

17. Crossing the Threshold

In Chapter 17 of the story, set in 1960, Kya is alerted by Jumpin', a close acquaintance, that Social Services officials have been inquiring about her, seeking information on her father's whereabouts, her education status, and her frequent visits to Jumpin'. Kya, already living in solitude in the marshlands, becomes apprehensive about being placed into foster care and decides to find a safer hiding spot. She discusses her concerns with Tate, a friend who suggests they meet in a more secluded location to avoid detection by authorities. They agree on an old cabin in the marsh as their new rendezvous point, where they continue their educational sessions and reading habit, particularly delving into "A Sand County Almanac" by Aldo Leopold, which inspires Kya with its poetic language and environmental insights.

Throughout the summer, Kya takes precautions to maintain her independence while benefiting from Tate's support, both emotionally and academically. They share moments of learning, discovering poetry together, which enriches Kya emotionally and intellectually, allowing her to explore new ways to express herself, evidenced by her attempts at writing poetry. The chapter also explores Kya's maturation, as evidenced by her first menstrual cycle, an event that causes her embarrassment and confusion, especially in front of Tate. However, with help and reassurance from Mabel, a motherly figure, and Tate's continued respect and support, she navigates this new phase in her life.

Moreover, the chapter subtly reveals the depth of Kya's and Tate's emotional connection. While they both confront personal vulnerabilities—Kya with her sudden womanhood and Tate by sharing the tragic loss of his mother and sister—their bond strengthens, hinting at a relationship that transcends friendship. Tate's dedication to teaching Kya and providing her with books indicates a deep care and possibly romantic affection, whereas for Kya, these interactions with Tate represent rare moments of human connection and comfort in her isolated life. This chapter, rich in emotional and physical transitions, portrays Kya's resilience in the face of societal pressures and personal challenges, underscored by the pivotal support of the few individuals who understand and accept her.