

Chapter 2

The New Friend or Into the Web

<https://youtu.be/o1Ycx0nfuKA> Bedbugs, Squirrel Nut Zippers

A New Home

“Yes, I think you’ll like her very much,” came a whispered voice from the other room.

Cecelia was just regaining consciousness from the deep untroubled sleep that had been forced on her, and she was uncertain what these words could mean. “Hello,” she called out weakly.

“Shhh, finish this strand, sticky on the end. Now I need to go to her,” said a hurried voice. The old lady came through the door with a large smile and arms full of white fluff, “Oh, my sweet. You’re awake. I trust you’ve slept well.”

Cecelia tried to sit up, but her body felt distant and heavy. “Uhhm, I don’t know. I feel...I don’t know how I feel. Weird. My body’s not attached.”

The old woman giggled, “Oh, that’s just a little something I gave you to help you sleep well. Last night you were so distraught...”

“You, you drugged me?”

“Well, not exactly drugged you. It’s an all natural, unprocessed liquid that is milked from the most exotic creature. Totally natural.”

“Uhhgh, feels really powerful.”

“No worries, it’s meant to relax your body while letting your mind function. Just take the time to rest. And I’ll finish bandaging your wounds. I was getting the bandages just now. You shouldn’t feel a thing—that’s another benefit of the toxin, I mean tincture, all natural *tincture* I gave you.”

The old woman used a soft matted wad to wash off Cecelia’s scraped elbow, then wrapped another white stretchy bandage around it. It was soft and form fitting, and then at the end it attached to itself like glue. There were various scrapes up and down her right side that were bathed and let to dry, her bruised finger tips examined with a “tsk tsk”, and then her ankle was looked at.

“I do believe you sprained your ankle. Look at how it’s swollen.”

Cecelia, laying in the hammock with her legs higher up than her head, could see one thick and one thin ankle. The old woman picked up the joint and tried to bathe it. Cecelia winced in pain, which made her remember breaking off the heel of her shoe and the pain she ignored with the help of the adrenaline from the fright.

“I’m going to leave this be for right now. Just let it rest, and you’re already elevating it. And you certainly won’t be walking on it today the way you are.” She chuckled again. “Oh, I remember the days when I was stuck in this hammock too.”

Cecelia felt that her chuckle was more menacing than reminiscent, but she had no reference for why this would be and dismissed it. She had other things to worry about. *Was this a good place for her escape? Could she stay hidden here? How would she support herself? Would the woman let her stay long term?*

The old woman watched Cecelia’s eyebrows moving up and down, in and out with all these thoughts. She patted Cecelia’s hand, and holding it said, “Don’t you worry, dear, don’t you worry. You had quite the day yesterday, that’s obvious. You can stay here and recover. You can stay.”

“I can?” Cecelia said hopefully.

“Oh, yes, my dear, you can stay for a long while.”

Her voice was sing-songy like she was trying to be cheerful, but once again there was a falseness that Cecelia couldn't quite identify. She was so grateful to feel safe, to feel in control that she told herself this was the answer to her prayers. She had escaped successfully after all, hadn't she. But she was oblivious to her current out of control condition.

Cecelia tried to sit up against her uncooperative body. She turned her head toward the woman who had moved into the kitchen area, “What's your name?”

“Lorelei,” she looked back and smiled. “Isn't it such a pretty name for such an old dried up woman such as me?”

“Oh, no, I thought you looked like an angel with sparkling stars around you when I first saw you. I was so relieved to have some help, I'm so sorry I wasn't very gracious to you last night. I was so upset.”

“I know, dear, I know. You're fine now. Trust me. I know.”

Cecelia turned her head back around; it was tiring to hold that position with just your neck muscles. She took a sip of the water by her hammock, closed her eyes again too tired to fight her thoughts and her body unwilling to move.

Where Am I

Celia woke late the next day, her body still feeling exhausted. She had no desire to move, but the curtain had been drawn from the window in the next room letting in a slash of sunshine across her face. She could see a sliver of the sky between the buildings, a clear blue sky with crescent bits of clouds sliding across into and out of view. It was so slow, but she could still see the movement, which made her sudden shift in circumstances feel all the more violent. This sudden change in her life was too much like a storm wreck.

