

Chapter 7

<https://youtu.be/pOVrOuKVBuY>

Getting Ready

The Love Letter

Jordi mailed Cecelia a hand written letter on fine parchment:

My Dearest Cecelia,

Our first meeting was resplendent like an early morning moon rise in the spring. I am so happy to be betrothed to you, and desire to tell you of how our first meeting has deeply affected me.

That took me a hour to write, and it sounds silly. I could rewrite it, but maybe it will make you laugh. I didn't want to start a letter like we send text messages, so I wrote too fancy. I do want you to know that I am quite smitten with you.

It's so old fashion to be set up for marriage by your parents, at least here in Spain it is. Dad says that it's more common in your country. For me, Dad has been harping on me to find someone, but I just haven't trusted so many of the women I've met here. They're beautiful and all, but I think they just want my money. I don't like it when they paw all over me and talk in baby voices. Yuck!

So he told me about the last meeting he had with your father, and about hearing all about you. When I saw the picture of you I was intrigued because your smile looked thoughtful and not one of those silly poses with duck lips. I was so excited to meet you—I'm sorry that I'm such a clumsy buffoon! Cecelia, you have caught my attention in a way that surprises me, and I want you to know that I am very happy to be marrying you. I can't believe I'm saying this, because love at first sight is such a fantasy. Can it be true? I think it is true love for us.

I wasn't expecting to come away from our first meeting visit already engaged. Dad said to just come meet you and see how I felt. We met, and then our fathers got talking, and asked me what I thought of you, and I said I liked you, and then they started making arrangements. At first I was shocked and scared, and then surprised by the fact that I was also feeling excited. You will marry me, won't you? Did we actually talk about this with each other? Even though we're already engaged, I will ask you again myself. I don't think I even had the chance to do that personally. Did I?

I feel like I can only be this bold with you because we're already officially engaged. Wait, I still can't believe that's true. Are we really engaged, about to be married? That makes me nervously excited. Does it make you excited too? I hope you have found me as interesting as I found you.

I'm thinking about your henna; it was so unique, and did I see words written in it? I

think I saw these words in Spanish: blanket, Zain, and ugly hijab. Is that silly of me? The writing was so strange though, so maybe I was just seeing things. And if that is what I saw, whatever could that mean? It doesn't make sense, but you said you designed the pattern and that alone is very creative.

I want to hear more about your creative side. I want to hear more about your life, I want to understand who you are deep down inside. I feel like that could take a lifetime, and that's what we'll have together, won't we.

I hope I'm not overwhelming you. I just want you to know how I feel since we haven't had much time to talk about these things. I am looking forward to seeing you when your yacht arrives. I will drive down to the port myself and come get you.

Yours with the deepest affection,
Jordi

The letter arrived the day before they sailed off on their epic trip. Cecelia in her excitement ran straight to Dalia's room so they could read the letter together. Evonnia was in the hallway bustling about getting Dalia ready; Evonnia, of course, was not allowed to go because she was considered a trouble maker. She would fly up to Spain joining them for the rehearsal, pre-wedding parties, and the wedding.

"What are you doing here?" Evonnia whispered at Cecelia.

"I have a letter. I want to read it with Dalia."

"If they see you in this part of the house there will be trouble. Dalia will be forbidden from coming with you. Hurry, go back to your room and act like you are indifferent to Dalia."

"I know. I knew that. I just, I wanted to share this with her."

"Who's it from," she asked, looking up and down the hallway to make sure they weren't being watched.

"Jordi," she held out the envelope, "see."

"Stick it in your suitcase, and then maybe on the yacht you can read it together. I'm trying to convince Abu Afzal that he should have you two room together, that that will only work if he thinks you don't ever spend time together. Go now! Quickly. Act like you came to get this piece of luggage, that yours is broken, if anyone asks." She shoved the luggage that she had been bringing to Dalia into Cecelia's hands. 'Now where am I going to get luggage for Dahlia?' she thought, 'Maybe Blah-de-blah will have one she doesn't care about.'

Cecelia ran back to her room, trying to act casual. She threw the letter in the bottom of her new piece of luggage, and went over to her piece and tore out the zipper. She knew she had to back up the story with a broken piece of luggage if anyone asked. It was harder to do than she thought, but with a small cut along the side of the teeth she was then able to pull out a small line of the teeth. She put what she had already packed into the new luggage, and threw the old one into the hallway for a maid to come get. All of her runaway gear either blended with her regular clothing, like the ugly hijab, or had been stashed with her toiletries in her tampon and pads pouch. Paper items had been rolled up and slid into the empty tampon applicator, then put back in the paper wrapper with the open end facing down. She forgot that she had the roll of cash hidden in the lining of the old luggage.

The maid discovered the cash when she tipped up the luggage to throw it away and something slid down with a thump. After pocketing some of it for herself, she reported this to the head driver, who reported this to Abu. Abu dismissed this as just being extra spending money, because he didn't want the trouble of having to punish his daughter on the cusp of this lucrative marriage, but he also made sure that Cecelia was not going to be left alone on this trip just in case.

