

WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

Written by

Lucy Alibar

Based on the novel by Delia Owens

Hello Sunshine/3000 Pictures
(310)244-3000

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

A boat drifts out in the water. Old, gnarled hands open a sketchbook.

KYA (V.O.)

The marsh is not a swamp. The marsh is a space of light, where grass grows in water and water flows into the sky.

AERIAL SHOT: THE MARSH

We wind down through the sky, past gulls surrounding a FIRE TOWER.

We continue along the rugged Carolina coast...

To the houses on the edge of Barkley Cove...

To Jumpin's Bait & Gas...

Down the cove to Point Beach....

Past more coast, over scrappy pines and grass..

EXT. MARSH - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

HEADING: BARKLEY COVE, 1969

BENJI and STEVEN (both 10), crash through the marsh, pretending to shoot each other.

They stumble over a body, whose face we're unable to make out.

KYA (V.O.)

A swamp knows about death, and doesn't define it as tragedy. Not as a sin.

EXT. MARSH - DAY - LATER

The burly, confident SHERIFF ED JACKSON (50s) and DEPUTY JOE PERDUE (20s) study the body. Benji and Steven huddle together, trying to hide their fear.

SHERIFF JACKSON

How many times I told folks in this town something like this was bound to happen?

DEPUTY PERDUE
Thought Chase Andrews would have
more common sense.

Deputy Perdue shines his light around the mud. Two sets of
small footprints.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)
Boys, are these your footprints
here?

The boys nod. And now Sheriff Jackson shines his light
towards the fire tower, looming ahead.

EXT. FIRE TOWER - DAY

Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Perdue climb the ladder in the
FIRE tower.

DEPUTY PERDUE
Some kids just get crazy ideas in
their heads. They drink and think
they're invincible.

When they reach the last step, Sheriff Jackson lifts his
hands and pushes open an iron grate.

INT. FIRE TOWER - PLATFORM - DAY

The men crawl up through the open grate to the platform.
There are wooden planks all around the perimeter, but the
floor is a series of see-through square grates that can be
opened and closed.

DEPUTY PERDUE
Hey, look at that.

He points to the far side of the platform, where one of the
grates is wide open. They go to the grate and peer down.
The body, misshapen, is below.

SHERIFF JACKSON
Did he open that grate himself?

They stare down at the marsh below.

DEPUTY PERDUE
Could have been an accident, all
the same.

SHERIFF JACKSON

How did Chase Andrews walk down the path, cross this muck to the stairs so he could climb to the top, and not leave any footprints behind? Did the man levitate?

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1951)

HEADER: 1951

A green saltwater lagoon, pristine and seething with life, laps at clusters of oaks and palmettos on the shore.

Standing with her bare feet in the lagoon, LITTLE KYA CLARK, 7, holds a sea gull feather up to the sunlight.

MA (O.S.)

Kya, you better not get too far out!

Behind Little Kya is the Clark house: A screened-in shack, hiding behind a cluster of palmettos.

MA (20s), Kya's young, pretty mother, smokes mussels over a smoker in a yard. Dogs and chickens run wild.

Little Kya's brothers and sisters (MURPH, 17, LITTLE JODIE, 8, MISSY, 14, and MANDY, 10) are coaxing CHANEL, the resident skunk, out from under the house.

LITTLE JODIE

Come on, Chanel! There's a pretty girl!

But Chanel won't budge.

Little Kya stares at an overhead flock of seagulls, lost in her own world.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house has dirt floors and bare walls. Ma and the children have taken pride in keeping their home clean and tidy.

Ma curls up with a beat-up encyclopedia, "B". Little Kya relaxes on her lap. Ma reads aloud as Little Kya traces her fingers over pictures of beaches, trees, flowers.

MA
 (reading)
 "Bora Bora, surrounded by coral
 reef, hosts thousands of species of
 marine and bird life..."

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Chanel waddles out from under the house. Little Kya holds a biscuit in front of the skunk's curious nose.

LITTLE KYA
 Here you go, Chanel.

Chanel grabs the biscuit from Little Kya's hands and waddles back under the house. Little Kya's siblings squeal with delight.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY - LATER

Ma paints with a five-and-dime watercolor set. The trees outside, the water. Little Kya is set up with her own paper next to her. Little Kya copies all of her mother's movements, clumsily painting the marsh.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Ma, face bruised, counts out money for Little Kya. She manages a smile for the fearful little girl.

MA
 I'm busy with chores, if anyone
 asks. "Yes sir, yes ma'am." Don't
 run in town or they're gonna think
 you stole something.

Little Kya takes the money Ma counts out for her.

EXT. THE ROAD TO BARKLEY COVE - DAY

Little Kya trudges through black mud to town.

KYA (V.O.)
 It was four miles into town.
 Barkley Cove used to all be
 underwater. People like to act
 like we come a long way, but...we
 still pretty much ancient
 creatures, if you want to know the
 truth.

But the distance doesn't bother Little Kya. She's absorbed in the salty haze, the gulls and sparrows, the snakes.

Little Kya makes her way out of the Everglades...

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - PIGGLY WIGGLY - DAY

And into the single lane highway of Barkley Cove. The town is a shocking contrast to Little Kya's home in the marsh. Everything is clean, orderly, muted. The colors are beige and army green.

A swarm of BOYS ON BICYCLES zooms past Little Kya, almost knocking her over. A well-dressed woman, MISS PANSY (20's), yells at them from the pay phone on the side walk.

MISS PANSY

Boys! I'm'll tell y'all's mammas about this. Better yet, y'all's papas. What ya got to say for yourself, Chase?

Tan, dark-haired LITTLE CHASE ANDREWS (8) looks back at Little Kya and smiles. Little Kya sees he's got the nicest bike of any of them.

LITTLE CHASE

Just surprised to see that girl there, is all.

Miss Pansy sees Little Kya for the first time. She sucks her teeth and leans in, speaking low to the boys, but Little Kya hears it all the same.

MISS PANSY

Boys, you gotta stay away from girls like that. She's trash from the swamp, you understand? They eat cockroaches.

BOYS

Yes, ma'am.

Little Kya watches this flock of boys laughing together. Little Chase turns around. Steals a look in Little Kya's direction before joining the rest of the boys as they ride off.

INT. BARKLEY COVE - PIGGLY WIGGLY - DAY

Little Kya's eyes are wide as she beholds the food of Piggly Wiggly. She sways, weak with hunger.

She can't read, and relies on the pictures on the boxes to tell her what's what. She arrives at a giant bag of grits. She takes it to the counter.

The cashier, MRS. SINGLETARY (50s) looks Little Kya up and down.

MRS. SINGLETARY
Where's your mamma at?

LITTLE KYA
Busy with chores.

Kya pulls out all the money from her pocket and puts it down on the counter. Mrs. Singletary softens, then counts out the money.

MRS. SINGLETARY
Twenty five, fifty, sixty, seventy,
eighty, eighty-five and three
pennies.

She's trying to teach Little Kya to count money, but sees it's not sinking in.

MRS. SINGLETARY (CONT'D)
Because the grits was twelve cents.

Little Kya blinks. Mrs. Singletary pushes the rest of the money towards her.

MRS. SINGLETARY (CONT'D)
You gotta get someone teach you to
count. You can't go throwing your
money around like that. You hear?
You especially, need to be careful.

Little Kya nods, shaking, and walks carefully out the door with her bag of grits hugged to her stomach.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1952)

HEADING: 1952

Little Kya stands on a stool over a basin, where she scrubs a pot crusted in leftover grits. Pa is passed out at the kitchen table, his snoring breaks through the birdsongs and gentle breezes outside. Little Kya stifles a laugh.

Suddenly, a door slams. Little Kya jumps. Then carefully, carefully she returns her pot to the basin. She tiptoes past Pa and opens the screen door....

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE DAY

Ma, frail and in her own world, walks one foot in front of the other, as if on a tightrope.

Ma holds a blue train case so hard her knuckles are white. She has a white scarf wrapped around her head that doesn't do a good job of covering yellow bruises. She's wearing her nicest fake-alligator shoes, and the kitten heel looks wrong in the white dirt.

Little Kya stares after her mother, mouth agape. Ma walks unsteadily. Little Kya begins to sprint, faster and faster, but Ma keeps walking.

Little Kya finally stops. Stands still. Waits for Ma to turn around. Ma keeps walking down the sandy lane that leads to town, disappearing into the woods.

Little Jodie appears behind Little Kya.

LITTLE JODIE

Ma'll be back.

LITTLE KYA

I dunno. She's wearing her gator shoes. Her goin' out shoes. Carrying her blue case like she's going somewheres big.

LITTLE JODIE

A ma don't leave her kids. It ain't in 'em.

But he stares down the path uncertainly.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Mandy has boiled a big pot of beans on the stove. The rest of the children stand on the counter or under the pot with pieces of bread, dipping the bread into the beans and eating silently.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Little Kya sits on the screen porch, staring at the path. Waiting for Ma.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya has fallen asleep on the porch. Little Jodie shakes her awake. He puts his finger to his lips. Pa's drunk snoring saws through the air, thick and dangerous.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Little Jodie and Kya fight with wooden sticks in the marsh.

LITTLE KYA
TAKE THAT, SPANIARDS!

She lunges at Little Jodie, who gracefully sidesteps.

KYA (V.O.)
Everybody else was quick to get
out, same way.

In a SERIES OF SHOTS, Little Kya sits by the chickens and watches her brothers and sisters leave.

And here comes Little Jodie. He's got a black eye and swollen jaw. He heads straight to Little Kya, who's cradling a chicken in the yard.

LITTLE JODIE
Kya.

Little Kya stares at her chicken, cooing to the bird and ignoring Little Jodie.

LITTLE JODIE (CONT'D)
Kya. Listen. Even when you think
you're gonna cry you still have to
look at people.

LITTLE KYA
(through tears)
That's a dumbass rule.

LITTLE JODIE
I have to go, Kya. Can't live here
no longer. You're smart. You know
that, don't you?

LITTLE KYA
I know. You could take me with
you?

Little Jodie's downcast eyes say it all. Little Kya is devastated.

LITTLE JODIE

Kya, you be careful, hear? If anybody comes, don't go in the house. They can get you there. Run deep in the marsh, way out where the crawdads sing. Like Ma always says. Always cover your tracks; I learned you how, remember?

Little Kya nods. He embraces her. She holds him tight. They both hear Pa shouting and throwing furniture, drunk, inside the house.

Little Kya pulls away, aged twenty years in a few seconds.

LITTLE KYA

Run.

Little Jodie nods and runs away, leaving Little Kya standing in the dirt as her raging father breaks the whole house.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Little Kya wades through the water, staring at fish. She's as gentle as the egrets cooling themselves in the water and paying her no mind.

KYA (V.O.)

Learned from the minnows to keep out of the way. Don't let anyone see me. Dart from sunspots to shadows.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Pa slaps money down on the counter, in front of JUMPIN (50's, black, constantly on his toes) and his wife MABEL (50's, black, kind).

JUMPIN

Hey, Jake! How are you?

PA

Well, I woke up on the right side of the dirt. This here's my daughter, Kya Clark.

JUMPIN

Hello, Kya. Good to know you.

Kya stares at her toes.

PA
 (nodding to Little Kya)
 She steered us here herself. How
 'bout that?

JUMPIN
 Good on you!

PA
 And I tell her, stay away from
 everybody. Don't be no little
 girl. Dangerous world, ain't it?

JUMPIN
 It is, it is.

MABEL
 You helping out your Pa while your
 Ma's gone?

KYA
 Yes ma'am. Keeping the house clean
 for her and everything.

PA
 Let's go.

Mabel slides a Sugar Daddy candy to Little Kya, with a sly
 wink. Little Kya smiles.

EXT. JUMPIN'S WHARF - DAY

Pa and Little Kya walk down the wharf to their lone boat.

PA
 We don't talk about her, hear?

Little Kya nods.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

KYA (V.O.)
 Pa would drift in and out. Easier
 when he was out.

Little Kya drifts along in Pa's boat, past deer, salt
 grass...

She goes through dark lagoons. This is magical, and she's a
 part of it. Little Kya looks up to the darkening sky and
 carefully turns the motor on. But which way is home?

Little Kya looks around. She's lost and the clouds are gathering on the water.

LITTLE KYA

Don't be no girl.

She almost bumps into LITTLE TATE WALKER, 8, thin and dark-haired, fishing from a boat. He smiles at her and touches the brim of his hat.

Little Kya, terrified, motors around him without as much as a smile.

LITTLE TATE

You okay?

Little Kya can't answer.

LITTLE TATE (CONT'D)

You're Jodie Clark's sister.

LITTLE KYA

Used to be. He's gone.

LITTLE TATE

Well, you're still his...

He lets it drop.

LITTLE TATE (CONT'D)

You don't have nobody looking after you?

LITTLE KYA

I don't need nobody.

Little Tate nods. He can't stop smiling when he looks at Kya. He tries to look away. Lets out a small laugh.

LITTLE KYA (CONT'D)

What's funny?

LITTLE TATE

I just laugh when I'm happy.

LITTLE KYA

I never heard of that.

LITTLE TATE

You know your way home?

LITTLE KYA

Yeah...

Then, worried her one shot out of here might leave...

LITTLE KYA (CONT'D)
Oh, you mean from here?

LITTLE TATE
Follow me.

And Little Tate leads Little Kya back home, through the lagoons, twisting and turning. She studies the way with wide eyes, making sure never to get lost again.

They finally arrive in front of Little Kya's house. She leaps out and ties her boat to the waterlogged pine. He watches.

LITTLE TATE (CONT'D)
Well, storm's coming, I better git.
My name's Tate, case ya see me
again.

Little Kya says nothing.

LITTLE TATE (CONT'D)
Bye, now.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1953)

HEADER: 1953

A truancy officer, MRS. CULPEPPER (30s and no-nonsense) knocks on the door to Little Kya's house.

MRS. CULPEPPER
Yoo-hoo, anybody home? Truant
officer here. I've come to take
Catherine Clark to school.

No answer.

MRS. CULPEPPER (CONT'D)
It's the law, hon. You gotta go to
school. You get a hot lunch every
day for free. I think today
they're having chicken pie with
crust.

The door opens and Little Kya peers out. She's wearing Little Jodie's pants tied around with rope. No shoes.

MRS. CULPEPPER (CONT'D)
 Hello, dear. It's okay to go barefoot, other children do, but because you're a little girl you have to wear a skirt. Do you have a dress or skirt, hon?

Little Kya disappears again into the house.

MRS. CULPEPPER (CONT'D)
 Hurry up, hon. You're not just late today, you're a year late, so let's--

She stops when Little Kya rushes back to the door, breathing hard. She's wearing one of Ma's skirts, pinned tightly around her tiny waist. Mrs. Culpepper manages a smile.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Little Kya stands in front of the class, ramrod straight in her pinned up skirt and bare feet.

Two little girls, TALLSKINNYBLONDE and ALWAYSWEARSPEARLS, snicker at this dirty, skinny little waif. The teacher, MISS ARIEL, (19 and doing her best) tries not to laugh along.

MISS ARIEL
 Do you want to tell us your name?

LITTLE KYA
 (carefully)
 Catherine Danielle Clark.

The room bursts out laughing.

MISS ARIEL
 Now, children, we don't laugh! We never laugh. Miss Catherine Danielle Clark, why don't you spell "Dog?"

LITTLE KYA
 G-O-D.

The class laughs again.

ALWAYSWEARPEARLS
 Swamp trash.

Little Kya looks around desperately. Little Tate and Little Chase both look down at their desks. They're the only ones not laughing.

MISS ARIEL

You can go ahead and sit down, Miss
Catherine Danielle Clark.

Little Kya makes her way through the sea of contemptuous
faces and finds a seat in the back of the room.

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Little Kya watches the LUNCH LADIES heap her tray with
collard greens, mash potatoes, some kind of meat situation,
green beans, and corn bread. A sympathetic LUNCH LADY hands
her a tray piled high with food.

The other GIRLS in line pull back, disgusted. Little Kya
takes her tray to a table in the corner, sits alone, and digs
in.

The entire cafeteria watches as Kya eats VERY carefully and
slowly from her tray. She's starving, and nobody ever taught
her how to use utensils, but she's doing her best.

Little Kya takes a few bites. Drinks her milk. Then she
opens up her milk container and gently forks the rest of her
food into the container. She folds it back up. It's comical
and just a little heartbreaking.

