

11. Croker Sacks Full

In 1956, Kya, a ten-year-old girl, discovered the complexities of loneliness and survival after her abusive father, Pa, stopped returning to their decrepit shack in the marshes. As weeks turned into a full moon cycle without a trace of him, she braced herself for the daunting reality of total isolation. The departure of her father brought a mix of relief and an overwhelming sense of abandonment different from when her mother left, hinting at the complicated relationship she had with her remaining parent. With the absence of her father, the already sparse provisions began to dwindle, leaving Kya with a bare survival kit: a few matches, a sliver of soap, and a handful of grits—her staple food. The prospect of facing the winter without the means to boil her grits presented a stark realization of her precarious situation.

As she navigated through her empty days, Kya's inability to read prevented her from finding solace in her mother's books, relegating her to "play-reading" fairy tales. The eventual and unanticipated darkness that enveloped her home with the depletion of kerosene marked a poignant moment of Kya's childhood—an introduction to self-reliance and the tangible absence of her father's care. Left to the mercy of the marshland with only a boat as her significant possession, she understood the imperative of devising alternative survival strategies. Despite her fears and the looming threat of being discovered by authorities and taken away, Kya's spirit and innate connection to the marsh spurred a silent vow of resilience. This chapter encapsulates a pivotal turning point in Kya's life, portraying her confrontation with abandonment and the stirrings of her indomitable will to adapt and persevere amidst the wild, untamed backdrop of the marshes.