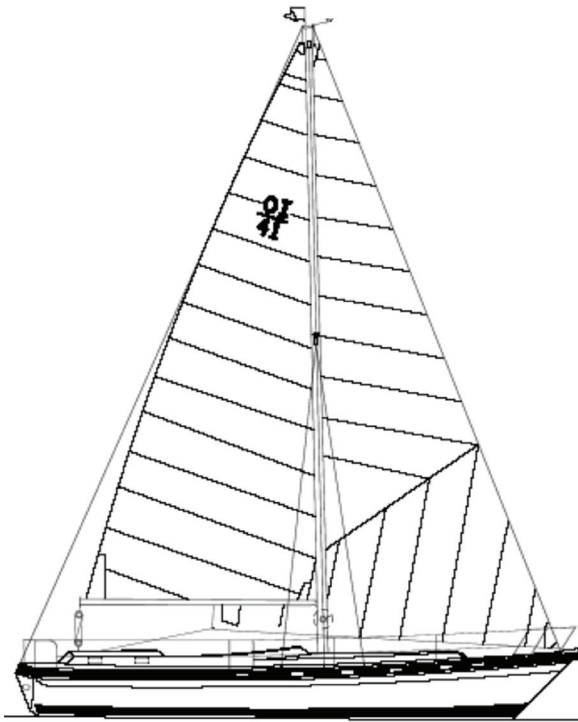


Morgan 41

By

M. Randolph Mason



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Jacksonville, FL

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I am the son-of-a-son-of-a-sailor. I owe a great debt of gratitude to my father, a sea captain, who put me on the water and drew from an unbelievable supply of patience... and to my family, some of whom have passed on and will never know what those summers meant to the scrawny boy.

I am profoundly grateful to my wife, family, and friends who have been nothing but encouraging and tolerant.

Line drawings extracted from the Morgan 41 Out Island Owners Manual available at <http://www.dv-fansler.com/Sailing/Annabelle/morgan.htm> and are used by permission.

"She's Like the Swallow" is a Canadian folk song of unclear origin and authorship. Occurrences of its passages in this work are metaphorical.

Prologue

The boat on which this story unfolds is a Morgan 41 Out Island sloop. It is a 41 foot sailboat, well designed and known for cruising. It has a small diesel engine which allows the crew to motor in conditions where sailing is not feasible.

If you are not a sailor, then in this book, you are going to be exposed to cruising and sailing.

But most of all, this is a love story. It is about two people who desperately need each other before they meet. They both have much to overcome and the Morgan 41 proves to be the ultimate teaching vessel for them both.

You will read conversations as if you are with them. Telephone conversations are heard as if you are standing in their presence and listening to only one side. I believe, if you pause between lines, you will easily imagine what is being said on the other end.

When one of the main characters is talking to themselves - and they do - *their unspoken words are in italics.*

A warning: This is a book in which emotional and physical intimacy have significant impact.

Chapter 1 - Berth

The young couple bumped open both doors of the seafood restaurant and lounge as they burst into the late summer evening. At the inside bar and on the outside deck, the crowd was rocking to Jimmy Buffett's "Livingston Saturday Night." The young man grabbed her delicate little wrist as they strode across the front of the pier-side night spot. She struggled to pull away.

The young man stood at medium height, with muscular build, dark hair and eyes, and a bold demeanor. He was aggressive.

She was very small with long, silky, raven hair and green eyes. Her short, flowery, cotton summer dress loosely fit a body that couldn't have weighed 80 pounds. Over her arm she draped a folded white cashmere sweater. Her other tiny hand clutched a small, white canvas purse - a nautical theme with a snap-strap closure on the top and two small open grommets on the bottom.

By the brow of the pier, as they cleared the end of the building, he announced, "The night now moves to the nearest motel for the event of the evening!"

"I don't think so," she replied while struggling to free her wrist.

To which he replied, "Ohhhh yes! I have spent ten hours in a car with you today, and now it's my turn to get some return."

"I don't think so," she repeated, her eyes now wide with fear as she realized what he wanted to do.

He grasped her by the wrist as she struggled. His face changed to a different sort of aggression.

"Don't be a bitch! Come on!"

He swung her around as if to head for the parked cars.

Neither he nor she saw the light pole by the pier. As he yanked her around, she slammed, face first, into the creosote covered pole. The tiny silver bracelet fragmented as her hand slipped through his grip. He passed to the inside of the pole, but she launched over the bulwark. The fallen canvas purse tangled in his feet and he pitched forward onto the gravel.

For her, time decelerated to slow motion. Her back arched as her view panned up the pole, past the light arm, past the bright mercury vapor lamp, and then the evening sky. Droplets of blood flew in formation before her eyes. One little white sandal passed in and then out of view. Her legs rotated upward following the spiraling inertia of her body. They splayed wide, splitting the back seam of her dress most of the way up to the zipper stop. Outward and downward, her fading, one eyed stare rotated into the twilight.

Four feet away and facing the slimy pilings, the now stunned and nearly unconscious girl penetrated the water, feet now together, as if standing upright. In a nice neat configuration, she entered the dark cold inlet with hardly a splash. Under the pressure of her plunge, the split dress immediately inverted over her arms and face, but caught at her armpits.

Down she sank like a dart until her delicate feet pressed into the muddy bottom of the inlet. The cold of the water shocked her into awareness - except for the confusion of having her arms pinned over her head. She struggled with the dress, managing to work it back down to her chest. Her lungs burning, she kicked back up towards the surface. Her underwear sagged on her slight body and bunched down on her thighs. Mercifully, the water was only slightly over six feet deep. Immediately after she broke the surface, she banged into a timber cross member bolted to the face of the pilings. Gasping for air, she reached up and clung to the slippery wood. Not 60 feet away, the back-porch bar crowd was in full swing, Saturday night, hot and sweaty, rock and roll.

Above her was the angry young man pitching a temper tantrum. Looking over the edge to the water ten feet below, he was mouthing off into the darkness below.

"Bitch, stupid bitch! So you're gonna f**k me after all? Fine! How did I get mixed up with skinny, pathetic F**ked up women like you anyway? Fine, FINE! So you killed yourself walkin' into a f**king telephone pole! Maybe you got lucky and you were dead when you hit the lake! Here! Here's your purse. Put some lipstick on your goody-two-shoes face before you make your appointment with Saint Peter!"

With that, he kicked the crumpled purse into the water, it splashing not three feet away from the gasping, battered, and exhausted young

woman. He didn't see her clinging below him. He didn't call her name and he didn't go for help.

He did get into his perfectly restored, 1969 Boss Mustang... and drove away.

The sun had, since half an hour, set and the nautical twilight was fading fast. The cashmere sweater drifted slowly below the restaurant deck. Several ducks ignored it as they paddled about and occasionally lunged for raining tidbits sacrificed by the revelers above.

The restaurant spotlights, triggered by the photovoltaic sensors, came on and lit up the water below the deck... so that the ducks could see. The island of light did not include the shivering, near drowned waif.

Holding on to the timber with one hand, she struggled to pull the remnants of the summer dress over her head and finally pushed it away from herself. Gasping from the effort and the coldness of the water, she looked up but could not see the bulwark above. From her water level perspective, she saw no end to the inlet.

The bar crowd was still in boogie... oblivious of her... as usual.

Trading hands, she turned to face away from the pilings. She could see across the inlet to a row of slips with yachts, about a hundred feet away. A little to the left was a low floating landing with small open boats clustered all about it. The spotlights were reflecting off the shiny ones.

With one hand clutching the waistband of her underwear, she side-stroked across to the low landing. Exhausted again, she pushed between the small boats and clung to the edge of the float. After many tries, she managed to scratch and drag herself onto the float. She lay panting for a moment and then passed out. In time she awoke and after laboriously hauling herself to sit with her back against the dock ladder, she examined herself in the light gleaned from the back porch spotlights. The loudspeakers blared the raucous song about friends in low places.