Finally Little Kya looks up from her feast. The children and
adults are all looking at her the way you would an elephant
or a Komodo dragon. They've never seen anything nearly as
strange as Little Kya before.

Little Kya looks them all back in the eye, one by one by one.
Little Tate can't meet her gaze and looks down. Little Chase
stares right back. His expression is unreadable.

Little Kya stands up and walks out of the cafeteria with her
head held high. As she leaves, she hears the children burst
into cruel laughter. The adults do nothing to stop them.

CHILDREN

Swamp rat! Swamp Rat! Swamp Rat!

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Little Kya keeps walking as the voices of the children fade.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Mrs. Culpepper knocks on Kya's door again. Pa opens the
door.

PA
Get the hell out!

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

The voices of Pa and Mrs. Culpepper fighting fade out as Little Kya climbs out the window....

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

...and runs deep into the woods. She comes to the water and stops. Looks longingly at the boats out on the water.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Little Kya sleeps on a pallet on the floor. Pa snores in the next room. Kya wakes up to the clanging of pots and pans. She sits straight up.

LITTLE KYA
(delighted whisper)
Ma!

Kya slips out of bed and runs to the kitchen.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Little Kya runs into the kitchen and stops dead. Her face falls.

A CHICKADEE has flown into the house and is trying desperately to escape the cold, empty kitchen.

It bangs on pots and pans as it flutters through the air.

Little Kya opens the door for the bird and watches it fly off into the marsh.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1954)

HEADER: 1954

Little Kya makes breakfast for Pa. Ham, bacon, grits, eggs. She sets the table. Plates the food. Pa wanders in.

PA
Ah swanee, girl, what's a' this?
Looks like ya went and got all
growed up. Cooking and all.

LITTLE KYA

Yessir. I fixed cornbread too but
it didn't come out.

PA

Well, I thank you. That's a mighty
good girl. I'm plumb wore out and
hungry as a wallow-hog.

Little Kya sits with Pa at the table. He eats everything.

PA (CONT'D)

This here's better'n a cold collard
sandwich!

LITTLE KYA

I wish the cornbread'd come out.
Maybe shoulda put more soda in,
less eggs. Ma made it so good but
I guess I didn't--

She stops talking when Pa's face clouds over at the mention
of Ma.

PA

Hold up.

He gets up and goes to the closet. Rummages around and comes
back with a World War Two issue knapsack.

PA (CONT'D)

Thought you could use it for your
feathers, bird nests, all that
other stuff you collect.

Little Kya smells the knapsack and holds it close.

LITTLE KYA

Can I go fishing with you sometime?

PA

You're a girl.

LITTLE KYA

Yessir. I'm your girl.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Little Kya and Pa boat down the river.

She reaches into the water and pulls up some feathers. Holds
them up to Pa.

LITTLE KYA
Great horned owl, probably.

She pockets them.

PA
My folks wasn't always poor, you know. Had rich land, raised tobacco and cotton and such. Over near Asheville. We lived in a house with a veranda that went all the way around. It was fine, mighty fine. Then it all went wrong together. Depression, cotton weevils. I don't know what all, and it was gone. Only thing left was debts.

They fish in silence.

PA (CONT'D)
I don't want you needing anything from anybody. One day you'll understand, Kya. With the money the Army owes me, you know what I could have done? But I own this land, at least. And one day you will, too.

LITTLE KYA
Yes, sir.

PA
I want you to stay careful. In this world you can't be no goddamn girl, you understand?

Little Kya nods.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY - LATER

Little Kya casts a line.

Little Tate motors by. He waves at Little Kya and Pa. Little Kya waves back, and Pa punches her shoulder. He glares at Little Tate, who motors quickly away.

PA
You gotta be careful. Woods are full of white trash. Folks tell you they got your best interest at heart. They're all liars.

(MORE)

PA (CONT'D)
 Ain't no one out for no one but
 theyselves. Better just to be
 alone.

They keep fishing as the sun sets on their bare shoulders.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya and Pa walk up to the house with a line full of fish.
 The flag is up in the mailbox, and Kya runs to it.

She pulls a letter out of the mailbox. "CATHERINE DANIELLE
 CLARK".

LITTLE KYA
 That's Ma's handwriting!

PA
 Give me that.

He snatches the letter.

LITTLE KYA
 Ma's alive! Living somewhere else.
 Why doesn't she come home?

Pa grabs the letter. Opens it and reads. His face clouds
 over.

LITTLE KYA (CONT'D)
 What's she say?

Pa fishes into his pocket for a lighter. He sets the letter
 on fire.

LITTLE KYA (CONT'D)
 Pa, stop! STOP THAT'S MINE!
 THAT'S FOR ME!

But the letter is ash.

PA
 She ain't never coming back.

Pa drops what's left and walks back inside. Little Kya runs
 to scoop up the hot ash.

LITTLE KYA
 AIN'T ISN'T EVEN A REAL WORD!

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya pours her handful of ash into an empty bottle. She cradles it to her chest.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya has fallen asleep on the floor, holding her bottle. She awakens to Pa tiptoeing around, collecting his things. She sits up. Pa sees her.

PA

Going to Asheville. Army's holding onto my damn disability pay and hell if government's gonna rob my own daughter the way they robbed me. I'll be a week at most. I ain't leaving 'til they pay me what they owe me. Understand?

LITTLE KYA

Yes, sir.

Pa tries to say something more, but can't. He heads out the door. She stays on the floor, frozen.

KYA (V.O.)

Always had a talent for knowing when someone's gonna be gone. Even before they did.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Deputy Perdue taps on Sheriff Jackson's door.

DEPUTY PERDUE

Got the first of the lab reports.

Sheriff Jackson waves him in. The two men sit, looking through the papers.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)

Time of death, between midnight and 2 AM, just like we thought.

They keep reading.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)

Damn.

SHERIFF JACKSON
Negative data. Ain't a thing here.
Except the two boys going up to the
third switchback, no fingerprints
on the railing, the grates,
nothing. None from Chase or anyone
else.

DEPUTY PERDUE
What does that...

SHERIFF JACKSON
What it COULD mean is, someone
wiped them clean.

DEPUTY PERDUE
So you thinking no accident?

SHERIFF JACKSON
No accident.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Little Kya traces through her mother's encyclopedias,
pretending to read to herself.

LITTLE KYA
"Bora Bora is an island, far away,
filled with many magical
creatures."

She takes a colored pencil and draws a blue heron in the
margins of the encyclopedia.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Kya tries to sleep on her mattress on the floor. Outside,
she hears the lapping of water and the roar of crickets. The
music of the marsh. She sits up in bed.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Kya drags her mattress out to the porch. Wraps herself in a
blanket and falls asleep, peaceful and calm.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya picks scuppernongs from the vines around her
mother's overgrown, weeded-out vegetable garden. Eats
hungrily.

EXT. MARSH - DAY - LATER

Little Kya digs mussels.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya smokes mussels in the smoker.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya stands on the counter and watches the scuppernongs boil on the stove. A row of jam jars are lined up on the counter.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - WATER - DAY

Little Kya motors out of the marsh with her pack of freshly smoked mussels and bag of scuppernong jelly jars.

EXT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Little Kya makes her way shyly into Jumpin's shop. Jumpin and Mabel peer down at this dirty, barefoot little girl with a giant bag.

JUMPIN

Good morning, Kya.

LITTLE KYA

Good morning, Mr. Jumpin. Mrs. Mabel.

She tries to talk but her mouth is dry.

JUMPIN

You needing some gas?

LITTLE KYA

I hear tell y'all buy mussels? I got some here. And some scuppernong jam.

Jumpin starts to say something, but Mabel cuts him off.

MABEL

Yesiree, we sure do. They fresh?

She looks through Kya's bag.

LITTLE KYA

I dug 'em before dawn. Just now.

MABEL

Well then, we can give you fifty cents for one bag, a full tank of gas for the other.

LITTLE KYA

How many bags y'all need a week?

JUMPIN

How about we strike up a business deal? I buy about forty ponds every two-three days. But mind, others bring them in too. If you bring them and I already got some, well, you'd be out. It's first come, first serve. No other way of doing it.

LITTLE KYA

That's fine. Thank you. Can I, uh...

She grabs a candle, matches, and more grits. She stops her hand above a Sugar Daddy candy.

Mabel rings her up.

MABEL

Come by next time and I'll measure your feet. Sure we can find some shoes in our church donation bin for you.

LITTLE KYA

I'll be by first thing.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya, safe and warm in her house, walks over to the record player. Dusts it off. No one's played it since Jodie left. She puts on a record: Mississippi John Hurt.

"*You Got To Walk that Lonesome Valley*" begins to play, and she sways back and forth.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Mabel measures Kya's feet by outlining them on butcher paper.

A FISHERMAN walks into the door holding a bag of mussels.

MABEL
We're full for the day, but thank
you!

She winks at Little Kya, who beams.

MABEL (CONT'D)
If you outwork 'em, you can beat
'em.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Little Kya leans over the desk and several packs of seeds as Mabel sketches out diagrams of how to plant corn.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Little Kya hoes in her garden under the hot sun.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Little Kya digs mussels at night.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Little Kya looks through the box. Dresses...and a bra. She pulls it out and wrinkles her nose.

MABEL
Come around back. I'll show you.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

The music continues as Little Kya, now more confident, boats through the marsh, casting a line. Her boat drifts into some weeds...

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1959)

HEADER: 1959

The boat drifts out, five years later.

Kya, 14, casts a fishing line with grace and ease.

EXT. MARSH - CLEARING - DAY

Kya walks home with a bucket of fresh mussels.

She stops when she sees the tree stump in the middle of the clearing.

There's a six inch long, thin black feather sticking straight out of it. Kya picks it up.

Kya begins to walk back home, then doubles back. She snatches the feather out of the stump.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya's house is neater, clean, from the outside. There's a carefully tended garden, with tomato plants crawling up stakes, red peppers, okra, and melon.

And of course, her porch bed, which is surrounded by shells and feathers. Kya's bed has the look of a shrine, or maybe a fortress.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - DAY

Kya walks into town. She's wearing the feather of the white tropic bird in her hair.

EXT. MARSH - CLEARING - DAY

Kya comes out of her house to find another tail feather on the stump. She smiles.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya opens her mother's drawer and paws through her old make up.

Kya paints her face. Finds a pair of scissors and cuts her hair. She finds a bottle of her mother's pink nail polish.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - FLASHBACK

Little Kya sits on the porch with her sisters, laughing as Ma paints their nails.

MA

Don't move, you'll mess it up!

LITTLE KYA
It's so PINK!

MA
It'll look good on your pretty
olive skin.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya paints her fingernails carefully with Ma's pink nail
polish.

EXT. MARSH - CLEARING - DAY

Kya finds a small red and white milk carton, and next to it,
another feather. She smiles. Picks up the feather first.
Then looks inside the milk carton. Packages of seeds
(turnips, carrots, green beans). A spark plug for her motor
boat engine.

At the bottom of the carton is a note. She picks it up and
traces her fingers over it. She can't read. No matter. She
runs back into her house...

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

...and grabs the tail feather from a tundra swan off her
wall.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Kya makes her way through the woods, where she runs smack
into Tate. They stare at each other for a moment.

KYA
Oh. You.

Kya pulls the tundra swan feather from her pocket. Hands it
to him without a word.

TATE
Tundra swan!

KYA
Who taught you birds?

TATE
My dad.

KYA

Oh.

More awkward silence.

KYA (CONT'D)

I can't read your note.

She pulls the note out of her pocket and hands it back to him.

TATE

All I said was, I saw you a couple of times when I was fishing, and it got me thinking that maybe you could use some seeds and the spark plug. I had extra and thought it might save you a trip to town. I figured you'd like the feathers.

Awkward pause.

TATE (CONT'D)

Well, I'd better be going, getting late.

Kya says nothing. Tate nods. He makes his way out of the woods...then turns.

TATE (CONT'D)

I could teach you to read.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY

Kya sits on a driftwood log while Tate pulls out a paper and pencil.

TATE

I thought you may as well learn to write at the same time. So we start with "A". "A". Just draw that shape.

Kya writes out a letter "A" on her paper.

TATE (CONT'D)

Good! Now I'm gonna show you something kind of neat. Here's "B", here's "C".

Kya draws out "B" and "C".

TATE (CONT'D)
Now write "C, A, B".

Kya does.

KYA
(sounding it out)
"Cuh-ah-buh".

TATE
Cab! Cab! See, you already can
write a word! C-A-B. You can
write the word "cab"!

KYA
What's "cab"?

TATE
Don't even worry about it! Now "D"
and you can write "D-A-D". "Dad!"

Kya begins to write.

TATE (CONT'D)
Oh my gosh. Oh gosh. Kya, I'm so
sorry.

KYA
"Dad". No big deal. What's this?

TATE
"E".

Kya writes out "E".

KYA
Rather you say something about it.
Everyone else don't talk about it
none. Look right through me.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Kya lays on her porch. In the porch light, she writes
"FINCH" beneath one of her drawings of a finch.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Kya stands in front of an old, windy oak tree and we see that
she's sketched it almost identically. She writes "O" at the
bottom and stops.

KYA
Don't tell me.

Kya writes "OKE".

TATE
Gettin' there.

KYA
Don't help me.

TATE
Sure, I got all day.

But he's smiling.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Tate sits at the table, finishing a plate of mussels and bread, as Kya leans over him reading from "Sands County Almanac"

KYA
(reading from Sands County
Almanac)
"There are some who can live
without wild things," comma, "and
some who can not."

She pulls back.

KYA (CONT'D)
Oh. Oh.

Tate jumps out of his chair.

TATE
That's what I'm talking about Kya!
Wooo! Now there'll never be a time
again when you can't read!

KYA
All right, all right.

But she's smiling, too.

KYA (CONT'D)
I didn't know words could hold so
much. I didn't know a sentence
could be so full.

TATE
Not all words hold that much.

A SERIES OF SHOTS where Tate brings Kya more and more books. Zoology, Biology, Botany. A Strunk and White for good measure.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya, with a children's science book, practices diagramming a plant cell.

KYA (V.O.)

We went through the whole library,
Three times a week, summer into
winter.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Kya and Tate tramp through the marsh, laughing and talking. Tate freezes. He's right in front of an alligator, panting heavily. Kya pulls him away.

KYA

Aw, relax. They don't attack
unless you're right up on em.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (WINTER 1959)

It's winter, and Tate motors up with Kya waiting for him. Tate beams upon seeing her. He's carrying a picnic basket.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

There's a makeshift Christmas tree on Kya's table. Tate pulls out Christmas leftovers from the basket and a wrapped book, which he hands to Kya.

TATE

I'm sorry I couldn't invite you
over for Christmas. My whole
family--

He stops himself. Kya sees his embarrassment.

KYA

Don't worry about it.

Tate plates the food as she unwraps out a used Webster's Dictionary. She opens it to....

A Pelican feather under "P"

A Mushroom under "M"

And a bunch of forget-me-not blossoms under "F".

Kya pushes forward a head tuft from a male cardinal.

TATE

Head tuft from a male cardinal!
Cool! I don't have one.

He wants to hug her. She wants to hug him, too. They don't.

TATE (CONT'D)

Thank you!

KYA

Yeah.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1960)

HEADER: 1960

Kya guns her boat and takes off into the marsh, towards the setting sun.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY - LATER

Kya kills the motor and allows the boat to be carried through the gentle current.

A flock of seagulls flies around Kya, dipping and calling out for food. She obliges, pulling out old crackers and feeding them from her hands.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Deputy Perdue is holding a plastic bag full of the red fibers up to the light while the Sheriff study's a report.

SHERIFF JACKSON

"Cause of death: sudden impact on
occipital and parietal..."

He keeps reading.

SHERIFF JACKSON (CONT'D)

He fell off the tower. So somebody
did destroy all the foot and
fingerprints.

DEPUTY PERDUE

And look.

He hands the Sheriff the plastic bag.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)

Didn't come from any of his clothes. And they were all over his body. Wool, it says.

SHERIFF JACKSON

Could be a shirt, skirt, socks, cape. Hell, it could be anything.

INT. TATE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tate's house is filled with pictures of his pretty MOTHER (mid-20s) and sister CARIANNE, 8. SCUPPER (40), a big, boisterous man with red knuckles, is cutting tomatoes while Tate fries burgers for dinner.

Miliza Korjus sings from a record player. The house is neat, but there's something still and sad in the air. Scupper sings along to dissolve it.

