

35. The Compass

In July 1969, Kya received her book, "The Eastern Seacoast Birds" by Catherine Danielle Clark, featuring her painting of a herring gull on the cover. Feeling elated, she carried it to a familiar oak clearing, seeking mushrooms. There, she discovered an old milk carton with a brass-cased, army-issue compass inside— a gift from Tate, accompanied by a note expressing his affection and acknowledging their past. The compass, once belonging to Tate's grandfather from the First World War, represented more than just a navigation tool; it symbolized the direction in Kya's life, especially on cloudy days when uncertainties clouded her path.

As Kya read Tate's note, she reminisced about their shared past— from the innocent days of being guided home through storms and learning to read to awakening her first sexual desires and contributions to her academic achievements. Despite these fond memories, Kya remained guarded, haunted by the pain of Tate's previous abandonment which overshadowed the affection she once felt. This emotional turmoil mirrored the unpredictable behavior of marsh fireflies, leading her to maintain distance despite her brother Jodie's advice to reconsider Tate's place in her life.

Struggling with her conflicting feelings, Kya ventured into the foggy estuaries with the compass, intending to explore a sandy area for rare flowers whilst subconsciously hoping to encounter Tate. The enveloping fog, silence, and tranquil setting contrasted sharply with her internal conflict— longing for Tate's presence yet wrestling with past hurts. As she navigated through the mist, the gentle sound of water and the suspense of possibly crossing paths with Tate added layers to her journey, both physically in the marsh and emotionally in her heart.