Her hollow stomach and the tops of her legs and feet were scraped and weeping blood. She touched her face. Her trembling lips were swollen. Her left cheekbone and eye brow were slippery with half clotted blood. Her head pounded. Knuckles were skinned and she had at least one splinter in each hand. Her shivering was uncontrollable as were her tears.

Pulling herself up by the ladder, she found the dock to be at chin level. She looked up and down, but saw no one. Painfully, she climbed up and began stumbling toward the landward end. It terminated in a small divided "gate house" with a locked chain link access gate. In the dim light of the gate house, she realized she was wearing only filthy bikini panties... which used to be cotton white... no bra... she had never been "blessed with real tits"... like real women.

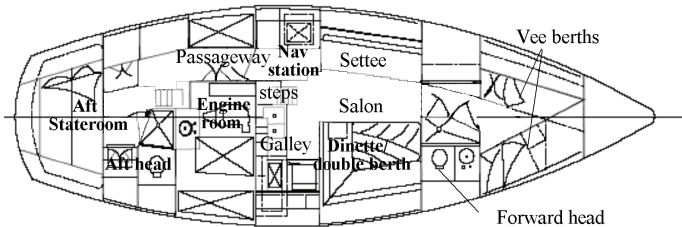
She moved back into the dark... back down the long dock. Through

her remaining, but poorly focusing eye, she discerned a sleek white yacht tied alongside the pier. It was away from the others. The cockpit of the yacht was ringed with white, vinyl cushioned seats. There was a soft glow from its cabin windows. She peeked in. No one. Just a little lantern on a counter top. Gingerly lowering herself to the cockpit, she tested the hatch. It wasn't locked. She was desperate.

Once inside she drew the small curtains closed and struggled to get the hatch tight. In the confined space she caught the stench of herself. Like oil and dead fish and slime... and filth. There was a closet-like toilet compartment fitted with stainless steel. It had a small sink, but turning the tap produced no water. At the kitchen-like place, there were jugs of bottled water. She put half of the water in a small pan to heat it, but the stove did not come on. Putting the rubber stopper in the sink, she poured in the water. There were a couple of clean dish towels and some soap. Painfully lowering and then stepping out of her sodden underpants, she washed herself as best as she could. She refilled the basin to rinse. She could not wash her hair, so she pressed the lake water from it with the other towel. After scooting the two towels and underwear into a remote corner of the toilet compartment, she used the toilet to pee and then found that it didn't flush. There was no toilet paper.

With no luck, she looked for something to wear. Above each narrow bed there were compartments for storage. There were blankets and a pillow stuffed into each compartment.

She wrapped herself in one of the blankets and collapsed onto a bunk. Blessed rest came quickly.



Morgan 41 Out Island Sloop - Cabin/Interior

On the other side of the inlet, beneath the light pole by the restaurant, glittered two shiny silver beads accompanied by one child sized sandal. On the pole, about four and a half feet above the gravel, fluttered a bit of raven hair, a minute sliver of delicate flesh, and a smudge of O-Positive blood.

So it developed into a dark night outside... but, inside the bar... bright, lively, and loud.

Chapter 2 - The Certificate

The sleek white yacht is a recently and completely renovated 1992 Morgan 41 Out Island sloop, belonging to Aida and Jakob Levin, ages 74 and 75, respectively. Painted in simple black letters on her stern is "Tattoo" over her home port, "Fort Lauderdale." She has been re-floated for only four days. After being renovated in Fort Lauderdale, Tattoo had been professionally hauled overland to Fort Loudon Marina in anticipation of an extended inland river cruise leading to Mobile Bay, across the Gulf of Mexico to Tampa, around the Keys, and then up the Atlantic Coast of Southeast Florida, to home port.

Aida and Jakob reside in Rockville, Maryland during the summer. The Levins can't handle Tattoo under sail anymore, so they have hired a "captain." Tattoo holds many exotic and romantic memories for the Levins.

Lester Smith had been captain for Aida and Jakob for 6 years. However, he too was getting on in years. This condition had been driven home by his doctor's advice.

"Lester, I don't think you should be getting too far from land anymore. I mean it, stay off the ocean! I can foresee you having a cardiac arrest somewhere out there, brought on by fighting your way in a storm. Lester, at least keep to the Chesapeake."

And Lester's wife, Cathy, doesn't go out anymore... even in their own boat.

Captain Lester Smith's homeport is Annapolis, Maryland. So, Lester finds himself at O'Brien's. He had called Levin and told him that he'd locate another "perfect captain" for him. He knew exactly who that was gonna be... he only had to convince him to do it... Captain M. Henry Lee.

He has known Henry - not Hank - since 1967, when he first encountered the nimble teenager crewing for Dr. Hanbrook down in Hampton Roads. A Navy brat, Henry had been up and down the coast and had amassed impressive experience as both crew and owner. This included first mate on a charter foretopsail schooner out of Boca Chica in the Florida Keys. Later, Henry had survived a disastrous knock-down in the western Florida Bay while alone in his own sloop... and then, he rebuilt that very same boat!

He disappeared from the coast for a military career from which he retired in '92.

A crushing personal blow came to Henry in 2000 when his wife was tragically caught in crossfire during a failed bank holdup. The bullet that took her life was fired by a policeman who lost his own life in the same incident. Henry's marriage was one of those idyllic ones, and he went adrift after losing her. Henry's daughter, "Stevie", finally convinced him he should find his life again. So, he sold everything and created a trust for Stevie. Living off his military retirement, he'd come to Annapolis to get credentials to be a charter captain.

By the time Henry had passed the American Sailing Association Navigation Course, some tarhead had found out Henry's first name and he was soon referred to as "Captain Mikey." He protested long in vain, but the nickname stuck. Captain Smith heard that Captain Mikey had his ASA Offshore Passagemaking Certificate and was soon headed to the Bahamas to look for a new existence.

Captain Smith passed word, through his peers at the school, that Captain Mikey should meet him this very afternoon at O'Brien's. He intended that Captain Mikey should take over the Tattoo. Captain Smith was well known and highly revered at the school. Captain Lee would come, pay homage, and at least, listen.

Tattoo had been a pleasure for Captain Smith. She is normally berthed at Lauderdale Marina from early October to late May. The marina is full service, and so every year she is hauled, cleaned, serviced, and stored during the summer. The Levins live, September through May, at a condominium in Palm Aire, which is just to the north of Fort Lauderdale, in Pompano Beach. They try to go out once per week... sometimes for a few hours... sometimes for a short cruise to the Bahamas, or along the keys. Some weeks... they just don't go out at all.

The Levins are liberal about whether or not their captain lives aboard...

or, they will subsidize an apartment. If the captain lives aboard, on cruising he must move to the forward vee berths, leaving the main salon and aft stateroom to the Levins and their guests. Tattoo is maintained in ready-to-go status, except for perishables.

With advanced notice, the Levins can make the Tattoo available for charter cruises to the Bahamas or Keys, but, never “bareboat.”

If you’re old enough and you have enough time behind you, marina life is good. You’ll have many friends and exchange lots of sea stories. Captain Smith was certain that Capt Mikey fit the bill. You see, Captain Mikey was also an accomplished guitarist, singer, and all around teller of tall sea stories.

Sure enough, Captain Mikey showed. They sat long into the night, trading in names and experiences. O’Brien’s doesn’t charge captains its cover charge. They consider them to be “ambience.” Sea salt shows on a man and ordinary folks don’t seem to be able to get enough of it. Having the Lesters and Mikeys around, sells oysters and beer.

In the end, Captain Lee was amenable to the prospect of skippering Tattoo... as Captain Smith knew he would.

Instead of Eleuthra, Captain Lee set his course inland, to Fort Loudon Marina on the Tennessee River system, southwest of Knoxville. He would provision the sloop and wait for Aida and Jakob. The mast had been shipped to Grand Mariner Marina on Dog River in Mobile, near the south end of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway and the Mobile River. There he would interrupt the journey to supervise stepping the mast and tensioning the standing rigging... and he would personally bend on her running rigging and cruising sails.