SCUPPER

How's school?

TATE

Good, good. They're letting me sit in on ninth grade biology.

As he talks, he shapes an extra burger with his hands and puts it in the pan. Scupper pretends not to notice.

INT. TATE'S HOUSE - TATE'S ROOM - DAY

Morning light streams through the window as Tate sneaks out of bed...

INT. TATE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Tate tiptoes to the refrigerator and takes bread, the hamburger patty, and a bottle of ketchup out and puts them in a paper bag. He quietly slips out the front door.

INT. TATE'S HOUSE - SCUPPER'S ROOM - DAY

Through his window, Scupper watches Tate tiptoe towards water with his paper bag of food. Scupper smiles.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya leaps up from her porch bed as she hears Tate's motor approaching. She leaps to her feet, beaming as he walks through the trees to her.

KYA
I thought you'd forgotten.

Tate looks Kya straight in the eye.

TATE
How could I?

He hands her a carefully made hamburger.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - DINER - NIGHT (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Sheriff Jackson parks his car in between the trucks that are squeezed together in front of the very popular Barkley Cove Diner. The diner overlooks the harbor, and mollusk shells litter the sidewalks.

INT. BARKLEY COVE - DINER - NIGHT

Deputy Perdue and Sheriff Jackson weave between crowded tables to find a seat at the bar. A drunk MR. LANE (60) is talking to the WAITRESS (20s) behind the counter.

MR. LANE
I reckon it was Lamar Sands. He caught his wife doing a number with Chase right on the deck of that fancy ski boat.

WAITRESS
That's a motive.

MR. LANE
Also Lamar was with that bunch that slit the sheriff's tires.

The Waitress, recognizing Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Perdue, tries to save it.

WAITRESS
They were just kids back then.

MR. LANE
There was something else too, I just can't remember.

Miss Pansy Price, picking up a to-go order behind Mr. Lane, pipes up.

MISS PANSY

(to Mr. Lane)

It coulda been that woman lives out in the marsh. Crazy enough for the loony bin. I just bet she'd been up to this kind of thing.

MR. LANE

That one?

MISS PANSY

Well, for a while she got herself involved with--

She stops when she sees Deputy Perdue and Sheriff Jackson.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT (1960)

Kya, curled up in her cot, sketches a shell that she balances on her knee.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Tate and Kya sit on her bed, holding her tattered family Bible. Ray Charles spins on the record player.

Kya has the Bible opened to the family tree page, where she traces her fingers along the names.

KYA

(sounding out the words)

"Miss Catherine Danielle Clark.
October 10, 1945."

TATE

All right then, Miss Catherine
Danielle Clark.

KYA

(reading)

"Master Jeremy Andrew Clark,
January 2..." That's Jodie! "Miss
Amanda Margaret Clark. Master
Napier Murphy Clark. Miss Mary
Helen Clark."

She traces her fingers to the two names above.

KYA (CONT'D)

This means...these are my parents.
"Mister Jackson Henry Clark married
Miss Julienne Maria Jacques, June
12, 1933."

She chokes back tears and looks out the window.

KYA (CONT'D)

This used to be all ours. Pa said,
we used to own all this land,
generations back. We wasn't always
like this.

She motions to the shack.

TATE

Weren't always like this.

KYA

Weren't always like this.

She tears up.

TATE

(panicking)

Oh, no! Oh no. I made you cry.
I'm sorry, Kya.

KYA

You didn't make me cry. I miss
them.

She traces her hand over the names on the family tree.

KYA (CONT'D)

Jodie. Ma. I had forgot how much
I feel them not here. But I feel
them, not here, right now. I feel
them not here all the time. And
most of the time I forget that I'm
feeling it. I am so damn alone,
Tate. I am so damn alone. It's
there all the time. This hole in
my chest that's them being gone.
And I can't fill it up.

Tate reaches out and puts his hand on Kya's shoulder.

KYA (CONT'D)

I just wanted you to hear me.
Sometimes I feel so invisible I
wonder if I'm here at all.

TATE

You are.

Kya laughs, then flips a page. A handwritten poem falls out. Kya picks it up.

KYA

This is Ma. She used to write down poems she liked.

KYA (CONT'D)

(reading)

"I did care...I did say everything I thought/In the mildest words I knew. And now/I have to say I am relieved it is over;/At the end I could feel only pity/For that urge toward more life."

EXT. JUMPIN'S WHARF - DAY

Kya ties her boat up in the dock as Jumpin hurries out to meet her.

KYA

Hey, Jumpin! I got the rest of the mussels for ya!

JUMPIN

Kya, there were some men poking around here this morning, asking about you.

It's as if Kya has been struck by lightning. She looks right at Jumpin, suddenly an adult.

KYA

Who? What did they want?

JUMPIN

Social Services. Asking is your Pa still around, where your ma is, if you're going to school this fall. And when you come here. They especially want to know what times you come here.

Kya's too afraid to breathe.

JUMPIN (CONT'D)

So I told them, your Pa's just fine. Out fishing is all. And I never know when your boat is here.

(MORE)

JUMPIN (CONT'D)

I'll send them on a snipe hunt if they come again. But, be careful.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Tate motors up to Kya's house as she waits for him on the shore.

KYA

(nervous)

Can we meet somewhere's else, 'sides here?

TATE

It's besides, not 'sides, and it's polite to greet people before asking a favor.

She gives an elaborate curtsy.

KYA

Good afternoon, Mr. Tate. Can we go somewhere besides here? Please. Jumpin said the Social services are lookin' for me. They're gonna pull me in like a trout, put me in a foster home.

TATE

Well, we better hide way out where the crawdads sing. I pity any foster parents who take you on.

KYA

What do you mean, where the crawdads sing? Ma used to say that.

TATE

I mean, far out in the marsh, where critters are wild. Still act like critters.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Kya stands in the boat. They're motoring deeper and deeper into the marsh.

As Kya stands up, a hunting knife falls out of her pocket. Tate picks it up.

TATE
You carry this with you?

KYA
(shrugging)
It's dangerous for me. You didn't
bring any food, did you?

TATE
I knew I was seeing you, so I
always bring food.

He hands her a sandwich from his jacket.

KYA
I'm not poor, you know.

TATE
Didn't say you were. Girls just
eat a lot.

KYA
(mouth full of sandwich)
Really?

TATE
Have you ever thought of going back
to school? It wouldn't kill you.

KYA
They'll grab me and put me in a
home.

TATE
What, so you plan to live alone in
the marsh forever?

KYA
Better than going to a foster home.

TATE
Might be nice people who like kids.

KYA
You're saying you'd go live with
strangers before you'd live in the
marsh?

TATE
Well you can't just live like this
forever!

KYA
Why not?

TATE
Because!

He searches for a reason.

TATE (CONT'D)
There are bears out there.

KYA
I ain't afraid of bears.

TATE
I'm not afraid of bears.

Kya laughs.

TATE (CONT'D)
I'm just saying, it's not good for
a woman to live alone.

Kya shrugs.

KYA
Watch me.

TATE
All right.

A moment of unexpected intimacy.

KYA
Come on. Hide with me just a few
hours.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Kya and Tate sit on a log, with Kya silently sounding out words in a biology book.

KYA
You can go on.

TATE
In a minute.

KYA
Tate? I appreciate you teaching me
to read and all the things you gave
me. But why do you do it? Don't
you have a girlfriend or something
like that?

TATE
(posturing)
Well, sometimes I do.

KYA
Sometimes?

TATE
I mean, I had one, but not now.

Kya laughs. Tate relaxes a little.

TATE (CONT'D)
I guess, I like the marsh. I like
the way you're so interested in it.
Most people don't pay any attention
except to fish. They think it's
wasteland that should be drained
and developed. And...

He can't say the rest. He shrugs.

KYA
Where's your ma?

Tate doesn't answer.

KYA (CONT'D)
You don't have to say nothing.

TATE
My mother and little sister died in
a car wreck over in Asheville. My
sister's name was Carianne.

KYA
Oh, I'm sorry Tate. I'm so sorry.
I bet your ma was nice and pretty.

TATE
They both were.

KYA
My ma walked off one day and didn't
come back. The mama deer always
come back.

TATE
Well, at least you can hope she
does. I think...

KYA
What? You think what? You can say
anything to me.

TATE

I think they went to Asheville to buy my birthday present. There was this bike I wanted. Western Auto didn't carry it, so I think they went to Asheville to get that bike for me. I don't even remember what kind of bike it was.

Kya goes to touch Tate, then pulls back.

TATE (CONT'D)

And I been scared ever since, of doing the wrong thing. Stepping in the wrong place. Letting myself want something.

Kya leans in closer to Tate. And then, the wind picks up, and thousands of yellow sycamore leaves break from their life support and stream across the sky.

The leaves hit them both full on in the face, breaking the tension. Suddenly kids again.

KYA

See how many leaves you can catch before they hit the ground!

They run through the swirling leaves, laughing and catching them.

They bump into one another. They freeze. Stop laughing. Tate takes her shoulders and kisses her lips as the leaves rain down. She pulls back. Softens.

Now she kisses him. The two of them slowly figure it out. Then break away. Tate pulls a leaf out of her hair.

KYA (CONT'D)

Am I your girlfriend now?

TATE

Do you want to be?

Kya kisses him again to answer.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY (FALL 1960)

Kya and Tate race through the colored leaves, shrieking with laughter.

EXT. MARSH - TATE'S BOAT - DAY

Kya sits in Tate's boat and opens the basket. A Winn-Dixie cake with "Kya" written on it, surrounded by wrapped packages. Kya gasps.

TATE
Happy birthday, Kya!

KYA
What? No! How'd you know it was my birthday?

TATE
It was in your Bible.

Tate cuts the cake.

KYA
Not my name! Don't cut my name!

TATE
Yes ma'am.

Tate cuts the cake and they drift through the marsh, eating cake and laughing.

Kya unwraps her presents. The first is a small magnifying glass.

TATE (CONT'D)
So you can see the fine details of insect wings.

Kya beams and unwraps the second. It's a plastic clasp, painted silver and decorated with a rhinestone sea gull.

TATE (CONT'D)
For your hair.

He pulls some locks behind her ear and clips the barrette in place. Kya smiles.

The last present is a larger box, and Kya opens it to find ten jars of oil paint, tins of watercolors, and different sized brushes.

TATE (CONT'D)
For your painting.

Kya picks up each color. Each brush.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE DAY

Tate helps Kya tape up more drawings of her labeled shells and feathers.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Tate and Kya sit on a blanket on the forest floor, eating biscuits under a shared blanket. She leans into him, giggling. There's a sound of a roar, like cannons.

TATE

Here they come.

And just like that, hundreds of thousands of white snow geese fly up and through the air, towards them, landing just feet away. The entire world is blanketed in white. Kya and Tate are speechless.

Kya watches Tate laugh amidst the geese and sunlight. He and the marsh are suddenly one.

EXT. PETE'S BOAT YARD - DAY

Scupper and Tate hack barnacles off of Scupper's boat, "The Cherry Pie."

SCUPPER

I'm too tired to cook. Let's grab something at the diner on the way home?

Tate nods and keeps hacking.

INT. BARKLEY COVE - DINER - NIGHT

Scupper and Tate nod to the WAITRESS as they make their way into the crowded diner and find seats at the bar.

SCUPPER

(to the Waitress)

Two chicken fried steak specials, please. Extra biscuits for that one.

He nods to Tate. Tate is watching a FAMILY OF FOUR say grace in a corner booth.

SCUPPER (CONT'D)

We're celebrating tonight.

TATE
What? Why?

SCUPPER
Because I'm proud of you.

TATE
I didn't do anything.

SCUPPER
All on your own, you studied the marsh life, straight A's, full scholarship to Chapel Hill. I'm not the kind to speak on such things much. But I'm mighty proud of you, son. All right?

TATE
Yeah. All right.

SCUPPER
But we'll never talk about it again, how's that?

TATE
Great.

SCUPPER
I know there's that big dance at the pavilion coming up. You taking anybody?

TATE
Nah. I may not go. Nobody I want to ask.

SCUPPER
Now, son, I don't pay much attention to idle talk. Never have done. But there's a regular riptide of gossip saying you've got something going on with that girl in the marsh?

Tate throws up his hands.

SCUPPER (CONT'D)
Now, I'm not saying I believe those stories about her--

TATE

I'm teaching her how to read
because the people in this town are
so mean to her she couldn't even go
to school.

The Waitress plops down two heaping plates of chicken fried
steak, collard greens, biscuits, and mash and gravy. A
welcome distraction.

SCUPPER

Hey, it's my job to say all the
things we don't like to talk about.
Don't get huffy about it.

He butters a biscuit.

SCUPPER (CONT'D)

So are you gonna get any field work
freshman year, or is just books.

TATE

I applied for a couple of
internships, but I probably won't
get any.

SCUPPER

I never underestimate you, Tate.

Tate laughs. The two continue to chat and eat.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya and Tate make out on her bed. She takes his shirt off.

KYA

Okay?

TATE

Yeah.

He kisses her more, then stops.

TATE (CONT'D)

We shouldn't.

Kya doesn't say a word, but she takes Tate's shirt. She
buttons his shirt over her own, staring at him the whole
time.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Tate strokes Kya's hair as she sketches geese.

TATE
Lemme see that notebook.

Kya hands Tate her notebook. Tate leafs through the pages of Kya's notebook. A scallop shell, labelled with a water color of the beach and insets showing the creature eating smaller creatures of the sea.

There are hundreds of pictures. Tate whistles as he traces his fingers over the illustration.

TATE (CONT'D)
These are wonderful. Beautifully detailed.

KYA
So?

TATE
So I think you're the smartest person I know.

KYA
What do you need to go to college for, then? Stay here. Ask me whatever you wanna know.

TATE
You could publish these, if you want to.

KYA
Naw.

TATE
You could.

KYA
I can't.

TATE
Why not?

KYA
From the Marsh Girl?

Tate starts to object and she cuts him off.

KYA (CONT'D)

It's what I am because it's what they say I am. I can't do anything about it.

TATE

Maybe here, where all these narrow-minded people think they're the whole world. They're not. You can introduce yourself to the world. Catherine Danielle Clark isn't a Marsh Girl name. Not to them. Not to me.

Now Kya kisses Tate. He takes her shirt off. Stares at her breasts. He unbuttons her shorts. She lets him. Now they're naked, vulnerable. Kya turns away in shyness.

TATE (CONT'D)

Kya, look at me.

She does. And now she's on him, hands gliding over his chest...

Kissing her, his hands travel up her thighs...she gasps...he begins stroking her and she throws her head back...

And then Tate stops.

TATE (CONT'D)

God, Kya, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

KYA

Tate, please. I want to.

Tate shakes his head, and picks up her clothes. Tenderly dresses her again. Not touching her the way she wants.

KYA (CONT'D)

Why not?

TATE

Kya, I want you more than anything. I want you forever. But I can't get pregnant. I can't be damaged as easily. I won't do it, Kya, because I love you.

Kya pulls back at the word "love". He wraps himself around her.

KYA

When, then? When can we?

TATE
Just not yet.

KYA
How did you know what to do?

TATE
Same way you did.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Kya boats past a giant machine cutting several oaks at once on the bank. She turns her head away.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Kya and Tate stand side by side as she sketches and labels a butterfly resting on a tree trunk. The butterfly finally flies away.

KYA
NEXT!

She laughs and they walk on into the woods.

TATE
I'm going to Chapel Hill sooner than I thought. I got a job in a biology lab on campus. Starting summer quarter.

Kya forces a smile and nods. Tate sits up. Pulls an envelope out of his pocket and hands it to her. She opens it.

TATE (CONT'D)
It's a list of publishers I went through with my advisor.

KYA
What do I do with this?

TATE
Write them! You can write better than I can. Tell them you have books. They'll pay good money.

KYA
I don't know what to say to these people. Look at me. I'm not a writer.

TATE

You are.

KYA

You think someone's gonna look at me, give me money, read what I have to say?

TATE

If they're smart. And there are a lot of smart people in the world. You can teach them what's special about this place. Just like you taught me.

KYA

Do it with me.

TATE

Fine. I'll help you when I'm back. But look.

He motions to Kya.

KYA

What?

TATE

Look how much you've already done on your own.

KYA

What? What have I done?

She runs away from Tate.

TATE

Kya, wait.

KYA

You're gonna stay gone. There's no jobs here.

TATE

I won't leave you, Kya, I promise. I'll come back to you.