Cecelia did not discover this oversight until later in the trip. At this point, she needed to get packed and act as

normal as possible. They would be heading to the yacht that afternoon, and sailing in the morning. In her mind she practiced how to react to rooming with Dalia, to roll her eyes, to complain about her smell, and then to be sullenly compliant so that when they were quietly talking in their room everyone would just assume they were ignoring each other. 'We'll need to pick a few fights with each other,' mused Cecelia, 'fights about what? The stupider the better—what else do people fight about anyways. It's never what's really bothering them. And then later we can laugh about it together. Maybe if we play our music loudly we can talk more often. But we certainly can't spend too much time in our rooms, especially if we're supposed to hate each other.'

Her bag was packed, the letter temporarily forgotten in the midst of inventorying her run away gear, trying to breathe through her nerves, and the fear that every knock, bump or noise was someone coming to expose her plot. She pulled her luggage behind her as she descended to the courtyard to wait for everyone else. As a small child she would have rolled the luggage down the stairs with a loud bag on each step, but now she wanted to blend in and be unnoticed. She sat off to the side by a large potted palm with her hands clenched in her lap.

Dalia came into the courtyard shortly after her, and saw that Cecelia had her luggage.

"Hey! That was mine!" she mumbled with a pinched eyed scowl.

She wanted Cecelia to know that she was mad that Cecelia had taken her luggage, but happy that her favorite sister had it. She tried to show her anger at Cecelia without laughing. Dalia wisely sat down at the opposite side of the courtyard, back towards Cecelia. Cecelia noted that Dalia's replacement luggage was the most hideous green and pink paisley piece that looked like someone had taken a shapeless sofa cushion and sewn a zipper and handle onto it and called it luggage. It had no wheels, so Dalia had heaved it along waddling with the weight of it pushed forward by the leg it rested against.

Those who were going on this leg of the trip had gathered throughout the hour. Abu was happy to see that Cecelia and Dalia were not huddled together, but to him they seemed to be at odds. He nodded to himself and thought that rooming them together would be perfect. He would ask Dalia to keep tabs on Cecelia and report back to him.

They boarded their yacht, settled in their rooms. Hajar laughed out loud when she saw Cecelia and Dalia try to go through the door at the same time and start bickering with each other. Dalia slapped Cecelia, and Cecelia shoved Dalia whereby they tumbled into the room, slamming the door behind them and fell into one of the beds smiling at each other.

"That's such a nice piece of luggage that you have there, Dalia!"

"Shut up," she yelled for others to hear. "You're such a brat stealing my luggage."

"I'm sorry," Cecelia responded with snarkiness, then more quietly, "really. Evonnia, I mean Mother, was covering for me. I was so stupid coming to your room. I was really excited about Jordi's letter and wanted to read it with you. I wasn't thinking, and she kept me from making a huge blunder. And now you have this," she waved her hand by Cecelia's luggage like a product model and patted it.

Dalia rolled her eyes, "Yeah, thanks to your stupidity! But where's the letter? Let's read it? Are you excited?"

Cecelia started flinging her belongings about as she pulled them out, then realized she didn't want the maids putting things away and finding anything weird so she opened a drawer and threw them into the dresser.

"Hurry up!" scolded Dalia.

"I'm getting there. I'll find it in a moment." Cecelia paused looking at Dalia, "I don't know if I'm excited or not. I mean, it's exciting getting a letter—a *real* letter, but men. You know! Men!"

"I suppose there are some good ones out there. There's Rafiq. He's nice."

"Yes, he is," Cecelia pursed her lips and batted her eyes at Dalia, "and he likes *you*."

Dalia blushed, "but you two are so close."

"Close like brother and sister—a *nice* brother. Here it is." Cecelia lifted up the envelope to her face and

smelled it. There was the natural musky scent that he had mixed with cologne of black pepper, sandalwood, frankincense, and she thought maybe also a hint of ginger. "Smells really nice."

Dalia grabbed it and sniffed. "I do believe that he scented the letter, open it and let's see."

Cecelia opens, and Dalia grabbed it, unfolded it and examined the paper. "Look, you can see hints of oil staining the paper. He *did* spray his scent on it! How romantic."

Cecelia laughed, and the both flopped onto their stomachs across the bed and read in silence. When they were done the both rolled to their backs and sighed. Cecelia lifted the letter to her face again and breathed in the scent once more.

Dalia broke the silence, "So romantic!"

"Yeah," purred Cecelia, then surprised by her own reaction, she sat up quickly, folded the letter, and said, "We'll see." She bobbed her head and shoulders trying to shake herself back to reality. Shoving the letter into the side table drawer she turned back to Dalia and slapped her lower back hard.

"Ow!"

"That's right, leave me alone," Cecelia yelled, then whispered, "we better separate before they get suspicious."

Dalia frowned at Cecelia while rubbing her back. They burst through the door together, Dalia grabbing at Cecelia. Seeing their father they straightened up and walked in opposite directions.

Abu leaned over to Hajar, "Maybe this will be more trouble than it's worth."

Hajar smiled crookedly and enjoyed the scene.