Captain Lee had never been through a lock, so, during Tattoo’s shakedown, he could practice passing through the Corps of Engineers lock at Fort Loudon Dam. During the inland portion of the cruise, there were sixteen locks to pass through - six on the Tennessee River and ten on the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway.

At the end of the first week of September, Tattoo was due at Fort Loudon. She was to be lifted from the tractor trailer directly into the water. Captain Lee was two days ahead of her. The service manager arranged for him to live aboard a Marinett 32, the “Royale”, while waiting on Tattoo. Royale was a very comfortable motor yacht on the same dock as the Tattoo’s temporary space, but under cover. Chris, the owner of the Royale, took Captain Lee roundtrip, through the lock for the first time.

There was a restaurant-bar-night club, "Calhoun's," at the marina for the times when Captain Lee wanted good food and company. He even did a couple of guest sets at the microphone, which always netted good conversation and free wine.

Within a week he was well known among the marina population. A visiting Catalina 470 crew loosed the Captain Mikey moniker. But, somehow it had taken on an air of reverence. Captain Mikey had heard that the Catalina captain's wife regaled one corner of Calhoun's bar with the Florida Bay episode.

People almost never got that story right and it seemed to take on an amorphous life of its own. Sometimes the story was so warped by others in the telling that Captain Mikey was confused by questions about it. Come to think of it, the saga shifted around when told by Captain Mikey himself, depending on the number of drinks consumed. Because of the delivery first executed by Captain Mikey, the story was always presented as a comedy routine. There were long versions and short versions, but no two identical renditions of that yarn. He had even heard of counterfeit versions which did not include him! It did impart a godlike status on him as a mariner. Hell, he could rent a bareboat anywhere just based on that story and being able to prove his identity.

For sure, it did happen in the Florida Bay and he did keep the boat. He even had a painting of the boat just so that he could remember what she really looked like. Ah, but then, paintings are romantic embellishments too.

During the renovation, at Captain Smith's recommendation, the LORAN system had been removed. In its place, were installed redundant WAAS enabled GPS systems - one at the binnacle and one in the navigation compartment. There was a portable GPS in the emergency pack. Captain Mikey preferred to navigate the way he was taught in Key West, in the sixties. But, when the horizon looked the same in every direction, he was not above a small electronic peek to "revalidate" his skills. The loss of electrical power at sea on a sailboat did not have any discernable effect on Capt Mikey's blood pressure. He loved charts and pencils and dividers and compasses - bow and magnetic. He loved vectors and tables and almanacs and log books. Captain Mikey knew how to use his old sextant... and he knew how and why it worked.

The Tattoo was in the water, minus her mast and standing rigging. The 45 hp diesel started up within minutes of fueling, so they moved her to the transient dock. There was no shore power available at the temporary space she now occupied, but that was scheduled to change at the weekend. He had not pressurized her fresh water tank. Without even the twelve volt system activated, Tattoo was not yet fully alive.

Chapter 3 - Signing On

Captain Mikey had not started Tattoo's shakedown by the night of the 10th of September, when *she* mysteriously arrived aboard.

On Saturday, the 11th, Captain Mikey planned to switch out of Royale and into Tattoo. He began by packing his duffel bag and lugging it up the dock to Tattoo. He dropped the bag down into her cockpit, and then went on to the gatehouse to check the mail and get a cart to bring the rest of his belongings from Royale. Sure enough there was a letter from the Levins... probably their last minute modifications to the provisions list and their travel plans. He pushed the cart back to Tattoo. He opened the hatch to swing his duffel down into the cabin. It was unlocked. He must have forgotten to lock up yesterday evening before he went over to Calhoun's. Following the bag down, he dropped the unopened letter onto the dinette table. The little battery lantern was still on, so he switched it off and pushed it into a corner.

The cabin smelled funny. Captain Mikey reached up and slid the main hatch all the way forward, pushed back the curtains, and opened the main cabin windows. Then, "*that's strange*", there seemed to be a head odor, but then the head hadn't been used since renovation. He went to the head and looked in. Sure enough, the bowl had urine in it.

It was then that he noticed the towels and panties wadded up in the

corner. He reached down and fished them out. One towel was wet but clean, the other was damp but smudged with something... and blood. The small panties were smudged with mud and green slime and what looked like tar or oil, and on the front of them, streaks of blood.

His heart leapt in his chest and he jumped back into the main cabin. He looked quickly around, and soon enough, spotted the small figure curled up and partially covered by a blanket in the starboard vee-berth. He rushed forward and knelt next to the small girl. The thin legs and small feet were exposed below the blanket. Knees, shins, and foot-tops were skinned raw, but scabbing over. He held his breath and peeled back the blanket from her head. Lifting the tangle of black hair, he discovered her little face lying, right side down, in a huge clot of blood that had flowed across the bridge of her nose and pooled on the white pillow. The condition of the left side of her face took the wind out of him. Her eye was caked shut with blood. Both her eyebrow and cheek bone were gashed, but not bleeding. The entire side of her face was one nasty bruise.

And also, she was breathing.

He gently removed the blanket to discover the tiny little naked body beneath. Her chest, stomach, forearms, and upper thighs had the same abrasions as her feet and legs. A fingernail was partially ripped away from her right ring finger. This young lady had put up a hell of a fight and had lived to tell about it. Recovering his wits, he made the hatch in two jumps. He sprinted down the dock to Doctor Richardson's trawler "Caduceus Ret."

The shuffle back to Tattoo was excruciating. Both he and the old surgeon were breathless - he, from trying to explain what he had seen, and old Dr. Richardson, from the pace. Then, there was getting the doctor down into Tattoo. Doctor Richardson couldn't kneel, so he sat on the opposite vee-berth. Captain Mikey threw open the foredeck hatch which immediately admitted sunlight.

The girl jolted awake. Startled, she sat bolt upright banging her already tortured head into the compartment above. That brought the struggle to an abrupt end. There was not even a hint of the need for restraint.

Dr. Richardson's voice was the most calming voice he'd heard since his own mother's. The doctor placed the back of his feeble old hand under the girl's chin and said, "I'm Dr. Richardson, and you're going to be okay with me. You've had a bad experience, but you're already getting better. This is Captain Mikey... I mean Lee... and you're on his boat. Captain Lee will protect you now."

She began to cry.

"Can you roll over to your back for me?" he asked.

He instructed, "Captain, first get me your first aid kit, and then go get Mary and my medical bag. Walk! the greatest danger has passed for this young lady."

The Captain broke out and brought forward the "big kit" and then struck out for the Caduceus Ret again.

Everything was explained again for Mary. The retired RN moved quite well for her age and was all business in the Tattoo with the doctor and the girl.

Captain Mikey stood back.

Using the supply of bottled water, they cleaned up the child and found that the presentation of her wounds was far worse than the actual damage. The huge bruise, and for that matter, the multiple smaller bruises, cuts, and scrapes would eventually disappear. The girl would develop very small, linear, and maybe discolored, scars over and under her bloodshot left eye. Her pupils were reactive, blood pressure just a little low, pulse a little fast, and she had, in recent minutes, an aggravation to a headache that was, until that point, probably waning. As far as a concussion, yes that was probable. She should never have been allowed to go to sleep. But, that was a moot observation.

They treated the wounds with antiseptic and found that only the cheekbone wound really needed to be covered. Mary inspected the panties and seemed to think that the blood came from the scrapes on the girl's stomach. The nurse did not see anything to suggest that the young lady had been sexually assaulted.

Mary did make an unusual observation that had nothing to do with her present injuries. She kept it to herself.

There was no evidence of any other clothing. There was no identification – no jewelry.

The doctor and Mary did not press the girl for any details. They did ask if she had been attacked to which the girl shook her head "no." Through swollen lips she said she had "...walked into a telephone pole at the restaurant and fallen into the water." That was incredible! A lot must have happened between that telephone pole and Tattoo. Where were her parents?