KYA

You won't.

TATE
 (calling after her)
 You can't run away from every
 whipstitch. Sometimes you have to
 discuss things. Face things.

But Kya's already gone.

TATE (CONT'D)
 (calling)
 Damn it, Kya! Why are you like
 this?

INT. TATE'S HOUSE - TATE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tate lies in his bed, not able to sleep. Finally sits up.
 He opens a window and hops out.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Kya, on her bed on the porch, wakes up to the sound of a
 motor boat. She sits up. It's Tate.

TATE
 One more night.

KYA
 One more night.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Morning light pours over the two lovers. They're fully
 clothed, sleeping on Kya's porch bed.

EXT. MARSH - LAGOON - DAY

Tate stands on the shore with Kya. Morning light pours over
 them. He hands her the envelope.

TATE
 The best bet is probably gonna be
 University of North Carolina press.
 They just got a big grant and did a
 hire from Cornell to run the grad
 program. And then after that,
 there's University of the South at
 Sewanee...Kya? Are you listening?

KYA

(exploding)

You're going to forget me, up at Chapel Hill. When you get busy with all that college stuff and see all those pretty girls.

TATE

I could never forget you, Kya. Ever. You take care of the marsh 'til I get back. You hear? And be careful.

KYA

I will.

TATE

I mean it. Watch out for folks. Don't let strangers get near you. I'll come home in about a month, I promise. For Fourth of July. I'll be back before you know it. Kya, write those publishers. Don't let them tell you no. Someone will tell you yes.

Then he kisses her. She kisses him back. The most passionate and committed we've seen them so far.

Tate gets back into his boat and motors away. From the horizon, he waves goodbye to her. She waves goodbye and places her hand on her heart.

INT. UNC PROTOZOOLOGY LAB - DAY

Tate puts a bus ticket, CHAPEL HILL to BARKLEY COVE, safe in his chest pocket and hides a smile. He busies himself in the lab, alongside other clean cut SCIENCE STUDENTS. DR. BLUM, 40's and kind, taps Tate on the shoulder.

DR. BLUM

How are you settling in so far, kid?

TATE

Just trying hard to not blow it all to hell, Dr. Blum.

DR. BLUM

There's a birding expedition this weekend that my colleagues from Duke and Vandy are putting together. I have room for one student, and I thought of you.

The nearby students eye Tate jealously. He notices.

TATE

Yes! Absolutely. I'll be there.

DR. BLUM

Good. Friday morning, get back Sunday afternoon. I've told some of them about you. The boy from the swamps! Ha!

He claps Tate on the back and leaves. Tate tries to smile at the student next to him, who glares right back.

EXT. UNC BUS STATION - DAY

Tate stares at the bus station from the passenger seat of the car driven by Dr. Blum. His jaw clenches. His hand goes to the car door...

And he can't. He leans back as the radio plays Roy Orbison.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Distant fireworks go off as Kya puts on a too small chiffon dress as her Roy Orbison's "*Only the Lonely*" plays on the radio.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Kya waits for Tate on the banks of the marsh. And waits.

A day passes. The sun sets. Kya walks inside.

EXT. MARSH - DAY - LATER

The next day. Kya sits on the marsh, her smile gone, waiting. The sun sets again.

EXT. MARSH - DAY - LATER

The next day.

Kya watches the sun rise on the marsh. She sinks to her knees.

KYA

No, Tate. No, no no no.

She heaves in sobs.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya lays in bed, glassy eyed. The birds call outside, but she doesn't stir.

KYA (V.O.)

For three days after giving up on Tate, I didn't get out of bed.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya lays in bed, holding one of Tate's shirts.

KYA (V.O.)

Tate and life and love. Those were all the same thing.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya wakes up to a beating sound at the screen door. She sits up. Through the screen door, a raven-sized Cooper's hawk peers in.

Kya slowly gets out of bed. The hawk takes flight.

KYA

No! Wait.

But the hawk is gone. Kya rushes to the pantry and grabs the last of the grits. Gets to work boiling water.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY

Kya carries her huge pot of grits to the birds on the shore, swaying under the bucket's weight.

Kya feeds the birds in the marsh. They flutter and land on her arms, eating the grits.

Kya closes her eyes and lets the birds envelop her. BIG RED, a giant red seagull, lands right in front of her, standing watch. Kya laughs, tears running down her cheeks.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Kya, her face drawn, pays Mabel. Mabel searches Kya's face for signs of her old, lively self. Nothing.

EXT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Kya walks outside with her full oil can. She looks at the FAMILIES around her.

The groups of WOMEN leaning into each other, laughing with the familiarity of old girlfriends. The MEN putting their arms around their GIRLFRIENDS and WIVES.

She walks back to her boat. Guns the motor and heads back towards the marsh.

KYA (V.O.)

Every species has a method of surviving the big ice storm. The meteor that wipes everyone out.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya rolls out the list of publishers on her desk.

KYA (V.O.)

Every living creature tries to leave some kind of legacy. So in that way, I'm just one more, aren't I?

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya sits at her desk, a stack of manuscripts in manila envelopes piled on her desk.

KYA (V.O.)

Dear Publisher, I am following up with more pages, these rare birds of the Carolina marsh that have not been detailed in any publication thus far. In fact, as far as I understand, there has been no in depth publication of the wildlife in our marsh. Shouldn't there be?
Yours, Catherine Danielle Clark.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Deputy Perdue pushes open the door to the Sheriff's office with his foot and steps inside. He's holding a big greasy bag of doughnuts in his teeth and two coffees.

Sheriff Jackson takes the bag and coffee. Hands Deputy Perdue a doughnut. The two take big bites. Heaven.

SHERIFF JACKSON AND DEPUTY PERDUE
(simultaneously, with full
mouths)

Well, I got something.

Deputy Perdue nods to Sheriff Jackson.

SHERIFF JACKSON

Mine's probably nothing. Poor Patti Love Andrews called, carrying on about some necklace. I don't understand what she's going on about but she says it's important about the case. She'll be around later on.

DEPUTY PERDUE

I got it from several sources that Chase had something going on in the marsh.

Sheriff Jackson chews thoughtfully.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1960)

Tate's boat motors through the lagoon, towards Kya.

Tate turns the channel. He sees Kya, kneeling on a sandbar, staring at something in the grass. Whispering to it. She doesn't see Tate. Tate turns into some reeds, hidden from view, and kills the motor.

Tate watches Kya, gently whispering to some crustaceans. And then, the roar of a motor. Kya hops up, grabs her bag, and hightails it into the tall grass.

She's closer to Tate now, and as she crouches in the grass, he sees her wide eyes. Crazy with fear. A KINDLY OLD MAN boats past.

When he's gone, Kya creeps out of the grass again. Tears stream down Tate's face.

TATE
(whispering)
Kya, I can't. I'm a coward. I'm
sorry.

As Kya runs back towards her house, Tate motors his boat back towards the ocean.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Kya, Big Red circling over her, smokes mussels on the shore. She watches a backhoe digging channels to dry the marsh. She collects her mussels and turns back to her house...

EXT. POINT BEACH - DAY (1964)

HEADER: 1964

Kya, now 19, sketches sand crabs as they bury themselves beneath the lapping waves. Kya's drawings are spectacular, and here we see how much they've grown in her years apart from Tate. Refined and detailed, with each appendage numbered and colored.

Kya hears laughing and looks up.

It's Chase Andrews, older, even more strong and handsome, tossing a football back and forth with a group of friends. AlwaysWearsPearls and TallSkinnyBlonde are there, too, rolling their eyes at the boys and giggling.

The group is coming closer and closer, laughing and calling. Chase runs towards Kya to gracefully catch the football. Then he turns and looks right at Kya. Smiles.

And Kya can't help it, she smiles back. Chase holds her gaze another moment, then runs back to his friends. Kya gathers her sketchbook and tries to collect herself.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya walks to her house, carrying a basket of shells, feathers, and leaves. She stops dead.

There's a MAN IN A SUIT standing in front of her house, holding a camera. He's taking pictures of the house from all sides.

Light as a feather, Kya slips behind a tree. She presses herself up against the tree trunk, trying to contain her breath, as the Man in a Suit snaps more photos.

EXT. JUMPIN'S WHARF - DAY

Kya motors into Jumpin's wharf and hops off, with arms full of mussels. She struggles under the weight. One of the bags suddenly leaves her hands--

It's Chase Andrews.

CHASE
Can I carry this for you?

KYA
I got it.

CHASE
Please.

He takes the bags out of her arms and follows her into Jumpin's shop.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Jumpin and Mabel stare as Kya leads in this well-dressed, handsome young man.

KYA
Right up here on the counter is fine.

Chase deposits the bags on the counter. His shirt is stained with mussel juice. He winks at Kya, tips his hat, and leaves without a word. Kya and Mabel stare after him. Jumpin rolls his eyes.

KYA (CONT'D)
Hey, I need help. Somebody's been taking pictures of my house.

MABEL
They've been all over. Developers. Want to drain the "murky swamp" and build hotels.

JUMPIN
They'd probably offer you a good amount of money for your land.

MABEL
Jumpin!

JUMPIN
Nothing wrong with money.

MABEL

You do own that land, don't you?
Your daddy? You own that house?

JUMPIN

(off Kya's blank look)
Family bible, well, anything like
that? Might be good to know what
you own.

KYA

Me? I don't own anything.

EXT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Kya comes out of Jumpin's shop, rattling her coins and fixing her hair. She stops dead. Chase is standing on the dock, waiting for her.

KYA

Thanks for helping me.

CHASE

You're welcome, Kya. They call you
Marsh Girl, but I remember your
name. Kya. You wanna go for a
picnic? In my boat, this Sunday?

Kya's taken aback. Chase smiles.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - SHORE - DAY

Kya sits with Chase, having finished a fried chicken picnic on the beach. Their arms keep almost touching. The space between them is electric.

Chase is playing "Shenandoah" on his harmonica. Kya tosses a piece of chicken to a pelican, who catches it easily in its floppy beak. Chase laughs through his harmonica and puts it down.

KYA

(laughing)
Seagulls get the bad rap, but it's
pelicans that are greedy.

Chase picks up a shell. It's creamy with bright splotches of red and purple. Kya grabs it from him, eager and impulsive.

CHASE
You like shells?

KYA
This is an ornate scallop. Pecten ornatus. Many many of that genus here but this particular species usually inhabits south of this latitude because these waters are too cool for them.

Chase is staring at her.

KYA (CONT'D)
What?

CHASE
(laughing)
The Marsh Girl, who can't read, knows the Latin name of shells, and where they "inhabit", and even why, for Chrissakes. Here, you keep it.

He hands her the shell. She smiles and pockets it.

He kisses her. She kisses him back. Things escalate quickly. She enjoys it...he reaches for her breast...

And she pushes him away.

KYA
I'm worth more than fried chicken.

She gets up and heads back towards her house in the marsh.

CHASE
Kya! Kya, wait! I'm sorry!
You're right!

She turns.

CHASE (CONT'D)
Let me make it up to you.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Chase boats with Kya through the marsh as she points to various landmarks.

KYA
That was where the Creek used to live. This was all theirs.

CHASE
Ours now, huh? Hey.

He tucks her hair behind her ears.

CHASE (CONT'D)
There!

Kya smiles, shy.

KYA
Look. See that?

She points to Big Red, swooping gallantly overhead.

KYA (CONT'D)
That's Big Red. He's in my book.

CHASE
A lady writer. I'll be damned.

He laughs. She laughs along.

CHASE (CONT'D)
It's wonderful, Kya. Truly. Would
you show me your book sometime?

KYA
It's still a mess.

CHASE
I like a mess.

KYA
I can't.

Chase evaluates this strange girl.

CHASE
All right. The fire tower?

KYA
What?

EXT. FIRE TOWER - DAY

Chase leads Kya towards the tower.

CHASE
Can't believe you never left the
marsh and you never been up the
fire tower! It's a great way to
see the whole marsh from above.

INT. FIRE TOWER - DAY

Chase and Kya climb the ladder to the top of the fire tower.

CHASE

I just need to know...don't you
ever get lonely?

KYA

I'm not alone.

CHASE

People lonely?

Kya doesn't answer. She looks through the windows of the fire tower. The rounded oak forest stretch out as far as the eye can see. She stops dead.

CHASE (CONT'D)

You can tell me. I won't laugh at
you.

KYA

It's like having a friend your
whole life but you never saw their
full face. And now I see the full
face.

She gestures to the marsh. All the slipstreams, lagoons, creeks and estuaries weave through brilliant green grass to the sea.

CHASE

Come on.

They climb to the last step. Chase pushes open the iron grate covering the stairwell.

After they climb on to the platform, he eases it down again. Kya's afraid to step on the grate and she taps it with her toes.

INT. FIRE TOWER - PLATFORM - DAY

Chase leads her to the railing and they look over the marshland.

CHASE

Take me to your house.

KYA

It's far.

CHASE

I like far. And I don't care what
it's like, if that's what you're
worried about.

He comes to her and embraces her from behind. She lets him.

CHASE (CONT'D)

Let's go.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya and Chase motor up to Kya's lagoon and Chase hops out.
Kya ties up the boat, suddenly a mess of nerves.

Chase looks around at the overgrown vegetable garden, the
overalls and shirts hanging on the clothes line.

CHASE

How long you lived out here by
yourself?

KYA

Probably ten years?

CHASE

Neat. Living out here with no
parents telling you what to do.

His eyes catch a glimmer of light on the porch and he starts
walking towards her porch steps.

KYA

There's nothing to see inside!

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Chase steps into the screened porch and picks up the jars of
butterflies, leaves, and feathers that line the walls.

CHASE

You did all this?

KYA

Yes.

Chase walks inside the house uninvited, and Kya follows.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya watches Chase take in the ratty couch and the kerosene lamps. He cranks the water pump and lets the water pour out onto his hand.

KYA

I wasn't ready for guests.

Chase looks over and sees the shame burning on her face. He goes to her and wraps his arms around her.

CHASE

Kya, there's nobody I know who could live out here alone like this. Most guys would be too scared. You're something else.

KYA

What do you want with me?

CHASE

Look, I'm not gonna lie. You're gorgeous, free, wild as a dang gale. I'm sorry I came on like that. I just want to be with you, all right? Get to know each other. I won't do anything unless you want me to, how's that?

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Chase motors towards Kya's lagoon, holding up a picnic basket. Kya smile and waves.

KYA (V.O.)

Every day after Chase got done with work at Western Auto, we'd explore the coast.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Kya throws scraps of cornbread to the seagulls and they envelop her. Chase watches, laughing, as Kya disappears into the sea of birds.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Chase plays the harmonica while Kya lets the boat drift under low hanging cypress trees. A great horned owl stares at her as she sketches it.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Chase watches Kya carefully put up one more watercolor of sea grass.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Kya and Chase crouch close to a mother deer and her fawn. Kya sketches the mother. Chase looks bored.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

On her porch bed, Kya weaves a hemp necklace around the shell Chase gave her.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Kya and Chase sit under the stars on a blanket. A small fire burns in front of them.

CHASE

I wonder what makes stars twinkle.

KYA

Disturbance in the atmosphere. You know, like high atmospheric winds.

CHASE

Huh.

They watch the stars.

CHASE (CONT'D)

Is it okay if I kiss you now?

Kya nods. Chase leans over and kisses her. Pulls her body towards him. They lay like that, staring up at the stars, without moving.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

The spring sun shines bright on the water as Tate, now older and more filled out, races his boat towards Kya's marsh channel.

Kya's boat zooms out of her channel, towards the open water.

TATE

Kya!

Tate keeps calling her name and waving his hands, but she doesn't hear him over the roar of the motor.

TATE (CONT'D)

Kya! KYA!

Now there's another boat, shiny and new, coming towards her. It's Chase. Tate kills his motor and watches, unseen, as Chase and Kya circle around each other in their boats. Like birds courting in the sky.

They both look giddy as they reach their hands out to touch, laughing and jostling in the water. Chase leans in to kiss Kya.

Tate is crushed. He turns his motor back on and turns back towards the town harbor.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Chase and Kya drift along in her boat.

KYA

Tell me about your friends.

CHASE

Oh, I don't really have friends.

KYA

I see you with people all the time.

Chase waves his hands and looks for a way to change the subject.

CHASE

It's hot! Let's go swimming.

KYA

I don't have anything.

CHASE

I won't look. Take off your clothes and jump in, and then I will.

