

## 21. Coop

In 1961, amidst the sweltering heat that caused palmetto fronds to rattle menacingly, Kya endured the depths of despair following Tate's departure. For days, she remained in bed, not caring for the time, the moon, or the marsh that had always been her sanctuary. She was paralyzed by the heat and her own heartache, her sheets damp with sweat, offering no respite. The calls from the gulls and the marsh's life went ignored, a testament to Kya's grief over the abandonment she felt—not just by Tate, but by her entire family who had one by one left her behind.

Her bed became a nest of turmoil, as she grappled with the realization that Tate, who embodied life and love for her, had become another name in the list of those who had abandoned her. Heartbroken and despondent, Kya resolved never to allow herself to trust or love again, a decision born from the cumulative betrayals she had endured throughout her life. This despair enveloped her until an unexpected visitor—a Cooper's hawk—captivated her attention and marked the first steps toward pulling herself from the pit of her desolation.

With new purpose, however reluctantly embraced, Kya ventured to the beach, a place of former joy and now a canvas for her sorrow. There, feeding the gulls, she found a semblance of connection and liberation from her pain. Surrounded by the birds, feeling their feathers against her skin, she allowed herself a moment of release, tears mingling with smiles. This chapter vividly captures Kya's journey through despair, showcasing her profound connection with the natural world and marking the start of her healing process, however uncertain and painful it might be.