She had taken a radical move to leave the wedding, like a tornado she had swooped back and forth through the city leaving bits of destruction, bouncing through the confines of the narrow streets, losing bits of her attire as she went. Had she left a trail that could be followed? She looked back at the clouds that appeared like ripples in a pond, crossed by a sharp, long sword of a contrail: jagged white tendrils of bright white.

“Are you hungry?” Came a quite raspy voice from the kitchen.

She looked up to see Lorelei; she was changed. There had been a pillar of beauty the night before, like a siren calling her to the shore. Now she was a stooped-shouldered, thin woman in a dress that looked too large, hanging limply from her shoulders. With her shoulders bent forward, the loose frock hung straight down like a curtain concealing the form and shape behind it.

She saw that Celia was awake and looking back at her, and immediately straightened herself and let go of the back of the chair that she had been using to steady herself. She smoothed out the front of her dress, pushing back the excess fabric trying to conceal the billows behind her back.

“My dear,” she rasped and cleared her throat, “my dear, how do you feel this morning? Are you well rested?”

“Um, I don't know. I think I can feel my body again.” She adjusted herself in the hammock with a grunt of pain. “Yes, I can feel something now.”

“Nothing to worry about,” the old woman reached out picking away the strands of hair off of Ceclia's face. “There's nowhere you need to go, nowhere you have to be today. We can sit and talk, you can tell me all about yourself.”

Lorelei sat across the table that she had squeaked across the floor beside the hammock, putting a modest breakfast before them as the old woman had taken hers and portioned it in two.

“Where did you come from, my dear?”

"Here, in the city. It was my wedding day yesterday."

"You're married?"

"I don't know. I left in the middle of the ceremony. When does it become real?"

"Did you say, 'I do'?"

"Yes."

"Did he say 'I do'?"

"Yes"

"Did you kiss?"

"Our lips brushed, but when I felt his warm breath on my mouth it was like a stifling hot steam, I thought he might suffocate me."

"Is that when you ran?"

"I ran? Oh, yes, I ran. I don't remember. Did I run? Yes, I'm here now, aren't I." Cecelia's hands slapped and held her cheeks, "I saw my mother. She was so surprised that I could see right into her mouth all the way to her throat, she was staring at me."

"Didn't anyone say anything to you?"

"I don't know. There were some voices, but they sounded like radio stations that got crossed, everyone talking all at once."

"Didn't you tell anyone? Did you tell them where you were going? Aren't they going to be worried about you?" Lorelei's voice sounded urgent.

"I guess not. I didn't know I was really going to do it. I've tried to run before and failed, but then in that moment I just felt I needed to get outside to breathe, and there was the moped. The key was there, I could barely get on, my dress was so big, it got caught."

"I can see that you've torn it." she said sarcastically, pointing at the frayed fabric, it was now a high-low skirt, edged by grease, mud and some blood.

"Oh, my! That's a mess." Cecelia saw her leg exposed and started to reach down to see where scabs had formed; she was afraid of what she might feel. She slowly pulled back the silky sheet that was covering her other leg to see that her ankle had been bandaged with a stiff white wrap that fit like a custom made sheath. It was snug but not too tight. "What does this look like underneath?"

"It has a bit of a gash, so I gave you just a touch more, uh *tincture*, but we cleaned it up. I made sure that it was held closed just so."

"We?"

"Me, just *me*, my sweet."

"Well, you said 'we'."

"Does it feel OK now? Does it hurt?"

Cecelia pushed on it gently; it felt tender and a little warm to the touch. "Fine. It hurts a little, when I push on it."

"Then don't do that. It should heal fine. It was quite dirty, and I washed it when you went back to sleep. Your bandage has its own natural antibiotic."

"What is it made of? Another all natural, milked tincture kind of bandage?"

She laughed nervously, "A special spun fabric."

Cecelia was puzzled, but too tired to keep questioning the old woman. She rested her head in her hands, and looked at the remains of her breakfast.

"You've hardly eaten anything."

"I'm not hungry. I'm not much of anything right now."

"Lay your head back down, come along, dear."

“What day is it?” ask Cecelia before even opening her eyes.

“Tuesday.”

“Tuesday! Really? How can it be Tuesday?”

“It’s Tuesday because yesterday was Monday.”

“But I just came here Saturday night! How have 3 days passed?”

“You’ve been asleep most of it.”

“Do you keep drugging me?”

