

39. Chase by Chance

As dawn lifted the fog of an August morning in 1969, Kya set out to Cypress Cove, enticed by the memory of once finding rare toadstools there. Despite it being unseasonably late for mushroom foraging, the cool, moist conditions of the cove nurtured a hope that she might rediscover the elusive fungi. Since Tate had left her a compass more than a month earlier—a gift she had yet to acknowledge or use—she had not come into close contact with him, despite frequent sightings in the marsh.

Navigating her boat through the cove, where moss-draped trees formed a natural tunnel along the shore, Kya was on the lookout for the small, brilliant orange mushrooms she coveted. Upon finding them, she beached her boat and began sketching them in detail, lost in concentration until unexpected footsteps and a voice disrupted her solitude.

Chase appeared, uninvited, disturbing her peace with his familiar taunt: "Well, look who's here. My Marsh Girl." Confused and startled by his sudden presence, Kya demanded he leave. Despite her protests, Chase attempted to make amends, his breath heavy with the scent of bourbon, claiming his enduring care for her, despite their failed relationship and his engagement to another, revealed cruelly through public announcement rather than personal confession.

Kya, fiercely independent and hurt by his betrayal, rejected his advances and assertions of mutual love. She confronted him about his deceit regarding their future together and his subsequent engagement. Distraught and determined, she managed to break free from his grasp, asserting her independence and refusal to accept his version of their relationship, thus highlighting her resilience and self-reliance in the face of betrayal.