The Doctor and Mary wanted to take her back to the Caduceus Ret, but the girl didn't want to go. Captain Mikey opened his duffel bag and pulled out a clean white undershirt for Mary to put on the girl... *the girl*. They asked her name.

"Lori," she whispered.

"How old are you?" Mary asked.

"Twenty Four," she responded.

Twenty Four! She looked like a beaten up ten year old. Captain Mikey's mind could not make that fit. The girl... young woman... closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. The interrogation would have to wait.

Mary went to the office and called the police. The police arrived and questioned Captain Mikey and Dr. Richardson. They looked in on the tiny woman and then departed. Before they left, they cautioned Captain Mikey saying, "Don't *you* go anywhere, and don't let her leave either! Got it?"

The officers went over to the restaurant and, sure enough, they were led by a lone little white sandal near the pier, to the exact point on a light pole where the woman's face had smashed into it.

On summoning them to the marina, the bar staff remembered the small woman. Yes, she had been carded... no, correct that... her license had been scrutinized, and she was indeed twenty four. That was a topic among the bar staff, but the weight shown on the Virginia driver's license, 78 pounds, did surely represent what they were seeing.

No, they did not remember her name. No, she was not seen with or near Captain Mikey... Captain Mikey had not even been in the bar. Yes, she was with some other guy, a young dude. No, no one saw any arguing or fighting or even any friction between the two. She drank one gin and tonic during the nearly two hours she was there, and that was entirely adequate to make her very cheerful. She was dressed in a light colored sundress and had a small cloth purse. No, she did not use a credit card or pay for anything. No, she did not act romantic with the guy she was with. Yes, they carded him. No, they didn't recall any information about him other than he also had a Virginia driver's license. Also, he was just a little "...you know, uppity... highly educated... better than us." No they did not observe them leaving and no, they did not see his vehicle. He paid their tab with cash. He was not a big tipper.

One of the police officers went back out to the Tattoo where Captain Mikey was wedged crossed legged, between the vee-berths, watching Lori sleep. He had set through-ventilation and lowered the forward hatch most of the way to shade the forward berth space. He heard the officer clomping aboard and went aft to meet him.

The officer said, "Okay, we were skeptical of you, but you checked out. She is from somewhere in Virginia and she is indeed twenty four years old. That's most of what we know. When she wakes up, at least learn her name and where she belongs."

He gave Captain Mikey a business card and he wrote down the captain's cell phone number in his notepad. Then, he and his *black*, soft rubber-soled shoes climbed back up onto the dock.

Turning back he said, "Oh yeah, we found where she smacked that light pole. Some swim to your boat!"

As the police officer got back to his cruiser, a marina employee handed him the other white sandal, a waterlogged white cashmere sweater, and one

white, filthy, soaked, and ripped sundress. The officers had not taken the panties because Mary had washed them and hung them to dry. It was a good thing... those underpants were all that Lori appeared to own in the world.

Captain Mikey could not make himself leave line-of-sight to Lori. His eyes fell on the letter from Aida and Jakob. He unfolded his pocket knife and neatly slit it open. It read:

"Dear Captain Lee,

I am sorry to inform you that Jakob has had a small stroke. He is being observed at Bethesda Naval Hospital now and is doing better. He is expected to mostly recover. Obviously, we cannot travel. We do not know when my Jakob will be well enough to go to Fort Lauderdale. Jakob has asked me to instruct you to take our Tattoo to Fort Lauderdale. Enclosed you will find a check for \$3,000. I don't know how much you will need. If it is not enough, please let me know and I will wire you more. If you have monies left over, you can settle up with Jakob when we meet again. If you get to Fort Lauderdale before us, please go to Palm Aire and open the condominium for us.

Lester, Captain Smith, had given us your cell phone number but I've misplaced it. Please call me to let me know that you will do this.

God speed.

*Sincerely,
Aida K. Levin"*

Captain Mikey carefully folded the letter and slipped it, and the check, back into the envelope. He heard a stirring and looked up to see little Lori coming aft. The undershirt was huge on her. It fell past her knees.

"You must be rich," she said, "...this is a beautiful yacht."

"No," he replied, "I'm only the hired captain. The owners live in Maryland. This boat has a name. It's Tattoo. She has just been renovated and shipped here by truck, from Fort Lauderdale, her home port. I am putting her back into service. But, there has been a change of plans now. One of the owners is ill and I am supposed to make passage to Fort Lauderdale without them. They were going to meet me here for the trip.

"I still haven't figured out how to take care of you. After examining you, Dr. Richardson said..."

"Hello, Tattoo!" He was interrupted by Mary's voice. "I have brought you a present."

With that, she appeared at the hatch with a large, covered, Tupperware storage tub. She passed it down to him and then went back to the dock. She returned with a covered platter of fruits and vegetables and came down into the cabin.

Seeing Lori, she said, "Hello, I'm glad to see you up. How's your head?"

To which Lori replied, "My headache is nearly gone. But my hair is filthy."

Mary nodded saying, "You can get a shower up at the marina office building. But, first you need some clothes. My granddaughter was your size until recently. I told my daughter about you and she said you could have these things. I hope you don't mind. We didn't know what else to do."

The captain slid the rubber tub over to Lori as she took a seat at the dinette table. As Lori opened it, he realized the tub contained the clothes of a pre-pubescent girl. "*How could Lori miss that?*"

But Lori didn't appear at all fazed by it. She pulled out and examined each article. There was no fad clothing, just simple items. The underwear was plain cotton. There were no bras. Lori didn't appear to acknowledge that. She tried on the little blue flip-flops, and didn't take them off. She extracted a pair of the panties from the pile on the table and bent over. Mary and the captain averted their faces.

They looked back around after hearing Lori quietly say, "Thank you, Ma'am. You don't know me and I don't know you, but you are helping me and I'm grateful. Thank you!"

Mary then said, "Someone must be worried about you. Can we help you to contact them?"

Lori looked away into a corner and replied, "My father doesn't give a sh... damn. My mother is deceased. I will call my friends, Jennifer and Li, when I can get to a phone."

"Please tell us your whole name and home address. The police have asked us to get that information from you."

Lori explained, "I am Loretta Lane Baxter. My father is a United States Senator from Virginia. He is more interested in power, money, and sex than where I might be this weekend. I have just finished helping my friend, Li Chen, publish her thesis at Radford... and I was in the process of packing to move somewhere and look for a job, when I stupidly went for a ride with... a jerk. At a very high rate of speed, we drove here. I don't know what I was thinking. He didn't... well, he didn't get what he wanted. He was being an ass when I interrupted him by walking my face into a telephone pole and then going swimming. How could he want to..."

She did not finish that sentence, but instead continued, "I've got undergraduate degrees in Finance and Accounting and in Economics from William & Mary, and just this year completed a graduate degree at Virginia Tech... in International Economics. Li and I had an apartment together in Christiansburg, Virginia... until she got married." Lori paused, her eyes looking down and away, "I'll get out of here just as soon as I..."

She didn't finish. She looked up and fixed her eyes on Captain Mikey.

After a long silence, Mary picked up the policeman's card and said, "I'll call off the dogs," and left quickly.

Captain Mikey offered, "Do you need some privacy?"

He stood up to leave.

"No! No!... no I don't!" she stammered. "What do I do with these... my... clothes? Where do I put them... where?" she tapered off.

"Young lady, I would put my arms around you and reassure you that you'll be okay. But, I don't know what to do. I have a daughter who is four years older than you. I had stopped giving her advice before she was your age. Now, I'm not sure how to care for you. But, you are here on my boat... and I *will* take care of you. I promise!"

"You promise... you keep promises? Why would you make such a promise to... to someone... like me?"

She again looked away. He moved to her and gently put his arms around her as he comforted her, "Dr. Richardson spoke the truth. I will protect you."

She flinched at his touch, but then closed her eyes and laid her head under his chin. She began to rock ever so slightly, so he matched her rhythm. She stopped, but he continued; gently and ever so slightly rocking the silent young woman. This, they did for about a quarter of an hour.