“I’ve helped you sleep when you seemed to be in pain. Just a little bit of help, nothing to harm you. Good health and strength to your balls, as they say around here!”

“What? I don’t have...wait?”

“Cheers my dears, cheers and good health. Aren’t you feeling better?”

Cecelia sat up, then she realized that she could sit up. Patting her body and her legs she announced, “I guess so, yes.” Then looking around as if someone could be hiding in the room she cried out in fear, “Have they been looking for me? Has anyone come here? Do they know where I am?”

“Who are *they*, anyway? But, certainly not. How would *they* know to look here? No one knows what’s here.”

Cecelia laid back in the hammock and pulled up the sheet, “They’ve found me before. But if you haven’t seen anyone. You haven’t had you? My father is short with dark hair, two moles above his left eyebrow.”

“I certainly haven’t see anyone like that.” But Lorelei thought she had seen a younger man in a tux that same night that Cecelia had shown up. He had looked distraught, she said hello to him in a weirdly provocative way that repulsed him. *If that was her husband, he won’t want to come back here*, she thought and smiled. She needed to make sure Cecelia wouldn’t be found.

“I have a friend who will want to meet you soon. He’s, well he helps me. He takes care of me, and now you.”

“There *is* someone else? There is a ‘we’ that lives here.”

“There’s me, I live here. He lives there.” She pointed to the back of the house. “I have plenty of room to share with you, for the time being.”

“What does that mean? Are you going to make me leave?”

“Oh, no. If anyone goes, it will be me. But not until you’re well and up on your feet and can take care of yourself. Let’s see if you can stand on that foot.”

Cecelia winced with pain, but was able to hobble around the table holding onto the backs of the chairs. They sat at the table and ate a late breakfast. There was more food this time, a proper meal for two.

There’s Someone Else Here

Cecelia woke in the middle of the night, a rasping sound had woken her. She sat up and listened. As soon as she sat up it had stopped. Lorelei was asleep in another hammock, which seemed to have appeared on its own a few nights back.

“Lorelei, what was that sound?”

“Just our friend. He’s shy. Leave him be.”

“Why is he in here in the middle of the night?”

“No reason. Go back to sleep,” she snapped.

It took Cecelia a long time to get back to sleep. She lay there awake, trying to see the source of the sound in the dark. Every once in a while she would catch a glint or a flash, but all she heard were a few taps and something scraping.

That morning she slept in. There was a conversation going on in the next room again. This time Cecelia knew

that Lorelei had been talking to someone in there all along. Who was this person? She listened intently.

“You promised if I found someone I could leave, but...”

“Yes, I did, and you may go when the time is right. She must be broken in.”

“... but I just don’t know, now that I’ve found her, I don’t know where I’ll go. I don’t have another home.”

“Haven’t you been dreaming of this day? But I suppose I will have use for you before she is fully ready.”

“I can help, I will help you.”

“What do I need with you? What help can you give to me?”

“I don’t know what to do. I don’t have anywhere to go now. I’ve been here so long.”

“I guess I can find something for you to do.”

“You will? Oh, thank you. I will be most helpful.”

“Yes, I do believe that you will,” his fangs clicked together as he rubbed them with his pedipalps like someone licking their fingers. “Now, let’s have a meeting. Go out and introduce me. I will stay here.”

Lorelei came through the door, and Cecelia quickly laid back down before she could be seen. Lorelei came and shook her shoulder.

“I want to introduce you to our friend. He will take care of you, of us.” She smiled as if relieved.

“Uh, ok,” Cecelia stretched feigning sleepiness.

“Stay here by the door. He’s shy, like I told you. Doesn’t want to be seen.”

“Are you well?” came a melodious voice from the darkness.

“Yes, sir,” Cecelia whispered with lost breath, her heart beating hard.

“I trust that our friend, Lorelei, has been taking good care of you. She is so kind.”

“Oh, yes, sir. I am so grateful. I can’t hardly believe my luck to find such a welcoming home. Thank you so much.”

“No thanks are needed, no thanks at all. Let me introduce myself. I am Aurelio, a shining star, precious and valuable.”

Cecelia thought his introduction was strange, but didn’t feel she could question her new benefactor’s behaviors. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir.” She tried to lean around the door jam to see him.

