

From "Rowboat"

Chapter Twelve – Boathouse

To get to the little pram, they walked along the seawall until it was broken by the opening which was let into it to pull boats onto the yard where the pram lived. The short little boat sat on its own hard chined bottom where it had been skidded by its painter (bow rope). Though it had begun raining harder, Morgan bent to run her hands over the gunnels and oarlocks. The oars were nowhere to be seen.

Ignoring the rainwater in the little boat, Morgan stepped in and sat on the seat where a rower would sit. She still had on her thin cotton pajama shorts and thus nothing underneath. She seemed not to notice. The collected water in the bilge poured into Morgan's boat shoes. Fortunately, she was wearing the slicker Hunter had discovered on a peg in the utility room. Hunter slipped the hood over her already wet head.

"Give me some time," she requested.

Hunter extended the umbrella toward her but she pushed it away. He moved to the seawall and stood, facing away, and waited. After what seemed to be too much time he turned back to face her. She still sat with one hand on each gunnel and her head tilted toward her feet. He couldn't stand it; he moved quickly back to her.

"Morgan. I have to take you home."

She did not answer.

He placed his hand under the hood of the slicker. She was shivering.

"Morgan, get up. We have to go home."

No answer.

Surely he could not carry her because he still needed the cane. It was Thursday and Dad was at work so he called the house on his cell phone.

"Momma, we are down looking at the pram... three houses north along the seawall. Morgan is sitting in a rowboat full of water and shivering. I'm going to try to get her moving... but... will you come?"

He went back to Morgan and knelt next to the boat.

"Morgan?... **Morgan!**"

No response.

Hunter dropped the cane. Bending over, he lifted Morgan in his arms and began making his way back along the seawall. Half way home, he met Momma running through the rain.

"Hunter! No, you'll hurt yourself."

He kept moving.

"I can't put her down. Let's keep going."

At the house he took her directly to the guestroom bed because there was no possibility that he could carry her up the stairs to her room. Irene took off Morgan's slicker and she realized she was wearing pajamas. In surprise, she stood bolt upright.

"Momma, that's how I found her in the boathouse this morning."

Momma stripped the pajamas off of her, covered her with the VMI blanket and started warm water into the Jacuzzi tub.

"Hunter, I have to ask you to move her to the tub because I can't."

She pulled the blanket off of the tiny shivering woman and Hunter lifted her once again. This time the pain in his hip and upper leg was excruciating and he sagged from its intensity. But, he didn't go down. He carried her to the tub and, sitting painfully on the uneven edge, managed to lower her into the water without dropping her. But it wasn't the pain of his body that dominated his suffering.



She looked so skinny. He could never have imagined, even from seeing her in short-shorts, that her body would look so... so emaciated. Every rib could be easily outlined from spine to sternum. Her stomach was hollow beneath the cavern formed by the protruding lower edge of her rib cage. Her pelvis was shockingly prominent and there was so little flesh on her legs that he could easily put a clenched fist between them. The more he looked, the more his heart sank.

As the warm water rose, Momma rinsed her on her body with a heavy washcloth to especially get the warmth to her chest. She had no real breasts, just small mounds with full sized woman's nipples on them.

Her dark eyes were open and did not leave Hunter's face. Morgan, at long last, spoke.

"Sailboat... she wants to be a sailboat."

Momma asked, "Can you do her as a sailboat."

"Yes... or not paint her portrait."

"But, will you do it?"

She had not taken her eyes off of him, "Is it over?"

"Yes, you are home." He answered, "We'll get you warm and snug in no time."

"No, Hunter... I mean us."

"Morgan, there's nothing which could make me leave you! You, just got overcome by the weather. Everything is fine now."

"I mean... now you know... my body"

He took the washcloth from Momma, "I love your body and I promise to cherish and honor it always."

Knowing that he probably would not be able to get up, he lowered himself to his knees and began bathing her with the warm water.