes to defend a woman." Scupper, Tate thinks, would understand Tate's devotion to Kya.

As Tate visits Scupper's grave, it becomes clear that Sheriff Jackson wasn't arresting him in the marsh—he was informing Tate that his father had died. While grieving, Tate thinks about how thoroughly he has committed himself to Kya, realizing that his fixation on supporting her has blinded him to other important matters. And yet, he knows that Scupper would approve of this, ultimately managing to feel good about his unflinching dedication to the woman he loves.



Tate walks back to his car and finds a rare feather on the driver's seat. Immediately, he makes his way to Kya's shack. When he arrives, he calls her name and she steps outside. After she walks to him, he envelops her in a hug and says that he loves her. She reminds him that he left her like everyone else in her life, but he promises that he'll never do that again. "I know," she says, and when he asks if she loves him—pointing out that she has never said these words—she tells him that she has always loved him.

Even when Kya finally decides to let Tate back into her life, she reminds him that he wronged her. And though it's clear that she's willing to move on from this, it's also clear that she will never forget that even the people she trusts the most are capable of hurting her. In this way, she embraces romance and human connection while preserving the sense of cautious independence that she was forced to cultivate as a child and teenager living on her own.



CHAPTER 57. THE FIREFLY

Tate and Kya sleep together on the beach that night. The next day, Tate moves into Kya's shack and asks her to marry him. Looking at him, Kya says they're already married—"like the geese." Tate says that this is all right with him, and so begins their life, which they spend in happiness. Kya continues to publish books while Tate works as a research biologist. They make improvements to the shack and even build an addition, though they preserve certain things like the old woodstove and the kitchen table. For the rest of her life, Kya never goes to Barkley Cove again. The townspeople sometimes see her drifting through the marsh waters, and though some people continue to talk about what happened to Chase, most Barkley Cove citizens decide that Sheriff Jackson was wrong to arrest Kya, and they regret the way they treated her.

Kya waits in the marsh for Tate to come home after a day in the marsh, loving all the while that she knows for sure that he'll return. When he gets back, though, he gives her bad news: Jumpin' died in his sleep the night before. This stings Kya, who has only ever experienced loss because of abandonment. This, she feels, is an entirely new kind of grief. After the funeral—which she doesn't attend—she visits Mabel and gives her a jar of blackberry jam. Mabel tells her that Jumpin' loved her like a daughter, to which Kya says, I know, and he was my pa." While walking on the beach later that day, Kya thinks about Jumpin' and then about Ma, suddenly feeling all right about the fact that she's gone forever. "Good-bye, Ma," she whispers.

In the coming years, Barkley Cove and the surrounding area undergoes a number of changes, as developers arrive and turn the town into a tourist destination. In giftshops throughout the region, Kya's books stand on display with signs that describe her as an "Award-Winning Biologist." All in all, she publishes seven books and earns an honorary doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Despite these achievements, she stays in the marsh, declining to give speeches at the many institutions that invite her. She and Tate consider having children, but Kya never gets pregnant, which doesn't particularly bother her. Instead, she focuses on her life in the marsh and her relationship with Tate, who has finally convinced her that "human love" is worthwhile. And yet, Kya still knows that the act of surviving sometimes takes precedent over all else.

Simply put, Kya and Tate finally manage to live a happy life together. Having been forced into the public eye during her trial, Kya retreats back into a life of relative isolation, never going to town again for the rest of her days. What's different, though, is that the townspeople are no longer so intolerant of her alternative lifestyle. In fact, most of them agree that they should have been kinder to her long before the trial, thereby showing her empathy and giving her the benefit of the doubt even if some citizens still wonder how Chase died.



That Kya sees Jumpin' as her father suggests that humans are capable of building their own families, at least in terms of how they feel about one another. In the absence of a proper father, Kya turned to Jumpin' as a child, adolescent, and young adult. Now that he's gone, she's finally able to recognize just how important his role was in her life, and this ultimately helps her see that she managed to survive her childhood without her biological parents. For this reason, Kya finds herself capable of finally coming to terms with her mother's departure, bidding her farewell once and for all because she realizes that she has done just fine without Ma.