Kya nods. She stands up and takes her shirt off, then her pants. Chase doesn't look away. He reaches out and strokes her breasts. She doesn't stop him. Kya enjoys this, but it's moving so fast...

Chase kneels before her and runs his fingers from her ankle all the way up her leg. She leans into him.

He kisses her stomach, and then slowly begins to pull her panties down. Kya puts her hands over Chase's hands.

CHASE (CONT'D)

Kya, please. We've waited forever.

KYA

How do I know you won't...

But she can't finish.

CHASE

Kya, I'm falling in love with you.
I want to be with you all the time.
What else can I do to show you?

Kya stares into Chase's eyes for some kind of reassurance.

KYA

Soon, okay?

Chase nods. Tries to laugh it off.

CHASE

Come on.

And with that, he strips off his clothes and jumps into the water. Kya follows suit, and the two lovers laugh and splash in the cold water.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya, boating home from the marsh, sees a MAIL CARRIER gingerly putting a letter in her mail box.

When the mail carrier leaves, she docks her boat and pulls the letter out. Reads the letter. Screams.

KYA

OH!

DR. FOSTER (V.O.)

Dear Miss Clark, we were fascinated by your preliminary pages of the various flora and fauna of the Carolina coast. We're intrigued at the idea of a book, but we'd love a focus. Birds? Shells? Plants? Pick one, please, and let's talk further. Would love for you to come to the office. Information is below.

KYA (V.O.)

Dear Dr. Foster, how 'bout birds?
Yours truly, Catherine Danielle
Clark.

DR. FOSTER (V.O.)

Dear Miss Clark, birds it is.
Thirty thousand word minimum.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN THE MARSH

Kya boats through the marsh...

She collects shells, bones, feathers...

KYA (V.O.)

Dear Dr. Foster this will be a lot
of work. Maybe years. Do I get
money? Thank you, Catherine
Danielle Clark.

DR. FOSTER (V.O.)

Dear Miss Clark, of course.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya, now more mature, sits at her desk and sketches a feather
in a book. Bob Dylan's "*Highway 61 Revisited*" howls from the
record player.

Kya's walls are lined with more shells, more bones. Charts
of the evolution of birds.

Pull back to reveal that Kya's house is full of these books.
They pile on the table, the counters...

KYA (V.O.)

Dear Dr. Foster, "*Seabirds of the
Eastern Seaboard*" is coming along
slowly but surely. I'd like six
months before I send you what I
have.

DR. FOSTER (V.O.)

Dear Kya, seeing as lady scientists
are a rarity in publishing, and in
the world, would you like to meet?

KYA (V.O.)

Dear Dr. Foster, I prefer the marsh
and my own company.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Chase motors towards Kya's lagoon. In a nearby boat, Two nearby FISHERMEN watch him zoom past. One Fisherman nudges the other.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya serves Chase molasses ham and sour-cream biscuits with blackberry jam. She watches, delightedly, as he licks his fingers.

CHASE
Unbelievable.

Kya shrugs.

CHASE (CONT'D)
I'm gonna build you a two story on the beach with a wraparound veranda, when we get married.

Kya tries to hide her delight.

CHASE (CONT'D)
I don't think we should live right in town. That'd be too much of a jump for you. But we could build a place on the outskirts.

KYA
What about your parents? Have you told them about me?

But Chase barrels on as if he didn't hear.

CHASE
I'll build a studio for all your stuff. With big windows so you can see the details of all those dad-burned feathers.

He laughs into his coffee. Kya is overcome with emotion.

CHASE (CONT'D)
Oh, by the way, I have to drive over to Asheville in a few days to buy goods for my dad's store. I was thinking, why don't you come with me?

KYA
There'd be lots of people.

CHASE

Look, if we're gonna get married,
you gotta start getting out in the
world a bit. Spread those long
wings of yours.

KYA

All right.

CHASE

It's a two day job, so we'll have
to stay overnight.

KYA

Oh. I see.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Chase drives as Kya stares at the neat houses lined up
alongside the highway. Women hang sheets on clotheslines as
children run about.

CHASE

There's a lot more world than the
marsh, Kya Clark. Beautiful, huh?

Kya's eyes narrow. The dead grass, the paved roads. Nothing
beautiful about this highway.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Chase pulls into the parking lot of a cheap hotel. Kya looks
at him.

CHASE

Long drive back.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Kya and Chase burst into the hotel room, kissing
passionately. He picks her up and tosses her on the bed.
She laughs. He climbs on top of her.

And then, he undresses her. They start having sex. Quick,
no foreplay, and frantic. She grimaces.

Chase finishes and rolls off her. Kya sits up. Confused.
Was that what all the fuss was about?

CHASE
It'll feel better for you later.
The more you do it.

KYA
Oh.

Chase pulls her in close.

CHASE
I never want to lose you.

KYA
Yeah?

CHASE
I think about it a lot. Sneaking
out at night to come see you.
Wrapping up around you.

Chase starts singing (from "Long Black Veil") and playing
with Kya's hair.

CHASE (CONT'D)
"Nobody knows, nobody sees, nobody
knows but me..."

Kya laughs.

CHASE (CONT'D)
I love you, Kya.

Kya gasps. Chase plays with her hair.

KYA
Yeah?

CHASE
Of course.

But Kya can't say it back. Something in her won't give.

KYA
I made you something.

She gets up, nude, and goes to her bag. Fishes out the hemp
necklace. She ties it around Chase's neck.

CHASE
I'll never take it off.

KYA
Good. Maybe, this weekend, you
want to spend two nights?

CHASE
Oh, Kya, Christmas is gonna be so rough. SO rough.

KYA
Yeah, I know.

CHASE
So much family to pretend for. You don't know how lucky you are.

KYA
Pretend what?

CHASE
Oh, Kya. Everything.

He sits up.

CHASE (CONT'D)
After Christmas? We can open presents week after?

Kya nods.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Deputy Perdue hands Chase's exhausted mother, PATTI LOVE ANDREWS (45) a plastic ziplock bag of Chase's possessions. She opens it. Takes out each item one by one. A wallet, keys, lighter.

Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Perdue stand, side by side, eyes respectfully downcast.

PATTI LOVE
This is it?

DEPUTY PERDUE
Yes, ma'am.

Patti Love takes this in.

SHERIFF JACKSON
Once again, you have our deepest condolences, Mrs. Andrews. And we're going through every detail with a fine tooth comb.

Patti Love puts each item carefully back in the bag, and puts the bag into the giant purse by her side.

PATTI LOVE

Chase would have never just fallen off the tower by himself. You know what an athlete he was. And smart.

SHERIFF JACKSON

It's of course an ongoing investigation--

PATTI LOVE

(interrupting)

His necklace is missing.

SHERIFF JACKSON

I beg your pardon?

Patti Love is working hard to hold it all together.

PATTI LOVE

I think it's important. He had this necklace on when he had dinner with us that night. Pearl couldn't come, it was her bridge night...

She's falling apart. Steadies herself and tries again.

SHERIFF JACKSON

Keep going.

PATTI LOVE

It was a single shell hung on a piece of rawhide that wasn't loose, and it was tied in a knot. I just don't see how it could have flung off. And it was gone. From his body. And what I'm saying is, he never took it off.

SHERIFF JACKSON

Why did he wear it all the time?

PATTI LOVE

That Marsh Girl, who boats around in that old rattletrap boat. She made it and gave it to him when they were seeing each other for a while.

Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Perdue exchange glances.

SHERIFF JACKSON

The Clark woman?

PATTI LOVE

I don't know her name, or if she even has one. But, what I'm saying is...she's the only one who'd have any interest in taking it.

SHERIFF JACKSON

So were these two an item?

Patti Love reaches into her purse and pulls out a journal, filled with watercolors and sketches. Unmistakably Kya's work. There's a picture of Kya and Chase on the fire tower.

PATTI LOVE

I thought I bonded with my son more than any of the other mothers, that's what I told myself. But I found this, in his room.

Sheriff Jackson and Deputy Perdue study the journal.

PATTI LOVE (CONT'D)

I'm so embarrassed. It's strange, the things that you feel when... The night Chase died, he had dinner with us. He didn't leave our house until after eleven, and he was wearing the necklace. When I went to the clinic the next day, to identify him, the necklace was off. It was gone. Do you understand? She climbed that fire tower with Chase at least once. At some point, she gave that ugly necklace to him. And he wore it continuously until the night he died. After which time, it disappeared. So I'm telling you this because I want to know, is there something there? Because I think there's something there.

Sheriff Jackson doesn't answer. He keeps staring at the painting.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - NIGHT

Tate nurses a beer at a wild party in town. He watches Chase laughing ugly with a few FRIENDS. He can only hear pieces of the conversation.

CHASE

Wilder than a minx and worth every
bit of the gas money! Out on the
porch like animals!

His friends laugh. Tate seethes.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya sits working at her desk. The sound of a motorboat. She
leaps up, fixes her hair. Rummages for Ma's lipstick and
hastily puts it on.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - NIGHT

Kya runs to the shore, beaming as the boat comes into view.

But it's not Chase. It's Tate. Her face falls as he pulls
into the lagoon. Then she bends down, picks up a rock, and
throws it right at his face.

TATE

Shit, Kya! What the hell?

She picks up another rock.

TATE (CONT'D)

Wait!

She hurls another rock.

TATE (CONT'D)

Please! Can't we talk?

KYA

Why don't we talk? GET OUT OF MY
LAGOON YOU LOW DOWN DIRTY CREEP!

A rock hits Tate hard on the shoulder.

TATE

Kya, please, I just want to--

Another rock.

KYA

I never want to see you again EVER.

Another rock. When Tate dodges he falls out of his boat.

TATE

There's things you should know about Chase! He's not good! He's not good enough for you.

KYA

You never came back. You never wrote to explain, or even to say if you were alive or dead. You were not man enough to face me. You disappeared. And now you come floating in here after all these years. You're worse than he is. He's not perfect, but you're worse by a long shot.

TATE

You're right about me, Kya. Everything you say is true. I've been sorry for years. Please.

Kya exhales, as if she's been holding her breath this entire time.

TATE (CONT'D)

Look at you. Beautiful. You doing okay? Still selling mussels?

Kya nods.

TATE (CONT'D)

I brought you something.

He pulls a feather from his pocket. A northern flicker. He hands it to Kya. She almost throws it away...

Then realizes she hasn't seen a Northern flicker feather before. Curious in spite of herself, she pockets the feather.

TATE (CONT'D)

Leaving you was not only wrong, it was the worst thing I have ever done and will ever do in my life. I will always regret it. I think of you every day. I didn't think you could leave the marsh and live in the other world, so I didn't see how we could stay together. But that was wrong that I didn't come back and talk to you about it. The truth is, I didn't want to see how badly I hurt you. I was not man enough. Just like you said.

KYA

What do you want now, Tate?

TATE

What I want? If you could, in some way, forgive me?

KYA

Seems like all the wrong people talk about forgiveness, don't they?

TATE

You're right. I understand. I'm in graduate school. Zoology. You'd love it. Could I see your collection?

Kya starts.

TATE (CONT'D)

And then I'll be gone. Promise.

Kya turns and walks towards her house. Tate follows.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Kya's porch is lined with shells and feathers, which lean on delicate, intricate watercolors of the beaches of origin. There are thousands of them.

Tate picks up a shell. Looks at the watercolor next to it. Whistles.

TATE

Kya, these are...

He looks at her. She's smiling with pride.

TATE (CONT'D)

You're incredible.

Kya laughs.

KYA

You can have one.

TATE

Really?

KYA

Something to remember me by.

Tate looks across the watercolors, the shells, the feathers...

He finally lifts the painting of a great blue heron feather. It's the first feather he ever gave her.

He looks up and catches her eye. There's an undeniable pull...

TATE

Kya, I'm so sorry. Can't you forgive me?

KYA

I don't know how.

Tate nods.

TATE

Thanks for listening. For giving me the chance to apologize.

He waits, but she says nothing.

TATE (CONT'D)

Goodbye, Kya.

She turns away. He walks out the door towards his boat.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya watches Tate go, hidden behind her window. She chokes back tears.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - DAY (1966)

HEADER: 1966

A few weeks later, early January. The streets of Barkley Cove are lined with discarded Christmas trees. Kya hurries through town, in cutoff denims, holding Tate's thin shirt for warmth around her narrow frame.

Ahead of her she sees Chase, with a GOONISH MAN, TallSkinnyBlonde and AlwaysWearsPearls. His arm is around AlwaysWearsPearls.

She stops. They see her. There's no getting out of this.

CHASE

Oh, Kya! Hi!

KYA
Hey, Chase.

CHASE
Kya, you remember Brian, and Tina,
Pearl.
(to his friends)
And this is Kya Clark.

BRIAN
Hello.

TALLSKINNYBLONDE (TINA)
Hello, Kya.

Kya smiles awkwardly. Alwayswearspearls (Pearl) nods with a tight smile and turns abruptly away. The rest of Chase's friends follow. Chase and Kya are left alone.

KYA
I don't want to interrupt anything.

CHASE
You're not interrupting. I just
ran into them. I'll be out on
Sunday, like I said.

KYA
I'm making you a birthday dinner.

CHASE
What?

KYA
For your birthday! In two days.
Picnic and I thought I'd make you a
caramel cake. Men like caramel
cake.

Chase fingers his necklace.

CHASE
They do. I do. Maybe I'll steal
away later on today, huh?

KYA
(beaming)
That's fine.

And just like that, Chase is gone, after his friends. Kya continues to walk through town.

EXT. PIGGLY WIGGLY - DAY

She stops when she sees Mrs. Culpepper, a little older, smoking a cigarette in front of the Piggly Wiggly.

MRS. CULPEPPER

Don't be scared. Ain't nothing I can do to you now, is there?

KYA

No, ma'am.

Mrs. Culpepper nods and keeps right on smoking.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya unloads French bread, cheese, butter, sugar, eggs, and a newspaper. She eyes the French bread but goes to the stove to get a piece of day old cornbread and read the newspaper. She eats with one hand and turns pages with the other.

Her fingers trace pictures of the new biology lab outside of town. The headline reads ECOLOGY LAB IN SEA OAKS.

Kya turns the page to finish reading, and she jumps back out of her chair. Spits out her cornbread. There's a big picture of Chase and Pearl. It's a wedding announcement. "ANDREWS-STONE".

Kya tries to catch her breath as she hears the roar of a motor outside. She leaves the paper unfolded to the engagement announcement and bolts out the door.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya runs out the door, into the woods, away from the lagoon.

EXT. MARSH - WOODS - DAY

Kya squats in the palmettos, watching as Chase goes into Kya's shack.

CHASE

Kya! Where's my Marsh Girl at?

He goes inside. From inside, she hears him calling, until quickly he goes silent.

Chase bursts out of the house again.

CHASE (CONT'D)

Aw, hell, Kya. I can explain.
Kya! Kya!

He continues to call her name, crazed and angry. Finally he kicks her porch several times, gets into his boat, and motors away.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Kya motors out in her boat, with the bread and cheese next to her. The sea is churning.

KYA

SUMBITCH!

The winds are picking up and Kya boats right into the riptides and back currents. It's a game of Russian roulette, a heartbroken woman versus the sea.

The sky is black and Kya's boat is pulled into a rip. A wave crashes over her.

KYA (V.O.)

Have you ever wanted to feel
terrified, just so you can't feel
anything else?

Another wave rocks the boat and Kya is knocked, hard, onto the bottom. She picks herself up. The boat is spinning, out of control. Lightning slices the air.

KYA (V.O.)

Because the truth is, some of us
are meant to be alone our entire
lives. Whether we want it or not.

Kya is thrown again. Six inches of freezing water flood the boat.

KYA (V.O.)

But in spite of everything trying
to stomp it out, life persists,
doesn't it?

Kya returns to the wheel of the boat. She's no longer steering against the current. Now she's just moving with it.

KYA (V.O.)

I have to do life alone. But I
knew this from the beginning. I've
known for a long time that everyone
leaves you one way or the other.

The waters are calming. Kya sees a sandbar and steers towards it. She jerks the tiller to beach against the shining shells. She climbs out onto the sandbar, holding the soaked French bread. She sinks into the sand.

Gulls circle her and she pulls apart pieces of bread to feed them.

KYA (V.O.)

I must let go now. Love is too often the answer for staying. Too seldom the reason for going.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya lays out illustrated pages of her book and puts note cards next to the illustrations.

KYA (V.O.)