Suddenly she broke free screaming, "*No! Oh no! No! No! No!*"

Urine began streaming down her legs.

"I was holding it!" she wailed, "...the toilet doesn't work and... *oh no!*"

He quickly hustled her into the head and sat her on the toilet. But, of course she hadn't pulled down her underwear. She began to sob.

A voice from outside on the dock called out, "Hey! are you all right in there?"

To which Captain Mikey responded, "We're okay."

Then the voice said, "Miss... Miss... are *you* all right? Should I get help?"

She stopped crying long enough to call out, "Please no. I'm not in any danger, it's okay."

Then the voice repeated, "Okay."

Whoever it was, went on down the dock.

She sat pathetically upon the toilet, with her discolored face and tangled black hair pressed against the compartment bulkhead.

Captain Mikey poured the last jug of water into a pan. He chose a pair of little blue shorts, a round necked, white shirt, and a pair of panties from the neat stacks on the dinette. He gently pushed Lori upright on the toilet and, lifting her slightly...like a child... pulled the tee shirt off, over her head. He pulled down the soaked underwear and lowered her back to the toilet. He took off the flip-flops and then the underwear. With a wash cloth, he sponged off her legs and feet, and her back where he had pulled over the wet shirt. She was docile and silent, even when his ministrations were rather intimate. He slipped on the white blouse and guided her little feet and legs through the legs of the panties and the shorts. Hugging her to him, he pulled up the underwear and then the shorts. He wiped off the flip-flops and put them back on her feet. He put her wet clothes in the head

sink. Then he carried her forward to the vee-berth and sat her on the edge. She sagged to the bulkhead.

"I am so sorry," he apologized as he began wiping up the deck. "Today I will move the Tattoo to a full service slip and get all of her systems running. At this point, I know you must feel humiliated. I will try harder to make things better."

When he had finished with the deck, he turned to the navigation station and brought out the hand held marine VHF radio.

Switching it on and to the service channel, he transmitted, "Fort Loudon Marine, this is Tattoo. Do I have a slip assigned yet?"

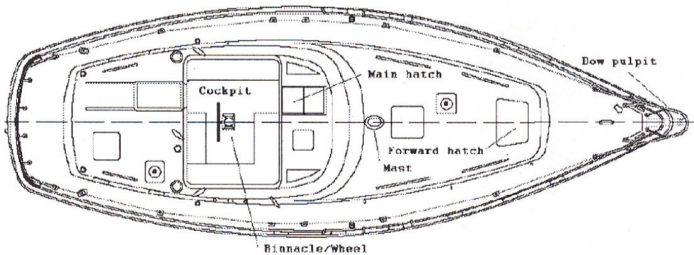
The answer came back, "Tattoo, you are reserved in 42 West. Are you ready to move?"

"Roger, in fifteen I will be transferring from transient dock to 42 West. Can I get a hand over here... and at 42 West?"

"Roger, Tattoo, I'll have some one there in five. Are you fueling during the move?"

"Negative, just moving. Tattoo, out."

He left the radio on, in case the marina needed to contact him again, and carried the handheld VHF with him as he moved to the binnacle and started the diesel. He went on deck to layout lines. As he stood from dogging the chain locker, he saw her watching him from the main hatch.



Morgan 41 Out Island Sloop - Deck Plan

"Come up!" he said, trying to be cheerful. "Sit next to the wheel... ah... the steering wheel. I'll come aft once I've finished laying out the dock lines."

She moved aft to sit on the outboard side of the helm. She was wearing the straw hat that was with the clothes.

The dock hand came up and hailed. All lines were loosed, except one spring line that Captain Mikey had rigged in anticipation of this maneuver into the narrow channel. Under idle, he backed down on the spring line and the bow swung out into the channel. When Captain Mikey shifted to neutral, the dock hand slipped the eye off the piling and dropped the line into Tattoo.

"I'll meet you at 42 West," he called out and then strode on down the dock.

Still idling, Mikey shifted into forward and Tattoo began to glide toward the middle of the channel and then outward. He watched Lori as her gaze shifted between the restaurant and the small boat dock. Her eyes followed the ducks as they turned toward the slowly passing yacht, likely expecting tidbits. After they had passed the restaurant, Lori stood to continue looking back. When she sat back down, she sat pressing up against him.

"Thank you," she whispered.

But he didn't hear her.

He made a slow crossing to the left side of the channel. Then, bumping the engine in and out of forward, he inched up to the far, outside piling of an empty slip.

Lori noted the presence of the dock hand, so this must be 42 West. The yacht halted precisely with the piling along the left side and about one third of the way back. Captain Mikey quickly went forward and threw some sort of knot around the piling in one quick move. Returning to the wheel, he turned it slightly to the right and put the still idling engine into forward. Nothing happened for a moment, but then slowly the back end of the yacht began to swing into the space between the pilings. As soon as the back end was into the opening, Captain Mikey reversed the direction on the engine. He tossed a rope to the dock boy and then shifted the engine into neutral. The hand pulled the yacht backward into the space. In a few minutes, without talking to each other, the two of them had the boat neatly suspended so that it didn't touch the dock anywhere, but one could step off easily. They connected a water hose and an electrical chord to connections on the yacht. The boy closed a switch on the dock and Captain Mikey went below and closed another. The boy opened the water valve.

"Hey, Glen!" the captain called out. "Do you want to crew for me to Fort Lauderdale?"

"Can't," the boy replied, "I'm in college now. But, I sure wish I could."

To that, Captain Mikey asked, "Do you know anyone who might want to crew for me?"

Glen considered for a moment and then answered, "Nobody, I'd want to be on a boat with for any length of time. What about your lady friend?"

The Captain responded, "No, she's not a sailor. Thanks... see you around."

Turning to Lori he said, "Tattoo has a bimini top but it hasn't been re-installed. I'm going to rig a kite. It's like a cover over the cockpit and it will keep the sun off you, but let in the breeze. You can sit up here and have some of the fruit Mary brought."

He went straight to work, and in no time there was shade and a cool breeze. He brought up the platter and set it before her.

"Lori, I'm going down to the Royale. She's a motor yacht that I have been staying aboard since Tattoo wasn't in the water when I arrived here. I have more of my things, including food and cold water. Just rest and enjoy the fresh air. I'll be right back."

Lori quickly stood up. "Can I go with you? Maybe I can help."

She looked okay on her feet, so he nodded, "Sure."

But, he walked slowly. He stopped frequently to point out this and that boat. They walked under the roofed portion of the dock. Soon they came to Royale.

Royale had lots of freeboard and thus her deck was well above the dock. Normally, there was a set of wooden steps pushed up to her, but another motor yacht had arrived and the older couple needed the steps more than Mikey. He and Glen had carried the steps over to the other boat as if it were a normal service at Fort Loudon.

Captain Mikey flipped open the varnished rail and lifted Lori to the deck. He felt her go rigid as soon as he touched her.

"Careful," he warned, "It's a big step down into the fantail. See the steps below you? There's a handle to your port... left."

Lori was in awe. There were cushioned deck chairs. Standing in the fantail - sort of a back porch - she turned and peered through the French doors into a large living room paneled with dark mahogany and trimmed with brass fixtures. An outside ladder beside the French doors led up to what looked like an airplane cockpit. She put her hand on the brass door handle, and then hesitated.

"Go in!" Captain Mikey urged, "I'll go up to the gatehouse and get us a cart. You can make yourself at home. There are cold drinks in the fridge, but I'd stay away from the beer & wine for now."

She froze.

"No! Please, I want to go with you to the gate house."

She came back to him and without a word Mikey lifted her down to the dock. They went back up the dock toward the gatehouse. Coming out of the covered slips, they came to the small-boat float and it's assortment of bobbing dinghies and rowboats. Some had little outboard motors on them.

Lori stopped to look down onto the float. Sure enough, there were streaks of, now dark brown, blood stain where she had dragged herself out of the water.

