

48. A Trip

On October 28, 1969, in a display of independence and mild defiance, Kya Clark set off on a brief journey away from the seclusion of the marshes to the bustling town of Barkley Cove. With only a faded suitcase and a knapsack filled with necessities, including books and a little money, she left behind the majority of her earnings, concealing them near the lagoon. Dressed unassumingly in a brown skirt, white blouse, and flats from Sears, Roebuck, she navigated the stares of townsfolk with a subdued dignity, their curiosity piqued yet again by her presence.

Kya's destination was Greenville, a choice that prompted whispers and speculation among the local community. The Trailways bus ride, an experience as distant from her life in the wild as one could imagine, was uneventful but marked a significant departure from her daily existence. Upon her return two days later, the reception was much the same, with the addition of whispers likely fueled by her rare and brief absence from the marshes. Yet, Kya's focus remained undeterred; she desired only to return to her sanctuary, to the gulls and the freedom of the marsh.

However, the calmness of her return was shattered the following day when she was confronted with shocking news by Jumpin', a friend and confidant. Chase Andrews, a pivotal figure in Kya's life and in the Barkley Cove community, was dead. This revelation threatened to upend the fragile peace Kya had cultivated amidst the wilderness and rumors that constantly swirled around her. The news of Chase's death, and the implication of it coinciding with her trip, introduced an ominous cloud over her return, hinting at the complexities and challenges that lay ahead in the wake of this tragedy.