And so it was another year, just me and Dr. Foster.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1967)

HEADER: 1967

Kya opens a package from her mailbox. It's a stunning colored proof of "Seabirds of the Eastern Seaboard."

Kya opens the pages and traces her fingers along the illustrations. Her shells, feathers, and leaves are all there, vivid and polished. Kya beams. Reads the letter.

DR. FOSTER (O.S.)

Dear Miss Clark, please review the enclosed contract. Five thousand dollars, plus royalties up and down the coasts of your Eastern Seaboard. While you're at it, review this proof at your convenience. I hope you're pleased. Sincerely, Robert Foster.

Kya traces her fingers on the number 5,000 and chokes.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya rummages through her family books. Opens the Bible. Searches through until she finds what she's looking for.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Several maps are spread out over the desk of an elderly COURT CLERK. Kya traces her finger along the coast line. Her family bible, with all the names listed, lays open in front of him. Her only identification in the world.

CLERK

Mr. Napier Clark looks like...yes ma'am. Never been sold, so yessiree bobtail I reckon it belongs to you.

Kya sags in relief.

KYA

Can I get something in writing that says so?

CLERK

Well, there's a little problem...

He looks through his papers.

CLERK (CONT'D)

Looks like you gotta pay some back taxes, you wanna keep it, Miss Clark. In fact, ma'am, the way the law reads, whoever comes along and pays off them back taxes owns the land even if they ain't got no deed.

KYA

How much?

He fiddles around with a clunky calculator.

CLERK

Looks like about eight hundred dollars total. Whoever's first to pay. Put the land free and clear.

Kya nods and reaches into her bag. Pulls out eight hundred dollar bills and lays them in front of the shocked clerk.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya watches a group of FIX IT MEN descend on her house with brand new equipment. A toilet, a sink, a refrigerator. She can't believe it. They all give Kya's porch bed the side-eye.

KYA (V.O.)

Full deed for Catherine Danielle Clark for three hundred ten acres of lagoons, marsh, oak forests, and a long private beach on the North Carolina Coastline. "Murky Swamp".

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

The Fix-It Man (JERRY) installs in a giant claw-foot bathtub in the back bedroom. Kya beams.

JERRY

I could put in a new stove, if you like. Get rid of that wood-burning dinosaur.

KYA

My Ma might come back and ask where her stove went.

JERRY

At least let me put in a real bed. You don't have to sleep in it every night, but when it's cold you're gonna want options.

KYA

Fine.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kya looks around her newly renovated house. She turns off the new electric switch, then turns it on and floods the house with light. Looks at her sofa, chairs, her bed and mattress. She smiles. Then she turns the lights off and walks out onto the porch.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya sits near her bed on the porch, sketching an intricate orange and red toadstool. Her porch has even more jars of nests, toadstools, moss. It looks like a fabulous natural history museum.

KYA (V.O.)

I finished "Seabirds", and was working on a guide to mushrooms. Already had plans for another on butterflies and moths.

A red pickup truck crawls over the sand out of the narrow path in the woods. Kya stands up, panicked. But she stays put. The truck parks. A YOUNG MAN steps out. Tall, dark haired, in an army uniform. He smiles at Kya.

YOUNG MAN

Kya.

KYA

Jodie.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya pours Jodie more tea as he stares at all her jars on the wall.

JODIE

I had two weeks off every year, I would go through any lead I could. After twelve years, I finally found her in New Orleans. She was sick already. But Kya, she tried to get back to you. Pa told her he'd kill us if she tried to come back, and she saved up for lawyers, for any kind of help, but...And then she got sick.

Kya nods and sips her tea.

JODIE (CONT'D)

I think I signed up for my second tour as a kind of punishment for leaving you alone with that monster.

KYA

You were a kid, yourself. What could you do?

JODIE

And then I graduate from Tech, and I see your book in a shop. Catherine Danielle Clark. My heart just broke and leapt for joy all at once. I knew I had to find you, and I was gonna start here, but I didn't think you'd still be here.

KYA

I'm always here.

JODIE

Come outside, I wanna show you something.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - JODIE'S TRUCK - DAY

Jodie and Kya sit in the bed of Jodie's truck. A cardboard box is open on the bed of the truck, and Jodie pulls out oil painting after oil painting.

JODIE

She kept painting, even after her mind started to go.

Kya holds up a picture of her and her sisters, standing by the lagoon, reaching up at a swarm of dragon flies. Another of Little Jodie and Murph holding a string of fish. And then...

Kya pulls out a painting of her and Little Tate, standing in the grass. His hand is on her arm, and he's pointing at a butterfly.

KYA

Is that...

JODIE

Think it's Tate Walker. He and I would go fishing, remember? I don't know if you remember the time he came by, and Pa smacked you upside the head, and he yelled at Pa he better not touch you again. So Pa smacked him upside the head, and told him he'd shoot him, but Tate made sure you were all right. Picked you up and handed you to Ma. You don't remember that? Musta been too little.

KYA

Guess so.

JODIE

I'm stationed at Fort Benning for a while yet, so I can't stay long now, but...knowing you're ok is all I wanted in my life. And I'd like to see you as much as I can get up here. You don't have to be alone anymore.

KYA
Yeah. I'd like that. Come
whenever you want.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Jumpin displays Kya's book in the window of his store. Proud, like a father. She slips a plain white envelope to Jumpin. TATE is written across the envelope in neat cursive. She shrugs. Jumpin smiles.

KYA (V.O.)
Dear Tate. If you're near my place
sometime, I'd like to give you a
copy of my book.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY

Tate leafs through Kya's proof on the shore.

TATE
Kya.

He goes to hug her, but she moves away.

TATE (CONT'D)
Sorry! I'm so happy for you.
Nothing like this has ever been
published. I'm sure this is just
the beginning for you.

Kya beams.

TATE (CONT'D)
Hey, you haven't signed it. Can
you inscribe it for me?

He takes a pen from his pocket and hands it to her.

Kya writes, "To the Feather Boy. Thank you. From the Marsh Girl."

Tate takes his proof back. Reads it. He bursts out into his signature nerdy, joyous laughter. Wipes tears from his eyes.

TATE (CONT'D)
Thank you, Kya.

He waits for more, but she says nothing.

TATE (CONT'D)

Hey, when you see me out in the marsh, please don't hide in the grass like some spotted fawn. Just call out to me. We can do some exploring together. Okay?

KYA

All right.

TATE

And thanks for the book.

He holds it to his chest.

KYA

Good bye, Tate.

Tate gets back into his boat, and she watches him disappear over the horizon.

INT. BARKLEY COVE - DINER - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Tate's hands shake as he tries to drink his coffee. But he meets the Sheriff's eye.

SHERIFF JACKSON

I understand you saw Miss Clark the night before Chase's death?

TATE

Yes, sir. I told you already.

SHERIFF JACKSON

I need to understand it again.

TATE

Is she in trouble?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Maybe not. Maybe not. But does seem like that girl is always in trouble, doesn't it?

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

HEADER: 1969

Kya sits on the banks of the marsh, clutching a knife in her hand. It's dark, and we can't see her face.

She hears a motorboat approaching. She stands up and brandishes her knife.

And Tate steps off his boat. He's wearing a red wool cap.

TATE

Hey...

KYA

Go away.

TATE

What happened to your face?

KYA

That's none of your business, either. Stop looking at me.

Tate laughs, softly.

TATE

How could I stop.

He tries to comfort her but she holds her hands up. She can't be touched.

Kya smiles in spite of herself. Tate looks Kya up and down. His eyes don't miss a single bruise.

KYA

Quit looking at me.

Tate mulls this all over. Then:

TATE

You met the publisher yet?

KYA

Don't need to.

TATE

Can I suggest something? You should go meet them. This week, if you can. Soon as possible. It'll be good for him to see you. Good for you, too. Go on up. Let them put you at a nice hotel. Eat some hot restaurant food you didn't have to make. Take it easy, Kya. You earned it. Stay a week, if you can.

He's looking deep into Kya's eyes now.

TATE (CONT'D)

I don't think it's good for you to stay here. You should go on up to Greenville.

KYA

All right.

TATE

Good. Tomorrow, if you can?

KYA

I'll see.

TATE

Good. Hey, aren't you freezing?

KYA

I'm fine.

TATE

Here, take my hat.

And he takes off his cap and tosses it to her. She catches it. Tate gives her one last wave and gets back into his boat. Turns on the motor.

KYA

(screaming through sudden tears)

I STILL HATE YOU!

TATE

I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND.

He motors away, and then he's gone from sight, leaving Kya holding the red cap to her face. Breathing him in.

INT. BARKLEY COVE - DINER - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Sheriff Jackson finishes taking notes.

SHERIFF JACKSON

You want some advice? Walk away from all this. And run away from her.

He gets up, leaving Tate with his coffee.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Jackson knocks on the door. No answer. The Sheriff nods to his deputies. They kick in the door.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Jackson, Deputy Perdue, and the mean-eyed DEPUTY CHAMBLISS search Kya's house.

There are piles of papers, shells, and leaves in every nook and cranny. Jars of snake skins and sharks teeth. But everything is organized and clean.

SHERIFF JACKSON

First order of business is that necklace Miss Patti talked about. Anything.

DEPUTY PERDUE

Ed, look at this stuff!

DEPUTY CHAMBLISS

Almost like a shrine in here. Half of me's impressed, other half's got the heebie-jeebies.

DEPUTY PERDUE

Hey! Check this out!

They turn to look at Deputy Perdue, who's studying one of the manuscripts and holding a giant peacock feather. Sheriff Jackson begins carefully opening drawers and cabinets, lost in his own world.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)

"Over eons of time, the males' feathers got larger and larger to attract females, until the point that males can barely lift off the ground and can no longer fly."

The other two men stare at him blankly.

DEPUTY PERDUE (CONT'D)

Well isn't that INTERESTING?

DEPUTY CHAMBLISS

Are you finished? We have a job to do.

DEPUTY PERDUE

Well, I think it's very
interesting.

And now Sheriff Jackson picks up a knit red ski cap, nestled
in a dresser drawer. He holds it to the light.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Kya drives her boat through the marsh, towards Jumpin's
wharf.

EXT. JUMPIN'S WHARF - DAY

Kya approaches the wharf. Jumpin sits on the dock, staring
past her. Kya waves. Jumpin doesn't move. Kya turns
around...

Three large police boats emerge from the fog and corner her.
Like an animal. Kya guns her engine and cuts backwards
towards the marsh.

Sheriff Jackson cuts her off in his boat.

She jumps out and begins to swim. She makes it to dry land
and begins to run...

EXT. MARSH - DAY

...through scuppernong vines, circling scrawny pine trees,
through a run-off creek...

She charges into the marsh.

She submerges herself up to her neck.

There's a boat motoring towards her.

Kya looks to the sky, mouths a silent prayer, and submerges
herself under the water.

EXT. MARSH - UNDERWATER - DAY

Kya expels all her breath underwater. Her heartbeat slows.
She kicks down further, determined to drown...

A hand breaks the surface of the water and pulls her up.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Deputy Perdue throws Kya into his boat, not caring that he outweighs her by a hundred pounds. She tries to leap out and he tackles her.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY

Deputy Perdue tosses Kya over his shoulder and carries her to his truck. She's screaming, clawing, like a wild animal.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - MORNING

Deputy Perdue's truck drives slowly through the town of Barkley Cove. It's like all of Barkley Cove is lined up to watch The Marsh Girl taken to jail.

EXT. JAIL - DAY

Kya is fingerprinted and photographed.

INT. JAIL - KYA'S CELL - DAY

Kya stands on her cot, trying to get a glimpse out the tiny window in her cell. A stirring behind her. She turns to see a black cat, SUNDAY JUSTICE. Two unseen INMATES banter back and forth in their own cells.

INMATE 1

They ain't given the death penalty
in twenty years, and hell if a
woman is gonna break that streak.

INMATE 2

(calling to Kya)
We're proud of you, Marsh Girl!

Kya winces. The black cat winds it's way through the halls. He sees Kya and slinks into her cell. Leaps on her lap and begins to purr.

JACOB (O.S.)

Sunday Justice, are you bothering
people again?

JACOB, (black, 60's), the longtime jailor of Barkley Cove, pokes his head into the hallway. He sees Sunday Justice cuddled on Kya's lap. She puts her arms around the cat protectively.

Jacob's face tries to hide his sympathy. He turns away.

JACOB (CONT'D)
 Sunday Justice? Sunday Justice, I
 don't see you anywhere!

Kya sags in relief.

INT. JAIL - KYA'S CELL - DAY

Morning light streams through the tiny window. Sunday Justice is sleeping on Kya's stomach. A knock on her cell door.

Jacob leads TOM MILTON, 50s, tall in a linen suit, into Kya's cell.

JACOB
 You don't need to keep sharing your
 food with Sunday Justice. He
 always takes half of mine and it
 shows. Loves his po'boys.

He pats Sunday Justice's fat belly. Sunday Justice leaps off of Kya's stomach, indignant, and slinks through the cell bars. Jacob nods to Tom and leaves the two alone.

TOM
 Good morning, Miss Clark? My name
 is Tom Milton. Thought you could
 use some help.

KYA
 How much?

TOM
 Pro bono. That means--

KYA
 I know what that means.

He pulls a book out of his bag and hands it to her.

TOM
 I know you like shells. This
 probably won't teach you anything
 you don't already know.

Kya opens the book: *The Rarest Shells of the World*. Each page is a life sized oil painting of beautiful shells. Kya becomes engrossed in the pages.

TOM (CONT'D)

I used to see you out on the water.
You always reminded me of a bird.
Everyone else on boats looks like
they fall in, they'll drown, but
you always seemed like you were
just as much a part of the marsh as
cypress trees or egrets. But no
one could tell me your name. They
just called you "The Marsh Girl."

Kya winces.

TOM (CONT'D)

And I think they deserve to know
you better.

Kya looks at him. Respect and warmth aren't what she was
expecting at all.

TOM (CONT'D)

I know you've never been in trouble
before, so I thought I'd take you
through the trial.

Kya nods, trying to choke back tears.

TOM (CONT'D)

So, there's going to be a jury, and
here's the bailiff, and the
judge...

He draws this all out for her on a notepad.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Kya sits with Tom in the courthouse and looks around. A
portly JUDGE SIMS (40s) shuffles through a mound of papers.
ERIC CHASTAIN, 35, makes notes in his legal pad without once
looking at Kya.

The JURY--all twelve of them, all white--stare at Kya as if
looking at a dangerous animal in a cage. Mr. Andrews and
Patti Love sit stone-faced.

And then there's Tate, all alone in the very back of the
courtroom. He smiles at Kya when she catches his eye. She
whips back around and stares at her hands.

TOM

(quietly, to Kya)

Don't look at the jury, trust me.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

That's Eric Chastain, acting for
the state.

KYA

Against me.

TOM

Against us.

JUDGE SIMS

Catherine Danielle Clark of Barkley
County, North Carolina, you are
charged with the murder in the
first degree of Chase Andrews.
The State has announced that they
will seek the death penalty if you
are found guilty.

Tom reaches out to touch Kya's shoulder in comfort, then
thinks better of it.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Kya watches Sunday Justice as he licks his paws on the window
ledge. She seems oblivious to her own trial, a fact that's
not lost on Tom. Eric is cross examining an earnest DR.
CONE, (50s) on the stand.

ERIC

...But when I step forward, my head
ends up slightly ahead of my body.
The momentum and the weight of my
head would pitch me forward. Chase
Andrews would have hit his forehead
on the beam, not the back of his
skull, if he was just stepping
forward by accident. So isn't it
true, Dr. Cone, that the evidence
suggests that Chase was going
backwards when he fell?

DR. CONE

Yes, the evidence would support
that conclusion.

ERIC

And is it correct that you found
red wool fibers on Chase's jacket,
the night he died?

DR. CONE

Yes, that's true.

Eric holds up a clear plastic bag with the red wool fibers found by Sheriff Jackson.

ERIC

And isn't it true that the red wool fibers found on Chase's jacket match those on this red cap?

He holds up the cap Sheriff Jackson found in Kya's house.

DR. CONE

Yes. These are my labeled samples, and the fibers from the cap and jacket matched exactly.

ERIC

Where was the cap found?

DR. CONE

It was found in Miss Clark's residence.

Tom nudges Kya and leans in.

TOM

You need to be here. Don't check out. If you're scared, let them see how scared you are.

EXT. JAIL - DAY

Tate, cradling books, negotiates with Jacob.

