

## 9. Jumpin'

Jumpin' into the hazy morning of 1953, Kya, a young girl, found herself surrounded by the complexities of isolation and a deep need for human connection. Her father, who had been mostly absent in recent times, took her on a trip to the marina, where they would meet Jumpin', an older Black man who operated a small Gas and Bait shop. The quaint shop was bursting with colorful advertisements, a vivid reminder of the area's history and culture, and it was within this setting that Kya first felt a touch of warmth. Jumpin', with his vivacious personality, welcomed Kya, making her feel seen and offering her a glimpse of kindness in a world that often made her feel invisible. The encounter, though brief, stood in stark contrast to what Kya would later experience at the Barkley Cove Diner.

The trip to the diner marked a painful reminder of Kya's isolation. As she sat at the table, she could feel the eyes of the townspeople on her, a cold and judgmental gaze that made it clear that her family was not welcomed within their circles. Their whispered comments and disdainful glances reinforced Kya's status as an outsider, someone who didn't belong. She couldn't help but feel the deep divide between her and the people of Barkley Cove, a rift that seemed insurmountable. Despite a hearty meal, Kya's sense of loneliness only deepened as she was reminded that, no matter how much she longed for connection, she would always be the Marsh Girl to the townsfolk—someone beneath their notice, someone to be avoided.

Kya's fleeting hope of finding companionship was dashed when Meryl Lynn, a young girl, tentatively approached her. However, the interaction was short-lived, as Meryl Lynn's mother, Mrs. Teresa White, quickly intervened, pulling her daughter away and ensuring that Kya remained on the outside. This incident left Kya even more heartbroken, further cementing her belief that the world beyond the swamp was closed off to her. It was a moment of painful clarity that only deepened her sense of alienation and despair, as the cruel social divisions in Barkley Cove became impossible to ignore. The rejection served as another painful reminder that, no matter her desire for human connection, she was not destined to belong.

Back in her isolated shack, Kya grappled with the deep emotional scars left by her father's sporadic presence and violent outbursts. His unpredictable nature made it impossible for her to ever feel safe or loved. While her father would sometimes be sober, those moments were fleeting and would be followed by devastating periods of neglect and aggression. The absence of her mother, who had left years ago, added to the emotional strain, leaving Kya with a deep-seated longing for the maternal love she never received. Her father's behavior, unpredictable and volatile, left Kya feeling abandoned, vulnerable, and unsure of what family really meant.

Kya's hope for a connection with her mother was reignited when she found a letter addressed to her, but her father swiftly crushed that hope by burning the letter before Kya could even read it. In that moment, the deep emotional wound left by her mother's abandonment was reopened. She was left holding only the ashes of the letter, symbolizing the loss of the love she so desperately sought. Her relationship with her father, already frail, was further strained by this cruel act, leaving Kya with only questions about her mother's whereabouts and her own future.

Through **Jumpin'**, the chapter brings to the forefront Kya's longing for connection, a longing that is often met with rejection and abandonment. It touches on the complexities of familial relationships, particularly the emotional scars left by both her father and mother's absence. Despite this, Kya's brief encounter with Jumpin' offers a glimmer of warmth in a world otherwise dominated by coldness and rejection. Themes of isolation, abandonment, and the desire for connection are explored in depth, highlighting Kya's resilience as she learns to navigate a world that has consistently shown her only cruelty and indifference. The chapter sets the stage for Kya's emotional and personal growth, emphasizing the challenges she faces in forging meaningful relationships and learning to trust in others.