

20. July 4

July 4, 1961, arrived with oppressive heat as Kya, dressed in a peach chiffon dress that had grown tight over the years, ventured barefoot to the lagoon, hoping to spot Tate's boat among the still waters. She sat quietly on a log, eyes scanning the horizon, her anticipation growing with each passing minute. The humidity hung thick in the air, the sticky heat weighing down on her, but her gaze remained fixed on the water, yearning for the moment she would see Tate's familiar boat glide toward her. Kya intermittently doused herself with water from the lagoon, trying to relieve the suffocating warmth, all the while turning the pages of the books Tate had left behind, finding brief comfort in the words that reminded her of him. Her mind wandered back to the days spent together, to their stolen moments of peace, but the harsh summer sun and the unrelenting humidity made her uneasy, keeping her on edge. She couldn't help but feel that with each passing minute, she was slipping further into a haze of waiting, hoping, and longing, all while her body was weighed down by the unforgiving heat.

As the hours ticked by, the sun hung heavy in the sky, and Kya's optimism began to fade. There was still no sign of Tate's boat, and the increasing buzz of mosquitoes only added to her discomfort. She watched the daylight turn to dusk, her heart sinking as the shadows deepened around her, and Tate remained absent. With the moon creeping in, Kya, feeling a mix of disappointment and resignation, stripped off her dress and waded into the cool, dark waters of the lagoon, hoping for some peace, some respite from the frustration she was feeling. The waters felt calming against her skin, the coolness offering a temporary escape from the overwhelming heat. She swam, allowing the night to swallow her up, her thoughts muddled by longing and the weight of unspoken feelings. Eventually, she emerged, but the moon had hidden behind thick clouds, leaving her with the silence of the night. The days following this quiet encounter blended together, each one mirroring the last with the same hot,

oppressive air and the unfulfilled anticipation of seeing Tate again. Her hope began to fade slowly, like the slow ebb of the tide, as each day seemed to offer nothing more than emptiness.

As Kya swam in the stillness of the lagoon, she turned her attention to the fireflies, whose flickering lights pierced the night air. She had always been fascinated by these tiny creatures, and as she observed their flashing lights, she remembered Jodie's explanation of the different patterns each species used to communicate and attract a mate. But then something caught her eye—a female firefly that wasn't following the usual pattern. Instead of simply flashing to attract a mate, she was imitating the signal of a male of a different species, luring him in before devouring him. The ruthlessness of the act stunned Kya, and she found herself reflecting on the deceptive nature of this behavior. It reminded her of the complex interactions in the world around her—how attraction and danger often went hand in hand. In that moment, Kya realized how similar her own situation was to the firefly's ruthless behavior. Much like the female firefly, she had let herself become vulnerable, waiting for Tate, only to feel the sting of his absence. This quiet reflection on the delicate balance between beauty and danger, attraction and betrayal, stirred something deep within Kya, a stark realization of the emotional risks she had taken. The fireflies' light flickered around her, as both their beauty and their dangerous allure mirrored her own complex emotions—yearning for love while protecting herself from potential heartbreak.