Again, it's clear that Kya has managed to find happiness in her life. This is because she has found a way to live a life of independence and relative isolation while also accepting and even giving "human love," thereby banishing her frequent bouts of loneliness and connecting her to Tate in a reaffirming, emotionally sustaining manner. All the same, though, her acceptance of romance doesn't change her overall outlook on life, which prioritizes survival over all else—a somewhat sinister fact, given that she seemingly no longer has any reason to think in such ruthless terms.



Kya dies at the age of 64 while floating in her boat. Tate finds her there and screams her name, but there's nothing he can do, for she seems to have simply slumped over while enjoying the marsh. Tate buries Kya on her land, and the entire town comes to her funeral—so many people that Kya herself could never have imagined the turnout. On her tombstone, Tate inscribes her name and, under it, the words: "THE MARSH GIRL."

When the entire town of Barkley Cove attends Kya's funeral, readers see the extent to which the narrative surrounding her changed in the aftermath of the trial. Whereas people used to make unfair assumptions about her because of her socioeconomic class, now they seem to have a certain kind of respect for her. For this reason, Tate reclaims her nickname, the "Marsh Girl," using it as a term of endearment instead of a nasty sign of the surrounding community's insensitivity.



After Kya's funeral, Tate walks back to their shack. While looking for Kya's will, he comes upon an old cigar box containing the ashes of Ma's letter, along with some trinkets. He also finds the deed for the property, but no will. Later, he continues his search when he discovers a secret compartment under one of the floorboards. Looking inside, he takes out a cardboard box and finds poems written by Amanda Hamilton—Kya's favorite poet, though Tate never particularly resonated with her writing. As he looks at these pieces of paper, though, he sees that some of the poems are incomplete and that they're written in Kya's handwriting. All at once, he realizes that Kya was Amanda Hamilton.

When Owens reveals that Kya was Amanda Hamilton, readers see that she wasn't quite as cut off from the world as it might have seemed. Indeed, Kya spent her life secretly composing poetry and publishing it under a penname, thereby interacting with society without having to actually leave the marsh. Once more, then, it becomes clear that even the most individualistic people yearn for some kind of human connection, regardless of what form it takes. After all, Tate taught Kya that poetry can make people feel something, meaning that she actively tried to connect on an emotional level with the people of Barkley Cove by publishing her poems in the local paper.



Looking at Kya's poems, Tate finds one called "**The Firefly**." It begins: "Luring him was as easy / As Flashing valentines. / But like a lady firefly / They hid a secret call to die." The poem also includes the lines, "The last step, a trap. / Down, down he falls." Tate reads the poem again, his heart hammering against his chest. Looking deep inside the cardboard box, he finds something else: **the shell necklace** that Chase wore until he died. Suddenly, it becomes clear to Tate that Kya *did* kill Chase, that she perfectly planned the murder by disguising herself on buses and riding her boat on riptides to get to the fire tower in time. Realizing this, he quickly burns the rest of Amanda Hamilton's poems, takes the shell off the necklace, goes to the beach, and drops it among the others—thereby keeping Kya's secret forever.

Throughout the novel, Kya has been interested in the ways in which female insects lure their mates only to destroy them. Observing this phenomenon in nature taught her that there's a certain power in sex appeal, and she never thought of this as evil or wrong because she saw it as a simple fact of nature. According to this mindset, living things must do whatever it takes to survive, even if this sometimes requires acting mercilessly. When she realized that Chase had become a threat to her wellbeing, then, she lured him into a trap, sending him falling through the hatch in the fire tower. This, she apparently thought, was only a means of survival—after all, she knew that nobody would believe her when she said that Chase posed a threat to her. Consequently, she had to address the matter herself, becoming the human version of a female firefly in a mere act of survival.





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