

24. The Fire Tower

In "The Fire Tower," set in 1965, the protagonist, Kya, encounters Chase after avoiding him for ten days following an intimate beach picnic. Despite her mixed feelings and the logic against yearning for his company, Kya's loneliness propels her to seek him out again when she spots him and his friends from her boat. Their unexpected eye contact rekindles her old longing, despite her shy nature urging her to flee.

Chase, spotting Kya alone on her boat, waits for her and apologizes for his overwhelming advances during their last encounter, suggesting a visit to an abandoned fire tower as a peace offering. Eager yet cautious, Kya agrees, leading to a journey past Barkley Cove and through a dense, backwater-seeped forest to the tower. Climbing the weathered structure, they survey the expanse of marshland below, sharing a moment of closeness and tentative reconciliation.

Kya presents Chase with a necklace made from a shell, symbolizing her lingering affection. Chase accepts it gratefully, recognizing the significance of the gesture without making any grand promises. The day culminates in a visit to Kya's isolated shack, a stark representation of her solitude and self-sufficiency. Chase's curiosity about her lifestyle and the privacy she has enjoyed sparks a deeper connection between them, beyond the confines of social expectations and the wilderness that has been Kya's true home.

Their interaction at Kya's home reveals layers of her character—her connection to nature, her resilience, and the vulnerability she feels around Chase. The visit symbolizes a tentative step towards accepting Chase into her guarded world, challenging the solitude that has defined her.