JACOB

She still says no. Try again tomorrow, son. If you're feeling lucky.

TATE

Will you see she gets these?

He hands Jacob the books.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Kya sketches Sunday Justice on her legal pad as Tom cross examines Dr. Cone.

TOM

Isn't it true that if he stepped backward on his own and fell through the hole by accident, the results of hitting the back of his head would have been exactly the same?

DR. CONE

Yes.

Tom continues to cross examine Dr. Cone as Kya buries herself in her drawing. The sketch of Sunday Justice is, like all her sketches, remarkably detailed down to the last whisker.

Tom shows the court the plastic bag with the red fibers.

TOM

So you're saying that anytime during the four years the defendant knew Chase Andrews, when they met wearing those items of clothing, it's possible the fibers were transferred from the cap to the jacket.

DR. CONE

From what I have seen, yes.

TOM

Was there any evidence at all that Miss Clark was in close proximity to Chase Andrews that night? Skin, fingerprints, hair?

DR. CONE

No.

INT. JAIL - KYA'S CELL - DAY

In her cell, Kya stares at a plate of butter beans and meat.

TOM (O.S.)

So, in fact, since the red fibers could have been on his jacket as long as four years, there's no evidence whatsoever that Miss Catherine Clark was near Chase Andrews the night of his death?

DR. CONE (O.S.)

No.

Jacob unwraps Tate's parcel and hands it to her. It s periodical; *Fish of the Indian Ocean*. Kya's eyes light up.

JACOB
And from Jumpin and Mabel.

He hands her some cookies.

JACOB (CONT'D)
Just don't feed those to the cat.
I've got enough problems.

He nods, leaving Kya alone. Kya puts her dinner down on the floor and watches with happiness as Sunday Justice eat every last bite.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

ERIC
The People call Rodney Horn.

RODNEY HORN (40s), a bespectacled, eager man, sits on the stand, eager to please. Kya jolts when she sees Rodney, then stares down at her hands.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Rodney, I believe you were fishing near Cypress Cove the morning of August 30, is that correct?

RODNEY
That's correct. Been there since dawn.

ERIC
All right. I would like you to tell the court what you saw that morning.

RODNEY
Well, like I said, been there since dawn, and was about to pull my line and head out...

EXT. CYPRESS COVE - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya sits cross legged, drawing a formation of rare toadstools. Her boat is beached on the nearby shore.

CHASE (O.S.)
Well, look who's here. My Marsh Girl.

Kya jerks up. Chase stands over her, smiling. He's wearing the shell necklace Kya gave him.

KYA

Please, just go.

She hides her drawings protectively.

CHASE

I'm sorry about how things turned out.

He leans in. She pulls away. His breath smells like bourbon.

KYA

Please.

CHASE

You knew we couldn't get married. You never could have lived near town. But, Kya, there'll never be anyone else like you. And I think you love me too. Let's go back to what we had. You can stay here. We can have our life together. Right out here.

He reaches towards her shoulders and pulls her towards him.

KYA

Let go of me! I don't wanna be a secret.

CHASE

You don't think I'm a secret? You don't think I have to hide things, who I really am, out there? I keep so much of myself a secret, Kya, they don't even know me out there. You do. It's just the way things are. You think you're poor and all that but you don't know how lucky you are, to have no one to actually please. To have the luxury of hiding away without anyone caring.

KYA

I'm not your secret.

Chase pulls back, shocked. Then he slaps her. She punches him. He smirks.

CHASE
Wilder than ever.

He grabs her shoulders and clips the back of her knees with one of his legs. He pushes her to the ground. Her head bounces hard on the dirt.

CHASE (CONT'D)
No one knows me out there, Kya.
You're the only one who ever loved
me for me.

He pins her down and unzips his jeans. She squirms away, and he punches her in the face. She reels back as he unzips her shorts and rips off her panties. He flips her over on her stomach.

CHASE (CONT'D)
I'm not letting you go this time.
Like it or not, you're mine.

Kya reaches for a rock and grabs it. Swings around and smashes Chase in the face with the rock.

As he pulls back, she pulls up a fist full of dirt and flings it into his eyes.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY (1970) (AFTER DEATH)

RODNEY
By the time I got closer, I seen
the woman fightin' someone, and she
kicked him right in the--

EXT. MARSH - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya kicks Chase in the balls. Chase moans. She kicks him in the back several times.

Kya pulls up her shorts, grabs her knapsack, and runs to her boat.

She snaps the motor until it cranks. Turns the tiller sharply and accelerates away from the bank just as Chase gets to his feet.

KYA
Leave me alone, you bastard! You
bother me again, I'll kill ya!

Wild-eyed, she looks out to the sea, and sees Rodney Horne in his fishing boat. Rodney stares.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

RODNEY

Something about, "If you bother be again, I'll kill ya."

ERIC

Do you recognize the woman? Is she in the courtroom today?

RODNEY

It's that 'un there, the defendant. The one folks call Marsh Girl.

JUDGE SIMS

Mr. Horn, the defendant's name is Miss Clark. Do not refer to her by any other name.

But the damage has been done. The members of the jury shake their heads. Members of the audience whisper nervously to each other.

Tate stares at Kya, but she doesn't turn around.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya sits on her porch, head bowed. Her face, arms, and legs are smeared with bloody grit. She spits out blood and dirt.

KYA (V.O.)

Ma. Finally I understand why you had to leave and never come back. I'm sorry I didn't know. I'm sorry I couldn't help you. I will never live like that. A life wondering when the next fist will fall.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya has her boat docked behind some sea oats.

Kya's bruises have gone down enough to show that a few days have passed. She ventures out into the marsh. She hears a screech behind her.

She turns...it's just Big Red. She relaxes and gives him some bread crumbs.

And then, Kya hears a motorboat. Through the sea oats, she spots Chase's ski boat racing towards her channel.

She lays flat in the boat, her head to the side so she can watch him. Chase looks angry and determined.

KYA (V.O.)

One thing I learned over and over from Pa: These men have to have the last punch. These men, they need to see us taught a lesson.

Kya lays down in her boat as the sun sinks lower. Finally, Chase motors out of the marsh, spitting in the water.

Kya docks on the beach...

EXT. MARSH - WATER - KYA'S BOAT - NIGHT (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya drifts to sleep in the belly of her boat, curled in a ball.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya wakes up, surrounded by gulls. Big Red hops onto her legs. She smiles, until she hears the motorboat again.

She starts up and dives into the sea oats as she sees Chase, again, motoring towards her shack.

KYA (V.O.)

He will never let me go.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

A SKINNY MAN sits on the stand, avoiding Kya's eyes.

SKINNY MAN

Maybe Wednesday, I don't remember, I heard her at Jumpin's asking about the bus schedule. And she looked like she been fighting somebody.

ERIC

Let the record show that this is going to be Wednesday, September 3, 1969. Three days after Chase Andrews announces his wedding in the paper.

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya, covered in bruises and cuts, browses cans of beans in Jumpin's shop as she waits for several CUSTOMERS to leave. The Skinny Man is sneaking a bottle of coke from the cooler behind the chips aisle.

Neither Jumpin nor Kya see him. When the other customers have cleared out, Kya approaches Jumpin.

KYA

I need to write down the bus schedule. You have a copy, right?

Jumpin taps at a battered bus schedule taped to the wall.

JUMPIN

You wanna tell me what happened to your eye?

KYA

Nothing.

JUMPIN

What else he done?

KYA

If I tell they're gonna drag me into the sheriff's office and make me tell what happened to a bunch of men. And then they're gonna write me up in the papers. Call me a liar. Accuse me of whorin'. You know how it goes.

JUMPIN

How do you know he ain't coming after you again? And you're always on your lonesome out there?

KYA

I always protected myself before.

JUMPIN

You let me know when you're going over there and when you get back. You hear? I gotta know if you're out of town. Because, if I don't see you more than a day or so I'm going over to your place myself. Bring along a posse if need be.

KYA
I will. Thank you, Jumpin. I'm
leaving tomorrow.

JUMPIN
Good. Good.

The Skinny Man finishes his stolen coke and chips as he
stares after Kya.

EXT. JUMPIN'S WHARF - DAY (1969 BEFORE)

Kya eases her boat into Jumpin's wharf. She sees the
townspeople staring at her. Kya lets them stare. Her hair
is combed, she's wearing makeup and the nicest assortment of
Ma's clothes she could find.

TOM (O.S.)
Miss Pansy Price, will you tell me
what you and your employees saw the
day of September 4, 1969?

Kya walks up to Jumpin's store, and sees the line of
customers is too long. They all get a good look at her. She
turns and walks back...

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - BUS STOP - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

...to the bus stop. Kya waits for the bus. Looks around to
see more townspeople watching her. The bus pulls into view.

MISS PANSY (O.S.)
I saw the Marsh Girl wearing a
yellow dress, hair combed, leave on
the 2:30 bus.

TOM (O.S.)
That's a sharp memory.

MISS PANSY (O.S.)
We all talked about it because we
never seen her cleaned up like
that.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

PANSY PRICE trembles on the stand. Her turban hat glistens
in the light.

Eric takes the floor, holding a bus schedule.

ERIC
She was wearing a yellow dress?

MISS PANSY
Bright yellow.

ERIC
Almost like she wanted you to notice her.

MISS PANSY
I don't think she--

ERIC
She picked the bus stop right in the middle of Main Street even though there's one more closer to the marsh. Why do you think that is?

MISS PANSY
I couldn't--I don't know.

INT. BUS - DAY (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya surveys the people on the bus. Picks an empty seat near the back.

ERIC (O.S.)
I'm not a terribly clever man, but I do reckon that if someone can bus over to Greenville by day, they can bus back here at night. Bus back to Greenville. Nobody the wiser.

Kya sits and watches Barkley Cove disappear out the window.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Kya is led into the courtroom, hands cuffed in front. As if she's praying. Behind her are Tate, Jumpin, and Mabel. There's a murmur from the crowd. Mr. Andrews wrinkles his nose, and Patti Love pretends not to see a thing.

Mabel looks around for a place to sit. She's scared of this hostile room.

JUDGE SIMS
Anybody of any color or any creed can sit anywhere they want in my courtroom.

(MORE)

JUDGE SIMS (CONT'D)

Anybody who doesn't like it is free to leave, and in fact I'll make sure you do.

Mabel, Jumpin, and Tate all file in to sit directly behind Kya. She doesn't turn around, but smiles, and sits up straighter.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

DR. FOSTER, who we see for the first time, is gentle and professorial, smooths his tie for the fifth time on the stand. It's Tom's turn.

TOM

What was your first impression of Miss Clark, when you sat down with her.

DR. FOSTER

My first impression was...that she is...

He thinks.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya sits at a table flanked by her publisher, Dr. Foster, and several of his COLLEAGUES. They're pouring over sample pages of Kya's book. Shells, toadstools, minnows, all detailed and labeled, all beautifully colored in vivid reds and yellows.

DR. FOSTER

Astounding. Simply astounding. These illustrations are pleasing to the eye and so precisely detailed. The collection is a textbook that's a joy to read. Instructional and you see the beauty of creation, all in the swirl of a shell. There's a real appetite for this, you know, Miss Clark. After all of the exploration under the sea, Oceania, the Himalayas...people want to know what's right here, under their noses, that they never thought was special or extraordinary.

COLLEAGUE 1

And your story! My god!

DR. FOSTER
Miss Clark, truly, we are honored.

They all raise a toast to Kya. She takes it all in.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

LARRY PRICE (60s), the bus driver Barkley Cove to Greenville, peers at Kya from his place on the witness stand.

ERIC
So it is possible for someone to take a bus from Greenville to Barkley Cove and back again on the same night?

LARRY PRICE
I suppose it's possible, yes, but--

ERIC
Then--

Larry barrels forward, determined.

LARRY PRICE
But I remember that girl getting on my bus to Greenville and there was nobody close to looking like her on the ride back that night. I would have remembered.

ERIC
You did tell the sheriff during his investigation that there was a skinny passenger on that bus you didn't recognize.

INT. BUS - NIGHT (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Larry Price, driving the bus, glances in his rearview mirror to see a vague, thin figure sitting all the way in the back. The figure is wearing a bulky, blue cap.

ERIC (O.S.)
Could have been a tall woman disguised as a man. Could you please describe that passenger?

LARRY PRICE (O.S.)
Young white man. He wore a big bulky cap, blue. Kept his head down, didn't look at anybody.

(MORE)

LARRY PRICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Figured he was high on that
marijuana.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Eric turns to Kya. Kya stares right back.

ERIC
Could Miss Clark please stand?

Kya looks to Judge Sims, who nods at her. She stands in her seat. A thousand eyes bore into her.

ERIC (CONT'D)
Would you say the young man on the
bus was the same height and stature
as Miss Clark?

LARRY PRICE
Could have been.

INT. BUS - NIGHT (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Larry Price watches the figure. The figure is stock still, sitting with his head bowed to conceal his face.

TOM (O.S.)
Mr. Price, tell us how you're sure
the thin man was on the 11:50 PM
bus the night of October 29? Did
you take notes, write it down?
Maybe it was the night before or
the night after? Are you one
hundred percent sure it was October
29?

LARRY PRICE (O.S.)
When the Sheriff was joggin' my
memory, it seemed like the man was
on that bus but now I reckon I
can't be one hundred percent sure.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

TOM
Also, Mr. Price, wasn't the bus
very late that night? In fact, it
was twenty-five minutes late and
didn't arrive in Barkley Cove until
1:40 in the morning. Is that
correct?

LARRY PRICE

Yeah.

He looks from Eric to Tom and back again.

LARRY PRICE (CONT'D)

Look, I'm just trying to help out here, do the right thing.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT (1969 BEFORE DEATH)

Kya lays in bed, staring at the ceiling.

TOM (O.S.)

Let the record show that a 1:40AM arrival time would have given the defendant less than an HOUR to track down Chase Andrews, lure him to the tower, murder him, hide ALL evidence, and get back onto the 2:30 bus in order to meet her publishers the next morning.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Kya sits at breakfast with the publishers. She's more relaxed, easy. The men are charmed.

DR. FOSTER

I think you have a dozen more in you.

COLLEAGUE 1

Would you be open to being sent elsewhere?

DR. FOSTER

Or just focusing on the animals. Just focusing on the flowers, something for the ladies. Sorry. Oh, and...as promised.

He hands her an envelope. Kya opens it. It's full of crisp, hundred dollar bills.

DR. FOSTER (CONT'D)

We'll deduct it from the royalties, which we're expecting to be very generous. We can't wait to see what's in store for you, Catherine Danielle Clark.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Mr. JOHN KING (65), the Greenville to Barkley Cove bus driver, is on the stand.

ERIC

Mr. John King, you drove the 2:30AM bus from Barkley Cove to Greenville on the morning of October 30?

JOHN KING

Yes sir, I did.

INT. HOTEL RESTAURANT - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Kya talks with the publishers, growing more confident with every word.

ERIC (O.S.)

And did you see anyone who looked like Miss Clark on that bus?

JOHN KING (O.S.)

I don't think so, sir. Except there was this older lady, tall like Miss Clark, had gray hair, short with curls.

ERIC (O.S.)

So it's possible that if Miss Clark had disguised herself as an older lady, she would have looked similar to the woman on the bus?

JOHN KING (O.S.)

Well, it's hard to picture. Maybe.

ERIC (O.S.)

So it's possible.

JOHN KING (O.S.)

Maybe.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY (1970)

Eric nods to Tom, who pops right up.

TOM

We cannot accept the word "maybe" in a murder trial.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

Did you see the defendant, Miss Clark, on the 2:30AM bus from Barkley Cove to Greenville in the early morning of October 30, 1969?

JOHN KING

No, I did not.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - BUS STOP - DAY (1969 AFTER DEATH)

Kya steps off the bus. She checks the clock: 1:16 PM.

She looks around at the villagers staring at her and tosses her hair. Walks with her head high towards Jumpin's.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Kya sits in the courtroom, her eyes dead as Sheriff Jackson takes the stand.

As Sheriff Jackson is sworn in, there's a quiet shuffling of people standing to make way for one more person in the first row. It's Scupper, in his overalls and yellow marine boots. He sits next to Tate.

SHERIFF JACKSON

Well, one of the first things I noticed was there weren't any footprints around Chase's body, not even his own. So I figured somebody had destroyed them to cover up a crime.