“In time, in time,” he said, scuttling back, “I will come out in time. For now, know that you are safe here. There is no safer place on earth than under my care. But first, I need to know that I can trust *you*. There are some who would do me harm. The nights of fear that I’ve spent, tormented by the thought of being found. You’re not one of my hunters, are you?”

“Hunter, how could you be hunted? But me? No, of course not. I came here completely by accident.”

“Did you? Maybe you did, maybe fate brought you. And if fate brought you, it will be good for both of us. But I won’t come out yet. I need to know that you are good, that you are kind. That it will be you and I against the hunters.”

Cecelia liked that. She was tired of being hunted herself. “Yes, yes!”

“The three of us,” chimed in Lorelei.

Aurelio ignored her and continued, “We can’t let them win. No, we must fight together. Then we’ll be safe and free. Free to do what we want. The light that shines in will guide the way, and tomorrow will bring a sign of new hope. Look for that sign.”

“I will, I will.” Cecelia said, wondering what that sign could be. She resolved to look for it, no matter what it could be.

Cecelia woke late: Lorelei was in the kitchen area with her back to her. Cecelia’s eyes opened, but she tried not to move so she wouldn’t be seen awake. It was hard to make herself stiff now that she was no longer drugged into

stiffness. Slowly turning her head she looked at their little home. The walls were made of stones that were rough but regular, quite large stacked up in a neat wall. Smaller stones and bricks filled in spaces where some of these larger stones had fallen out.

The space she was in was a small alcove framed by an arched entry with a vaulted ceiling of large brick-like stones. The warm light from the sconces made the bare stone space feel cozy. The arches met at a single pillar, reaching out one to each side, and another larger one out over the main room. Unlike in the irregular criss cross arches of Casa Batillo, these arches met with a precise geometry, the haunch of the arch meeting neatly at the bottom. Cecelia didn't know that she was looking at walls built during the 1st century, then repaired, and then repaired again through the millennia. There are just a few walls left that the Romans had built left in the city, mixed in with the gothic building boom, and her room was framed by one of these lasting sections.

The main room was rectangular with a series of 3 small side rooms on one side. At the end of was the door and a window into the courtyard that was surrounded by buildings on each side with a narrow path that led to the street, one of these old narrow gothic streets barely wide enough for two horses to pass each other. In the main room there was the kitchen area and an awkward box that had been built into the space on the far wall from the rooms. This was a relatively modern bathroom of lath and plaster wall exterior, hexagon white tiles for the interior; a very small space with barely enough room to turn around to use the toilet, sink, or capsule-sized corner shower. The shower had a drooping curtain rod that arched from one wall to its neighbor with the drain in the middle of the room. The shower curtain reached down about ½ way to the floor, and Cecelia had supposed that it's only purpose was to keep the toilet and sink dry but it didn't quite reach down to the toilet seat.

As she looked around, Cecelia took an inventory of the furnishings. Other than the kitchen table and chairs there was little in here that wasn't some sort of white fabric hammock style bed, or seat that was strung in a corner. It was relatively bare and open. There was a bookshelf that looked like it had been abandoned during the Great Wars, with dust as thick as a century. She wondered where Lorelei usually sat, and what she did all day with nothing here to read or craft with, and no tv. It didn't look like she did much cleaning with bits of white strands hanging about, the dust not only on the shelf but also rounding out the corners. And remembering with a shudder the crunching in the narrow path, she reasoned that Lorelei didn't spend much time in the garden either.

Lorelei noticed Cecelia looking around and chirped, "How are you this morning, my sweet dear?"

"Uhhh," Cecelia jumped, and snapped her head back around, "Ok, I guess."

"Well, come have some breakfast then. You should be feeling up to being up and about now."

Cecelia moved slowly, concealing the fact that she actually felt relatively nimble. As she pulled herself out of the hammock she leaned forward trying to get a peek into the dark opening at the back of the main room. There had been an arch there that had been filled in with bricks, and those bricks had since fallen away leaving a puzzle piece shaped opening. Her gaze stayed focused on the opening while she deliberately shuffled into the kitchen. She thought she saw a glint and heard a tap; knowing that was probably Aurelio watching them.

"Don't be bothering with that part of the house," said Lorelei, "That's off limits to us. Dangerous, it is very dangerous. There's holes that have opened up into the abandoned subway station. You'll drop right through if you're not careful." She turned back to her cooking and added with a shake of her tied foot, "You'll probably need one of these."