Mikey was able to discern at what she was staring.

She looked up and over to the restaurant deck. People were already eating lunch and feeding ducks. It looked like only a stone's throw. Mikey put his hands on her shoulders. He felt her stiffen beneath his touch.

"Come on, let's keep going."

They got to the place where Tattoo was docked and she stopped again. She looked up at Captain Mikey and asked, "Can I be a sailor? I want to go to Fort Lauderdale. I want to be your crew. If old people can do it, I can. I can learn."

He pondered what to say because his promise came immediately to mind.

He answered, "Only if you promise me that you'll get off at the next big city or town if you can't handle it. Only if you'll tell me when you don't understand or are having trouble. You don't even know my whole name!"

"It's Michael Henry Lee. Dr. Richardson called you 'Captain Mikey' first, before he called you Captain Lee. Also, the sailing magazine on the dinette of the Tattoo has you listed as M. Henry Lee. Mikey must be short for Michael. You are from Virginia like me... Virginia Beach to be exact... 3881 Glen Arden Road, 23462 is your home address. Because your name is Henry Lee and you like Henry better than Michael, you must be of old Virginia blood somewhere... because Richard Henry Lee was a Virginian and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. I just haven't found out, *yet*, why you are called Mikey. It doesn't sound like something you would countenance!"

This discourse streamed, in one breath, from a battered, black and blue, childlike face.

Captain Mikey was taken aback! For a moment he just looked at her.

"I will pay you one thousand dollars if you make it to Fort Lauderdale... that is three hundred dollars if you make it to Bay la Launch, Alabama, three hundred more if you make it to Tampa Bay, and the rest when we get to Fort Lauderdale. If you don't make it to Bay la Launch, I'll pay your airfare home.

"I will pay for your food. You will be given your own private space aboard... the vee-berths. We will outfit you, at my expense, in the proper clothing and gear for the trip. Consider it an investment. You will be given spending money out of your pay. It will be deducted from each payment at each payment port. You will keep book of your expenses, allowances, and payments. As soon as we are settled aboard Tattoo, I expect you to take over the logbook. You will just continue in the same format. I will dictate entries until you get the hang of it. At the end of each leg, each day at sunset, or before going ashore, I will inspect the log and, if you have done a neat and proper job of it, I will sign the day's entries.

"The burgundy and white dinghy, back there at the landing, is Tattoo's. Her name is stenciled on it and we tow it astern... behind us. Dinghies are the number one cause of accidents in port. Let me know when you are ready to demonstrate that you can use the dinghy by yourself. You are wholly responsible for its repair, maintenance... and believe it or not, its accountability. We do not want to have to go back and get it! When we depart this port... any port... that dinghy will be astern.

"Learn how to use the head... uh, toilet. Some smart person engraved the instructions on a brass plate and screwed it to the bulkhead... wall... over the... head."

He stopped talking.

She just looked up at him. One green eye and one green and red eye. There were tears in them but she did not avert her stare.

There was a long pause.

"Do you accept? I was kind of thinking that you might make a sign that you agree to all that."

Softly, but firmly, she answered, "I wasn't sure you were finished talking."

He put out his hand and she hesitated... and after looking long at it, took it. He shook her hand firmly and she winced.

She turned both hands up and said, "Splinters."

"We'll have those out this afternoon," he said.

With that, he picked out a cart and they turned back to Royale.

Chapter 4 - Inventory

He lifted her again onto Royale and followed her into the salon. Dropping into the galley, he opened the fridge and asked, "Coke, lemonade, or water?"

"Water."

He brought her the water. Then, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone.

"Call your friends. Unless you really want some attention, I wouldn't describe what you look like right now. Tell them you are taking a cruise to Fort Lauderdale. They'll like that! I'll wait outside."

He stepped toward the doors.

"Please don't close the door," she requested.

He left the door ajar, but moved away from it. Through the glass, he could see her walking in a small circle and talking on the phone. After a few minutes, she ended the call and brought the phone out to him.

"Li wanted to come and get me. She said you are probably some lecherous pervert and I'm in great danger. She said she was going to store your cell phone number in her phone, so that she could help the police to find you, so that they could find where you disposed of my body. She's taking my stuff with her to Arlington, and I should meet her there tomorrow."

Lori paused.

Then she added, "Her car is junk, so I gave her mine."

Mikey suggested, "Call her back. Tell her to call you on that number

whenever she's worried about you. If we're in range of a cell phone tower and you're not involved in sailing, you can talk to her. Tell her you will call her often. Give her the boat's name and home port. Tell her to meet you in Fort Lauderdale in a month... you'll take her sailing!"

He laughed.

She called Li.

Her call was accomplished, this time, over a much longer duration. She didn't call the other friend. When he suggested it she said, "Maybe later."

Then he offered, "Tattoo is equipped for bathing only with shower wands and sinks. Royale has a full shower. The marina has a women's shower room. You want to wash your hair? Your choice... when, where, and how."

She considered for a moment and then answered "Royale... now."

He showed her the shower arrangements and she went into the compartment, and he back into the salon.

Inside the head compartment, she took off her clothes, folded them, and placed them and the flip-flops just outside the door.

"Do I have to close the door all the way?" she asked from the compartment door.

"Yes... and the instructions are written on the bulkhead," he replied.

"Don't leave this room," she said firmly.

He stared at the door after she had pulled it shut. He wondered, "*Does she think I'm a figment of her imagination? Is this just another dream? Will she be back drowning in the channel if I'm not here when she comes out of the head?*"

He began looking for a brush and a hair dryer. The owner of the Royale had a steady and varied stream of feminine cruise mates, so he must have amenities for them. A towel! He ran around searching for towels, shampoo, and soap. But, then he heard the water running.

Knocking on the door he called out, "Do you have soap & shampoo?"

"Yes," he heard her say.

He found a clean, white bath towel and placed it on the clothes pile. Reconsidering, he scooted a chair over to the head door and repositioned her things onto it - flip-flops on the bottom, shorts, top, underwear, and finally, the towel on top. In a few minutes he had located a brush and a hair dryer. The water stopped after about ten minutes.

"Is the fan running?" he called out.

"The instructions are written on the bulkhead," she replied.

"*She's learning!*"

He waited... and waited.

"Is everything okay in there?" he asked.

"Yes, just a couple more minutes," came the answer.

"We have a hair dryer," he called to her.

She didn't answer.

The door opened a little and she saw the chair and her clothes. Her hand disappeared with the towel.

"Thank you!"

A minute later she reached for the clothes.

After another minute, she stepped out of the compartment. In one hand was the plastic trash bag from the small waste can in the head. In the bag was her hair.

She looked like a boy.

"I found some scissors in a toiletry kit. I thought it was a good idea... it will be less trouble for the both of us. I'm not going to ask you how it looks. It will do very nicely... thank you."

He was disappointed... very disappointed. But, he was not inclined to question her... especially after all she'd been through. She probably thought it would help him to reconcile hiring her.

"Let's look at you hands," he said quickly.

She put out her hands and retorted, "I washed behind my ears too!"

He sat her down across the table and flipped her hands palm up. He got up and found some tweezers in his toilet kit and thoroughly washed them and his pocket knife in antibacterial soap. Two of the splinters on one hand had to be worked up with the tip of the sharp knife. There was a little blood. She seemed impervious to the pain. He dabbed on Neosporin... which of course would be rubbed off within minutes.

They gathered up his few remaining possessions, which included his toilet kit containing the guilty scissors. He heard her breath stop when he brought the guitar case aft.

"I should have known that," he observed. "No fingernails on your left hand and short ones, except for the ripped one, on your right hand. This is a hand made classical guitar. Rule: It does not come out of its case if the humidity is up... unless we are inside. Entiendes?"

She couldn't pick a guitar now anyway because of the splinters and the ripped finger nail.

She answered, "Si!"

"Do you speak Spanish?" he asked.

Lori answered, "Yes, Spanish and Italian... and sometimes a confused composite of both."