ERIC

Isn't it also true, Sheriff, that there were no fingerprints and no vehicle tracks at the scene?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Yeah, that's correct. Not even on the grate which somebody had to open. My deputy and I searched it for vehicle tracks, and there weren't any of those either. All this indicated that someone had destroyed evidence.

ERIC

No more questions. Your witness.

TOM

Sheriff, it's a physical characteristic of the marsh that as the tides come in and out, the groundwater goes up and down. In many places, as the water rises it soaks the area, wiping out any marks in the mud, such as footprints. Clean slate. Isn't that true?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Well, yeah it can be like that.

TOM

You know who taught me that? Catherine Danielle Clark. Fine scientist herself.

He pulls out some papers.

TOM (CONT'D)

I have here the tide table for the night of September 4 and the morning of September 5, and see, Sheriff Jackson, it shows that low tide was around midnight. So at the time Chase arrived at the tower and walked to the steps, he would have made tracks in the wet mud. Then when the tide came in and the groundwater rose, his tracks were wiped out. Do you agree that this is possible?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Well...

He doesn't want to say it.

TOM

Here we are in court, and you have no proof whatsoever that a person wiped away footprints to cover a crime. And if some friends had been with him, their footprints would have been washed away as well. Under these very likely circumstances, there is no suggestion whatsoever of a crime. Isn't that correct, Sheriff?

Sheriff Jackson says nothing.

TOM (CONT'D)

Sheriff?

SHERIFF JACKSON

The absence of footprints does not, by itself, prove there was a crime.

TOM

Sheriff, isn't it true that those gates on top of the tower were left open quite often by kids playing up there?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Yeah, sometimes.

TOM

Isn't it true that the gates were left open so often and considered so dangerous that your office submitted a written request to the U.S. Forest Service to remedy the situation?

Tom hands a document to the Sheriff.

TOM (CONT'D)

Is this the official request to the Forest Service on July 18 of last year?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Yeah. That's it.

TOM

Who exactly wrote this request?

SHERIFF JACKSON

I did it myself.

TOM

So only three months before Chase Andrews fell to his death through the open grate on the fire tower, you submitted a written request to the Forest Service asking them to close the tower or secure the grates so that no one would be hurt. Is that correct?

SHERIFF JACKSON

Yeah.

TOM

Sheriff, would you read to the court the last sentence of this document that you wrote to the Forest Service? Just the last sentence, here.

SHERIFF JACKSON

(reading)

"I must repeat, these grates are very dangerous and if action is not taken, a serious injury or even death will occur."

TOM

I have no further questions.

INT. JAIL - KYA'S CELL - DAY

Kya strokes Sunday Justice as Jacob knocks on her cell.

JACOB

Got a visitor, Kya.

Kya looks up to see Tate standing awkwardly in the doorway. Jacob beelines for his office. He doesn't want to get anywhere near this.

KYA

What?

TATE

I want you to know I'm in the back of that courtroom, every day. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere.

KYA

So what?

TATE

So I messed up in the past, and I'm sorry, but you can lean on me now.

KYA

Leaning on someone leaves you in the ground, doesn't it?

TATE

Tom Milton's very good, Kya. Probably the best lawyer in the state. He'll get you out of here, and we'll get back to exploring lagoons like the old days.

KYA

We're not, because I'm never getting out of here. You have to forget me.

TATE

I have never and will never.

KYA

You know I'm different. I don't fit with other people. I cannot be part of your world. Please, can't you understand?

TATE

I don't blame you, Kya, but-

KYA

(interrupting)

Tate, listen to me. For years I longed to be with people. I really believed that someone would stay with me, that I would actually have friends and a family. Be part of a group. But no one stayed. And I finally learned how to protect myself. I appreciate your coming to see me in here, do. And maybe someday we can be friends, but I can't think about what comes next. Not in here.

Tate tries again.

TATE

I been feeding your gulls. And yesterday, you won't believe it, but when I was at your place, a male Cooper's hawk landed right at your front steps.

Kya laughs.

KYA

The Coop! I believe it. Yes.

Jacob knocks on the door frame, averting his eyes from Kya and Tate.

JACOB

Time's up.

TATE

I'll keep feeding your gulls, Kya.
And I'll bring you some books.

But Kya is down on her cot, playing with Sunday Justice.
Tate follows Jacob out of the jail.

INT. JAIL - KYA'S CELL - NIGHT

Kya shares her dinner with Sunday Justice as Tom eats a sandwich.

TOM

You need to engage, Kya. You have
to look people in the eye.

KYA

If you had to say now how it's
going to go for me...how would you
say it's going to go for me?

TOM

This jury, this town, I don't know.
People make up their minds pretty
quick.

KYA

So what do I do?

TOM

I do want to talk to you about the
option of a plea bargain. If
you're willing to say, yes, you did
go to the tower that night, you met
Chase there, you had a
disagreement, and in a horrible
accident he stepped backward
through the grate, you'd probably
get ten years and be out in six. I
know that sounds bad but it's
better than spending life in prison
or, the other. Just take some time
to think about it.

KYA

I will not go to prison. Please
get me out of here. One way or--
the other.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Eric is standing before the jury, finishing his closing argument.

ERIC

...We know from her lifestyle that she is very capable of boating at night. Of climbing that tower in the dark. The defense wants you to buy a meek, frail young woman who isn't capable of a violent crime. I believe you're smarter than that. This woman is a menace, a threat, and has must be behind bars. It all fits together like clockwork. You can and must find the defendant is guilty of first degree murder. Thank you for doing your duty. The state rests.

Eric sits and Tom stands. Goes to the jury box.

TOM

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have lived in Barkley Cove my whole life, and I, like you, heard the tall tales about the Marsh Girl. That she was part wolf. The missing link between ape and man. That her eyes glowed in the dark. Yet, in reality, she was only an abandoned child. A little girl surviving on her own in the swamp. Not one church, not one community group offered her food or clothes. Instead, we labeled and rejected her because she was different. But I wonder, did we exclude Miss Clark because she was different, or was she different because we excluded her? The job of judging this shy, rejected young woman has fallen on your shoulders. But you must base that judgment on the facts presented in this courtroom, not on the rumors of feelings from the past twenty four years. The one physical piece of evidence the state is asking you to weigh, the red hat, could have come into contact with Chase anytime in the past four years.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

I know most of you very well, and I know you can set aside any former prejudices against Miss Clark. Even though she only went to school one day in her life, she educated herself and became a naturalist and author. We called her the Marsh Girl; now scientific institutions recognize her as the Marsh Expert. I believe you can put all the rumors and tall tales aside. I believe you will come to a judgement based on the facts you heard in this courtroom, not the false rumors you have heard for years. It is time, at last, for us to be fair to the Marsh Girl.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Break.

Kya and Tate sit, side by side, on the bench. Tate starts to say something to Kya. He can't.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY (1970)

Like a funeral choir, the jurors file into their boxes.

BAILIFF

All rise.

Everyone rises as Judge Sims enters and takes the bench.

JUDGE SIMS

Please be seated. Mr. Foreman, is it correct that the jury has reached a verdict?

The jury foreman, MR. TOMILSON, (50), rises.

MR. TOMILSON

We have, Your Honor.

JUDGE SIMS

Will the defendant please rise for the reading of the verdict.

Tom helps Kya stand. She sways back and forth, about to faint.

Mr. Tomilson passes a piece of paper to the Bailiff, who passes it to Judge Sims, who reads it, who passes it to MISS JONES, the recorder.

Miss Jones unwraps the paper. She stands and faces Kya.

MISS JONES
(reading from the paper)
We the jury find Miss Catherine
Danielle Clark not guilty in the
first-degree murder of Mr. Chase
Andrews.

Kya collapses into her chair.

The crowd bursts into angry whispers. "Did she say NOT guilty?" "This ain't right".

Judge Sims hammers his gavel.

JUDGE SIMS
Silence! Miss Clark, the jury has
found you not guilty as charged.
You are free to go, and I apologize
on behalf of this state that you
served two months in jail. Court
dismissed.

A crowd has surrounded Chase's distraught parents. Patti Love is weeping openly. Mr. Andrews stares straight at Kya, unflinching.

Sarah Singletary breathes in a sigh of relief. Miss Pansy cracks her jaw, finally relaxed.

Dr. Foster reaches out his hand to Kya. She shakes it, weak.

DR. FOSTER
You just forget about this nonsense
and continue your work.

Kya looks at Tom, at Tate. There is so much to say, and she can't say any of it.

KYA
Thank you.

She catches eyes with Scupper, who squeezes her shoulder. Tate reaches out his hand to Kya. She reaches out...

And Jodie, completely oblivious, wraps her in an embrace. Tate steps back.

JODIE

Oh, Kya. Kya, it's finally over.
Can I drive you home?

Kya nods, and he walks her towards the back of the courtroom. As she passes the windowsill, she reaches out and touches Sunday Justice's tail.

Tate and Scupper make their way out of the courtroom.

The door opens, and Kya is enveloped by light and sea air.

INT. JODIE'S TRUCK - THE MARSH ROAD - DAY

Kya stares out the window as Jodie drives her through the winding lane and up to her old shack, overgrown with weeds and Spanish moss. A heron stands on one leg in the lagoon, as if waiting for her.

Jodie stops and she leaps out of the truck.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya runs into her house, touching the bed, the table, the stove. Jodie stands in the doorway, holding a paper bag. He shakes it and holds it towards Kya. She grabs the bag and runs right back outside.

EXT. MARSH - SHORE - DAY

Kya stands on the beach, pouring crumbs from the bag into her hand. The birds surround her. Big Red lands and tramps around her.

KYA

Big Red! Hey, Big Red!

She feeds the birds as Jodie walks up behind her. She doesn't even turn to look at him.

KYA (CONT'D)

You can go now.

JODIE

I want to stay with you a few days.
I could sleep outside. Would that
be okay?

KYA

I don't need you.

JODIE

I don't want this to drive you further from people. I know you have every reason in the world to hate people--

KYA

That's what no one understands about me. I never hated people. They hated me. They laughed at me. They attacked me. They left me. Well, it's true, I learned to live without them. Without you, without anybody.

JODIE

You think you're the only one? I been duped, dropped, run over a few times myself, Kya. A lot of times love doesn't work out. But even when it fails, even that connects you to people. And in the end, that's all you have, is the connections. You're so brave in every other thing you've done. Why don't you take a chance?

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - DAY

The sun shines bright, and the dress of the TOWNSPEOPLE speaks to a hot summer's day. Kya, in a well fitted skirt and combed hair, walks confidently along the streets of Barkley Cove. Townspeople stare and she holds their gaze.

She stops in front of the local book store. "BUTTERFLIES OF THE EASTERN SEABOARD, BY CATHERINE DANIELLE CLARK", is displayed proudly in the window.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Kya, clean and better fed, lays out money for Mabel. Cheese, bread, even a Cherry Coke.

MABEL

Thank you, Kya.

KYA

Thank YOU.

She begins to gather her groceries. Mabel takes her hand.

MABEL

I'm sorry about Scupper.

KYA

What?

MABEL

Oh, you didn't? Heart attack.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - GRAVEYARD - DAY

Tate kneels in front of Scupper's grave. Right next to his mother's and sister's.

He stands up and makes his way to his truck. And there, on the passenger seat cushion, is a small, brown feather. He picks it up. Looks around. Drives with newfound purpose to the dock.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - DOCK - DAY

Tate nods at the few awkward fishermen on the pier offering condolences. Jumps into his boat, guns the motor, and drives to the marsh.

EXT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Tate turns off his motor and jumps out of his boat. Makes his way to Kya's door.

TATE

Kya! Kya!

Kya opens the door. Tate goes to her and hugs her close. She collapses into him.

KYA

I'm so sorry, Tate.

Tate pulls away. Looks Kya right in the eye.

TATE

I need to say something to you. I love you, Kya. You know that. I've loved you for a long time.

KYA

I know. I always knew.

TATE
Do you...do you think you love me,
too?

KYA
I've always loved you. Even...even
in a time I don't remember, I
already loved you.

TATE
Look at me.

She meets his eyes. He cups her face in his hands.

TATE (CONT'D)
I need to know that the running and
hiding are over. I need to know
you can love without being afraid.

Kya meets Tate's eyes, then takes his hand and leads him into
her house.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

She kisses him and leaps on top of him.

They rip off each other's clothes. The lovemaking is
passionate, fiery, joyful, funny...everything Kya's been
missing up to now.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya makes scrambled eggs, biscuits, grits. She and Tate
devour it all.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

Kya sits at her desk, working on a new book. Tate leafs
through the pages. Pictures of leaves, feathers, trees, each
more stunning and detailed than the next.

Tate bursts out laughing, uncontrollably.

KYA
What?

TATE
Will you...Sorry.

He can't stop laughing.

TATE (CONT'D)

Will you marry me? I mean, do you want to?

KYA

Aren't we already? Like geese.

Tate can't stop laughing. Kya cracks a smile.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - A SERIES OF MORNINGS

Kya and Tate wake up in each others arms as the years pass. Each morning sweeter, more familiar, more tender than the last.

EXT. BARKLEY COVE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS OVER A YEAR - DAY/NIGHT

INT. JUMPIN'S SHOP - DAY

Leaves change color. In Jumpin's shop, he displays Kya's books proudly, on the front counter. Then another, and another, and another.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY

Kya and Tate, now older, boat through the marsh as she sketches.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY

More mornings pass. The bookshelves that now line the walls are full of Kya's books, shells, feathers.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - DAY - LATER

Kya, now old, hands Tate her newest book. With trembling hands, he turns the pages. Fish. He kisses her hand. True love and peace at last.

EXT. MARSH - WATER - DAY (1990)

Kya, old, boats through the marsh, sketching in her notebook. An expensive looking camera beside her.

KYA (V.O.)

I always knew that I would leave quick and easy, without making too much noise. Always been my style.

Kya looks to the shore, and gasps. There, on the shore, following the path she took so many years ago, is Ma.

Or is it a vision of Ma? She's wrapped in her white scarf, but now there are no bruises. She's walking in her alligator shoes up the path, the way she did when she left Kya...

And now Ma turns. She looks right at Kya. Smiles, and waves. Tears stream down Kya's cheeks.

KYA (V.O.)

There was so much love for me, right here, the whole time. Took me my whole life to see it. Took me my whole life to take it.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

Tate looks out to the water to see Kya's boat floating through the water. She's nowhere to be seen. Tate wades into the water, to her boat...

Kya lays stretched out in her boat, her notebook in her hand. She's gone.

Tate picks the notebook and holds it to his chest. There's a feather sticking out of the notebook.

INT. KYA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tate sits alone in the bed, staring at the moon through the open window. He opens the notebook.

KYA (V.O.)

There is no real death in the marsh...

Tate looks through Kya's sketches. Trees. The water.

A young Tate, motoring up to Little Kya in her boat.

And Chase, falling. Another picture of Chase falling. Chase's angry face, close up and raging.

Tate's hands shake. He turns the pages. There's a hollow, cut into the back pages....

A hollow that holds Chase's shell necklace. Tate pulls out the necklace and holds it to the moonlight.

KYA (V.O.)

And now, I can finally admit this:
It was the chance of seeing you,
the hope of rounding a creek bend
and watching you through the reeds,
that had pulled me into the marsh
every day of my life.

EXT. OUT ON THE WATER, WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING - DAY

Tate stands in his boat. He looks once more through the pages of Kya's book. We see her words, written neatly in the pages.

KYA (V.O.)

I knew your favorite lagoons, your
paths through quagmires, and I
always followed you at a safe
distance. Stealing love. Never
sharing it. All those years I
rejected you, I survived because
you were somewhere in the marsh,
waiting.

Tate clutches the book close to him.

KYA (V.O.)

Because, my love, you, my marsh, my
work, were all one and the same.
It was you, Tate. It was always
you. Scientists try to separate
things so that we can look at them
clearly. But I look at how it's
all one thing. The sea. The
birds. God. It was loving you,
and letting you love me, that was
my great work.

Tate pulls out a match and sets the pages aflame. He pushes the boat further out into the marsh.

KYA (V.O.)

Keep my secrets deep. And you, my
love, can walk back home peaceful.
As long as you are here,
remembering the best of me, you've
never lost me. So you'll walk, past
our lagoon, under our canopy.

(MORE)

KYA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You'll see hundreds of fireflies
beckoning far into the dark reaches
of the marsh. And that's how
you'll know I watch over you still,
my love. Way out yonder, where the
crawdads sing.

THE END