Cecelia's gaze remained focused on the opening.

"I got clothes for you," Lorelei said coolly. "Here," she saw Cecelia wasn't paying attention to her, "Here! Put these on."

It was a week before she heard from Aurelio again, and this made her nervous. She wondered if she had offended him somehow. Lorelei said that she must be patient, that he's mysterious and must not be questioned. In

that week her ankle had been healing and Lorelei had cut off the cast. Cecelia had a long thin scab running from her foot up her calf.

There was no sign that she could remember having seen, so she hoped that he would explain it to her. That last night she had gone to sleep fitfully, and had dreams of being trapped in a deep cave with glow worms dripping sticky dew on her. The dew kept dripping down her leg and she tried to wipe it off her ankles and feet. In the dream the cast was back on the other leg and felt like a heavy weight; she couldn't lift her foot.

Upon waking she felt mostly normal, but found that she had a long flat rope bound around her ankle. She remembered the rope that Lorelei had pulled along that first night. Why didn't Lorelei have it on anymore?

"What is this?" she called out to no one in particular.

The soothing voice said from a different part of the room, "It's for your protection. I must watch out for you."

"From what? I'm stuck in this little home with nowhere to go."

"You are so precious and important. I can tell that you have a special caring heart that wants to change the world with deep love. That must be protected."

"But from what? I don't see any danger, and I'm not dangerous, so then why do I have this leash on my ankle? Can you please take it off."

"It's for your safety," he snapped, "You must keep it on, because you will soon get to have more freedom. Where I live in the back of the house there are fissures and gaps that open up unexpectedly. If you were to fall in then I can pull you out with this." He gently pulled on the line from around the corner, and she could see that it was attached by the door with a spread out splat of web.

"I see, for my safety," she repeated with doubt, reaching to feel the scratch on her back. She stopped short, fearing to touch his leg and the hairs sticking out of it with her hand.

"Yes, for your safety, and because I care so deeply about your heart. You've had a troubled life, and no one has understood you."

Cecelia was surprised by his insight, paying little attention to how general and broad his statements were. Still, they brought up her emotions as she played the narrative in her head. She held her breath as her eyes filled up with tears.

"I understand how deeply you've been hurt."

Her chest started to heave quietly as she tried to stifle her sobs.

"You're safe now. You can be that special heroine that you've always wanted to be. Who can we help? Who can we save? What lost souls are out there that we can help now that you're here and free?"

Cecelia was excited by this idea, but had no clue as to who she could help. She had always been in survival mode, so this had never occurred to her. "I don't know. Tell me."

"Oh, we'll figure it out. There's always someone who needs to understand the deep truths. You and I, we hold these truths and will teach them to others."

"That sounds so wonderful. I want that so much. I want to go deeper."

"You will, my dear, in time you will."

The Trap Gets Stickier

Days ran into days at an irregular pace. One day Lorelei would be there and they would have plates of tapas and talk of what an inspiring person Aurelio was, and another Lorelei would be gone leaving Cecelia alone with nothing to do but look through mostly empty cabinets for food.

Cecelia was getting curious about this house she was living in, and would poke around. She cleaned up a cobweb here and there, but didn't feel like it was her place to make huge changes that might offend Lorelei. She

would creep up to the hole at the back of the main room and try to peer in. A cool breeze could be felt, cool, yet stale. It smelled of oldness and a hint of rotten meat.

She was peering there when she thought she could hear the strange tapping and scraping noise that Aurelio made. She quickly tiptoed back to her hammock and sat down quickly, facing the front door as casually as she could.

He also crept in behind her quietly. Then he tapped and cleared his throat. Cecelia turned around to see Aurelio, huge Aurelio on the wall, two of his legs holding a chandelier on the ceiling. She screamed and falling to her butt tried to reverse crawl away from him.

Aurelio faked a cry, he spun around clinging to the edges of the stone arch and heaved his abdomen as if sobbing. He smashed into the chandelier breaking the glass chimneys with a loud clatter. "I knew it. I knew you couldn't be trusted. Why did I try again? You will call the hunters, and it will be the end of me." Then turning around, he jumping into her face, "How could you! You said you were good!" He slammed one of his forpaws down between her legs and pointed at her with it's pair. Then slowly he moved forward stepping around her and caging her in. His mandibles waved in front of her face, drops of moisture dripping from the fangs, his voice cracked, "I thought I could trust you." Then, as if in defeat, he fell back and slunk away.