"Fluently?" he continued.

"Read, write, and speak both," she stated.

He was in awe.

They piled all of his things into the cart, except for the guitar which she wanted to carry but would struggle with during the short walk.

He locked the Royale and put her keys in his pocket. They stopped at Caduceus Ret on the way to Tattoo. He called for Mary and she came to the fantail.

"Here are Chris' keys. I'm out of Royale now. Will you give them to him along with my thanks?"

She looked long and stern at Lori. Then she asked curtly, "Captain, would you step up here a minute? I need a short word with you."

Mikey stepped aboard but kept within Lori's sight.

Mary leaned forward and said just above a whisper, "We heard that you are taking her to Fort Lauderdale. Is that true? What are your owners going to think when they get here?"

He answered, "Jakob is ill. The Levins are not coming. I'm taking Tattoo on to Fort Lauderdale. Lori will crew for me... I have hired her. There was no one else."

Then Mary said, "**No!** You will send her on back to Virginia. She is anorexic, or bulimic, or something, but a woman is not that size at age twenty four unless something is wrong with her. **And**, when I was examining her, I found evidence that she is a cutter... she cuts herself... self mutilation... SIB. You have no business or resources to take this on. I think..."

Captain Mikey cut her off.

"Your husband calmed her down by telling her I would protect her and I promised her that I would. She is trying hard to believe me. I am a man of my word. If it doesn't work out, it will not be because I broke *my* promise. I'm glad you told me about the cutting thing, and I'll watch out for it. But, I accepted responsibility for her today... twice. I have to go. Thank you, Mary, for being wise and thoughtful."

When he got back to the dock, Lori asked, "What was that all about?"

Mikey replied, "She likes your hair."

"Am I fired?" Lori asked.

"No, of course not."

She waved at Mary and Mary smiled and waved back. They continued on to Tattoo.

They stowed his belongings aboard Tattoo and moved Lori's forward to the vee-berths. There were drawers beneath the berths. She rinsed out the tee shirt and underwear in the head sink and hung them outside on the safety line. She brought in the panties that she wore last night. They still had faint stains on them. She would deal with them later... both in fact and in her mind.

And she would deal with looking like a little girl. More than anything, she wanted to be dealt with seriously by other adults. She would be the best crew Captain Mikey ever had. She was comfortable around him. She accepted being in his arms. If only she didn't cause him to run away. "*If only...*"

"Put those away. We're going shopping after we return the cart."

He startled her. He'd had caught her with the stained underwear in her hands. She quickly, but carefully, tucked them into the berth drawer and slid the drawer tray over them. The tray was empty.

"*Nothing to store. I am empty... but I will do something about it.*"

They went up the dock, dropped off the cart at the gatehouse, and climbed into his rented pickup truck. They must have driven for half an hour before they came to a huge shopping mall. He parked outside of Proffitt's and they went in at the corner entrance.

People stared at her bruised face as she went by them. They sometimes looked menacingly at Captain Mikey. At one purchase, the clerk was staring so hard that Captain Mikey said, "Fire hydrant versus bicycle... bike did not win."

Lori laughed so hard that she snorted. That became their story and they stuck to it.

He told her what kind of clothes she'd need and what qualities they had to have. He even took her to lingerie, but waited in the center isle as she made her selections. He did not even look as it was rung up. She handed back his credit card and he signed when the time came.

"Get what you want to wear to sleep in," he said.

She asked, "Can I sleep in your tee shirts? I'll wash them."

He started to say something, but then didn't. She took that to mean okay.

He told her, "From time to time we will eat out in good restaurants. You'll need to find a suitable dress or two. Nothing fancy, but good enough for a restaurant that serves wine. Has to hang in a short locker and cannot require dry-cleaning. Do you get my drift?"

She did.

He followed her to the "Junior Misses" department. But, to find anything which fit, Lori had to go to the "Girls". There she settled for a couple of short, girls' size 8 jumper dresses, one white, and one light blue with white piping, and a white faux cashmere sweater. As they were passing the jewelry counter, he pointed at the earrings.

"You have pierced ears and you don't want the holes to close up. You didn't arrive with any, so buy at least two pairs. One pair must be posts... you cannot wear dangling earrings while working on the boat. "

While she was looking through the selection, he spotted a necklace with a small gold anchor on it. It had a gold chain. He quickly bought it and put it in his shirt pocket.

"You can't wear sandals or flip-flops while underway or working, but you should buy dressier shoes and maybe sandals here. We'll get your boat shoes and foul weather gear at the marine supply store."

She chose a pair of simple flats and also, sandals. The flip-flops she was wearing went into the box and she put on the sandals.

"Do you want a purse or pocket book? What about a wallet?"

Her curt answer was, "For what?"

They bought her a hiking pack to use for a tote bag.

Curiously, Lori was interested in the science store. She bought a magnifying glass and, to his amusement, a bug viewer.

As they came upon the truck, he stopped her. He pulled out the gold necklace and asked if he could put it on her. She began to tear up.

"Why?" she asked.

He said, "You are having trouble trusting me to keep my promise. If I ever break my word to you, you take that off and throw it away. It's long enough for you to tuck into your shirt while you are working."

She leaned her forehead into his chest as he fastened the chain at the back of her neck. They didn't look at each other as he quickly turned to go around to the other side of the truck... too much for both of them.

They went to a Kroger for food and for toiletries for her. He was reminded of the "anorexia" admonition because she didn't buy any feminine products. She also wanted to walk down every aisle. At the school supply display, she bought mechanical pencils, such as those used by engineers.

On the way out, there was a huge, colorful stand-alone display piled high with stuffed animals. She lingered to touch them. He briefly nodded and then quickly looked away.

She picked out a huge and cuddly, bright green and yellow frog that was peering out from the exact middle of the bin. She was embarrassed.

His heart was breaking for her as she placed "him" carefully into the buggy.

They got to do their "bicycle-versus-fire-hydrant" routine again at the check-out. Too funny! The frog sat up peering out of the same bag as the instant oatmeal.

They drove to Boater's World where she picked out and tried on Sperry Topsiders. Along with those, he bought her a complete set of foul weather gear. She chose sunglasses for herself.

On the drive back to Lenoir City, she started out the conversation.

"You have a daughter older than me. You must be in your fifties."

He confirmed, "Yes, one child, Victoria Stephen Lee. We call her 'Stevie'. She is an interior designer. She's married to Brett Etheridge, a naval architect. They have two young girls; ages 2 and 4... Victoria, 'Vick' and Alexandra, 'Lexus'. I'm fifty."

She asked, "Have you always been a sea captain?"

He laughed, "No, I'm not a sea captain. I have a certificate that says I can safely and professionally captain boats that belong to others on the open ocean, at night, and with passengers. I am actually a retired army officer... but, that was more than ten years ago. I grew up along the southeastern seaboard because my father was a real Navy sea captain. I've sailed ever since I could get my hands on a boat or a berth as crew."

She asked, "Where is your wife?"

After a moment he answered, "She died in a shoot out at a botched bank robbery. I miss her. Can we move on to some other topic?"

That brought on silence.

At the Lenoir City exit off the interstate, they ate at a deli. He watched as she tried hard, but she threw away much more than she consumed. He accepted this and made a concerted effort to make no outward sign that he was aware.

As they left the deli, he grabbed her unopened Cheetos. She had picked them out, so she must like their taste... if ever she ate them.

They needed a cart to get everything out to Tattoo. She walked with him as he returned the cart. Once aboard Tattoo, they separated their purchases and she took hers forward. She put the frog on the berth right up against the bulkhead... out of sight from the cabin. Kneeling on the deck, she coveted each item before she put it in her drawer beneath her berth. Every article of clothing, she refolded perfectly and found an exact spot for it in the drawer. She inserted the posts with the jade beads into her earlobes.

Unable to endure any longer, she grabbed the frog and buried her face in its tummy. Her wracking sobs were muffled.