Cecelia let out a deafening scream, gasped and screamed again. She wormed her way back until she was against the wall, he pace slowed by having to pull along the rope she was attached to.

"It's the same horror all over again. You will betray me and I will be hunted and caged again," he crouched down as in defeat. Slowly he turned back to her again, advancing to keep her hemmed in with his legs that herded her movements into the corner. She sat there quivering, arms crossed over her chest.

"I knew it," he scolded, "You can't be trusted." As he talked, he carefully moved her arms off of her chest down to her sides.

Cecelia felt paralyzed again, but this time purely by fear. "What are you? Who are you? You're a spider! A huge grotesque spider! Oh, my god! Oh, my god!" She pushed herself hard up against the wall, arms braced against the floor. "And you've tied me up. I can't betray you if I wanted to."

He put a hairy paw gently on her shoulder, near her neck, "No, you can't be trusted. The game is up. They will find us both." He carefully swept back the hair that had fallen in her face and tucked it behind her shoulder.

She glanced down at his paw and was amazed that it looked like a boot of a huge fuzzy cat's paw, but with two long claws that came out between the toes. It was cute and menacing at the same time. Looking up at his face, she wondered if it could be called a face as she could see the joints of his fangs framed by the pedipalps that moved in and out with his words. He had 4 eyes that faced her, and two that faced to the rear. The two in the middle were large and round, and struck her as sympathetic.

Cecelia was confused by his threatening voice coupled with his tender strokes through her hair. "No, no. I can be trusted. I just didn't know. How was I to know what you are."

"What I am?" he echoed in disappointment, "what I am is hated and despised. You couldn't understand what that's like." He stepped back and turned away from her, keeping his abdomen tight and closing his reflective patches into small spots.

"I can, I can." She clambered up off the floor and approached him, but not too close. "My family hates me. I have nowhere to go. What am I to do."

Aurelio turned around to look at her with his two right eyes, "Yes, they do hate you. But can you understand me? I am hated too." he whimpered, then quickly said, "Did you see the sign? I know it came. Did you see it? Did you?"

"The sign? Uh, yes, yes, I saw it," Cecelia replied out of fear.

"The sign? You saw it? Really? Then maybe we are kindred spirits. Us against the world. Tell me about it."

"It was," she hesitated trying to think of the right answer, "glorious. I saw it and I was speechless."

"Yes, it was, wasn't it. Glorious. I know it was." He reached out toward her again with one of his caramel colored legs, and started to stroke her hair again, then rested his paw gently on the nape of her neck.

"So you can trust me now? Can you?"

"I think I can." His paw circled slowly, the circles getting larger until he was reaching down her back and under her blouse.

"I'm so sorry," she heard herself saying, "Please don't send me away. We are kindred spirits. Aren't we?"

"Yes," he bobbed his head as if to nod and whispered, "yes, we are. But I need to know that you will be loyal. That you will never betray me." On the word 'betray' he extended his claws and scratched her back in a long line. Then more calmly and returning to stroking her, he said firmly. "Yes! You said you would trust me. You promised. You saw the sign. The *sign!* I will take care of you. But it will require everything of you. Everything given away to receive everything. The storm is here. We are the eye. Can you be the eye of the storm? The calm, the peace. Center yourself, and be you, be real, be me. We are one, and I love you. You are nothing but a scared little toddler, look at you sitting on the floor in your filth. Have you shat your pants too? Will you sit in your shit and roll around. Are you a cony crotch-heater, always showing off but never completing? What will you do? Will you learn from me? Will you trust me?"

Cecelia was startled; her wide eyes looked at him and tried to decipher what he just said. "I will, I will," she repeated, unsure what she was agreeing to, confused by what he was trying to say to her. But she knew she shouldn't miss this chance and be sent out on the streets again. If that happened then what, back to her family? She resolved to listen closer to his words, to pay attention and understand them better. What problem was it for her to have a little rope around her ankle for her own safety when there was so much to be gained. *So much to learn*, she thought, *and maybe then I'll figure out what the sign was.*

Aurelio pulled his claw back around, tracing the edge of her blouse to the opening at the top button. His paw paused there in the middle of her chest while he looked at her without moving. Then he turned and went back to the darkness.

Lorelei stood in the background and shook nervously