For some reason he turned to look forward. He saw her wretched condition. Her little body was absolutely quaking. If he hadn't seen the frog legs and arms sticking out, he would have thought she was having a seizure. He turned and moved quickly to the hatch and then up and into the cockpit where he pretended to work on the pedestal... in sight for her, but out of sight for him - because she was below in the darkness. If she needed him she had only to call out.

His cell phone rang.

"Sir, this is Glen, will you bring the swimmer up to the bar tonight? She's become a celebrity around here and we all want to meet her. We don't care how she looks, just, please bring her to Calhoun's tonight."

"Glen, her name is Lori."

"I'm sorry, Sir. Lori. Please Sir, it's important for us to meet her."

"She's had a very rough 24 hours. I'll ask her, but even if she accepts, I can't let her stay very long."

"All we can ask, Sir. Did you find a crew?"

"Well... Lori wants to try it. I'll have to train her. But, she's extremely intelligent and I'm certain she'll get the technical aspects of it quickly. We'll see about the rest, but I'm willing to give it a try."

Glen observed, "Anybody who can fall injured into that channel in the night and swim to the other side, must be persistent enough to be a crew. We look forward to seeing y'all tonight, Sir!" and he hung up.

Mikey walked forward and peered into the cabin. She was in the head.

He began to inventory what he had learned about her in this short day. She was a twenty four year old woman in the body of a ten year old girl... definitely undernourished for a woman her age. She was pretty banged up, but had hauled herself out of a very dangerous situation. She was well

educated and extremely intelligent. Lori was perceptive and retained information after only one exposure.

But, then there was the “cutter” allegation by Mary, who ought to know because she is a nurse. Mikey didn’t see anything when he was sponging her off... but then, he wasn’t looking. Lori was kind of “Velcro”, but Mikey was not discouraging that because he felt she was entitled to have someone to lean on in her condition.

She came from an apparently affluent, but broken situation. She didn’t have a mother and little respect for her father. She had a couple of girlfriends, but had not mentioned any men friends... unless you could consider the “jerk” that brought her to Tennessee, and then left while she was in the water. He suspected that her “love life” was non-existent.

She was probably a super-achiever. What he didn’t know, was what she needed. If he let her need him, then he might be acquiring another daughter. He didn’t know if she was just passing through or staying as a new chapter in his life. Her emotional state was still unaccounted for. She wanted a stuffed animal... and then used it to cry into. Did she cry all the time? Was she emotionally stable? Could she control her emotions? He had not seen what she was like when she got angry.

He did know one thing for certain; she wanted a chance and he was going to give it to her.

Chapter 5 - Seamanship 101

In a few minutes, she regained control of her emotional outburst. Suddenly feeling relieved she sat up and looked down at the poor frog in her arms. He had some blood mixed with the tears on his tummy. She felt sorry for him and took him to the head where she made a damp washcloth with cold water and blotted away the blood. She looked to see that Captain Mikey was out by the helm, talking on his cell phone. Shielding the frog from view, she slipped back to the vee-berths and put the stuffed animal back up against the bulkhead. She suspected from the Captain's behavior, that he wouldn't come unsolicited into her space. He seemed very respectful of her.

She decided to put on some makeup and show her face on deck. The mirror in the head was not really very large, but she managed to subdue the black and blue significantly. She didn't wash off any scabs because she didn't want them to bleed any more.

When she arrived on deck, the Captain asked, "I had a call from Glen, the dock hand. He says you have attained some sort of celebrity status at the bar. Your fans are clamoring for you to appear so that they can slap you on the back and get your autograph, I suppose. Anyway, will you accept their humble invitation?"

Inside she cringed. *"I don't need any more humiliation."*

But, she decided to "buck up" and nodded, "yes."

"Good!" he said, "We'll get a bite to eat and you can bask in your 'fifteen

She answered their questions as if she could remember everything perfectly. There was no mention of "the Jerk" by anyone. She answered with great aplomb about why and how she got the dress off. They asked if she were naked when she swam across. She offered that she would not answer such a personal question. *That*, then became the question of the evening and she deflected it, phrased differently, every time. They could not stump her.

Mikey muscled to the bar and, off to her side, asked the bar tender to bring her a chef's salad with a couple of different dressings on the side. He nodded.

After about an hour, a whole gin and tonic, and some attempt at the salad, he noticed she was holding on tight to the bar.

He said loudly, "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm afraid Miss Baxter must end this indelicate roast and retire to rebuild her strength for the next competition. *Stand back, you Lubbers!*"

One young fellow offered her his arm to escort her to the door, but she took Captain Mikey's arm instead. She grinned.

"Meet my Chief of Security."

She held on tight - she was tipsy. The young folks made a path, although some started good natured taunting.

"Miss... Oh Miss... can I have your autograph?"

They pushed out into the night air. Some of the partiers followed them out, wanting to prolong the festivities. They fell back when Captain Mikey draped the little white sweater over her shoulders as she stopped to catch her breath. She sagged a little, but he caught her elbow.

Glen ran up to them and asked, "Is everything all right?"

Lori looked at him and said, "Thank you! you are a sport! Thank you for rescuing my purse."

She held up the canvas purse with the dried mud on it and waved it around.

When they got through the gate and to the foot of the dock, Captain Mikey carried her over the uneven surface, to Tattoo.

As he helped her to the dark vee-berth, she asked, "Tee shirt?"

He brought one to her and helped her get the jumper over her head. He helped her into the tee shirt and then handed her the frog.

"Lori, you are one hell of a lady. G'night sailor!"

He left her sitting in the dark.

He awoke in the middle of the night, to find her and the frog nestled into him in his own berth. Resolving himself to the situation, he reached above and pulled a blanket from the compartment. He spread it over her. Her hair smelled so good to him. He closed his eyes... and then it was morning.

"Lori... Lori?" He said quietly. "We have to get up."

She stirred and then opened her eyes. She moved to rub her eyes and he grabbed her hand.

"Don't rub your eyes," he said.

She struggled to sit up, so he helped her. She rubbed her ears. He'd forgotten about women and sleeping in earrings. She looked down the front of her tee-shirt and confirmed that the necklace was still there.

He helped her to stand and then she shuffled into the head... the aft head... his head!

"I know," she groaned, "...the instructions are on the bulkhead."

There's really no modesty on a boat. When she had finished, the door opened slightly.

"I forgot my toothbrush."

He went to the drawer beneath her berth. Opening it he found that the tray was neatly laid out with every item in its place. He picked up her tooth brush and a hair brush. Tapping on the door caused a hand to reach out.

"Thank you."

He went to the book rack and pulled out the *Chapman* to lay it where she would clearly see it. He began making a list of tasks to be accomplished during the day. Suddenly, he remembered it was Sunday.

He made coffee... only to discover that she didn't drink coffee. He made instant oatmeal for them both. She ate most of hers. He again made an effort not to notice. He gave her a small bowl of fruit, which she ate. She swallowed a vitamin with her orange juice... no argument... no hesitation!

She went to her berth and put on fresh clothes for the day... Khaki shorts and a red tee shirt. She wore her boat shoes without socks... just like Captain Mikey. She slipped into the head to check her hair and the condition of her face. The swelling in her lips was gone. Most of the red was out of her eye and she was certain that there was a significant lessening of the black and blue... but now, a hint of brown. She took off the band-aid from her cheek bone and applied another dab of Neosporin to it and the cut on her eyebrow. Two swipes of the hair brush and she turned to Captain Mikey, who was watching through the open door. He nodded and motioned her to sit beside him on the settee. He began:

"First, today is Sunday. We won't work today, but I'm also a day behind. We'll use some of the day to get you started on terminology and safety. This big book is *Chapman*. It's like a how-to bible for boat people. There's a section in here about parts of a sailboat.

"Because we have to go through the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway, we can't have a mast and sails... there are some bridges we couldn't pass under. Our mast has been shipped to a boatyard in Mobile, Alabama where we'll step it later in our passage.

"Tomorrow, I'll inspect all of the safety equipment. We'll also break