Through the Strait

The two yachts sailed up the coast stopping in Tangier for the night. Everyone except the crew clambered off and headed to the port restaurant where they spread themselves out over several tables. Cecelia and Rafiq managed to sit off in the corner, and Dalia under the guise of spying for their father sat at the next table with her back to them. This provided her the opportunity to slyly participate in the conversation and she also provided them a buffer from other prying ears.

"Beautiful weather we're having," blurted Rafiq to everyone. He pulled out the chair for Dalia, then turned and sat while Cecelia rolled her eyes at him and pulled in her own chair. "I understand our plans have changed some. We are taking a different route." Rafiq cocked his head and pointed his eyes up, down, and around to indicate his perturbation.

"Oh, yes," replied Cecelia with a falsetto tone, "We're heading straight to Barcelona for the wedding. I was so looking forward to visiting Greece and France. But here we are now, from meeting to marriage in less than two weeks!" Her wide eyed smile morphed into a fearful grimace.

Rafiq patted her arm. "I have to let my friend know that my plans have changed. My dear friends in Greece will be so disappointed. Then there are some who will be surprised to see me within the week. I'm sure they'll be able to accommodate us. Seriously, how hard is it to run to the market for guests?" He forced a laugh.

"I'd like to meet your friends. They're on Palma?"

"Yes, they are. You will meet them there, you will. Don't worry."

Dalia hung her arm down beside her, then reached back and grabbed Rafiq's hand with a squeeze as if to say, "I understand that Cecelia's escape plans have changed, but that we're still good to go."

They ate their dinners mostly in silence as they listened to Abu's stories of past travels, and Carlo trying to one-up him with his various adventures.

"We'll see you in the morning," bowed Rafiq to the young ladies, "We must be getting going early while the

tide is coming in through the Strait. Otherwise it will take us gruelling hours to get to the Mediterranean.”

“Good night,” they called back to him, Dalia with an extra enthusiastic wave.

Traveling the Strait of Gibraltar started with the first glimmer of light. Cecelia and Dalia were on the foredeck with their strong black coffees waiting for the first sliver of the sun to peek up out of the waves. They sat far from each other and texted their conversation as they enjoyed the cool breeze, the warmth of their coffee, and the first line of broken sparkles of sunlight across the wave caps. Cecelia’s long dark hair blew to the side, sometimes whipping around into her face. She thought that this is what freedom should feel like, this moment of peaceful perfection mixed with a bit of wildness.

“You need to go inside,” announced their brother Farid. “A storm is coming.”

Cecelia jumped at the breaking of their peace, then stomped off leaving her coffee cup. Dalia followed, but with one look from Farid turned back around and grabbed the coffee cup. They flopped on their bed, looking out the window at the perfectly calm sea.

“He’s such a punk!” snarled Dalia.

“I’m used to it. Someone is always going to ruin my fun.”

It was a half an hour later when the waves hit. Their bed lay with the head against the starboard side, so as they steered into the waves the girls rolled to their lefts. Then they came crashing to the right as the bow slammed back down in the trough. They tried to steady their rolling by splaying their arms and legs, walking even a few steps sent them slamming into a wall or piece of furniture, though there was only the bed and two chairs. The dressers and closets were built into the wall with latches that automatically caught when closed. Cecelia rolled out of the bed to the left, and decided to stay in the corner where the bed met the floor. She wedged herself in the corner the best she could. The further the swells rolled her from the bed, the harder she rolled back with a jolt. Dalia tried to wedge herself at the foot of the bed.

Cecelia took the moment right after the crash of the trough to turn herself around so her head was at the foot. “Turn around, Dal!” she yelled.

“What? Why?”

“Turn around, I’m right here. You can hold my hand.”

Dalia curled up and rotated herself so that they were facing each other at the corner of the bed. She wasn’t sure if it was better to be head down during a swell, or the crash of the trough. But now, as she crashed feet down, holding onto Cecelia’s hand she felt more secure. The corner of the bed was rough on their arms, and one of them inevitably caught the corner with the crash. Cecelia let go with one hand and pulled the comforter off the bed and stuffed it under their arms. Still, they ended up having a strange array of bruise lines on their arms that looked like criss crossed runways.

The going was slow as the engines strained against the wind. The deep growl of the engine, the irregular smashing of the waves, and the rising and falling whistle of the wind, the cracking and thudding of the ship mixed with their screams. Time slowed down as they waited for the storm to pass, as they hoped that they were sailing out of it instead of deeper in. Dalia got seasick, a slurry of coffee throw-up spread out across the floor, this way and that.

Cecelia, having been imprisoned with all the smells of life and rot mixed together was little affected by the smell of the vomit. The coffee smell helped mask the bile. The two continued to hold hands, intermittently looking at each other, then out the window blurred by the rain to the vision of waves and a horizon that moved up and they moved down, then at the inside of their tight-shut eyelids.

The storm passed quickly as sunlight broke through the clouds. The waves lessened enough for Cecelia to jump up and run to the laundry/utility/linen room and grab rags and extra wash cloths. She took these back to Dalia

and wiped off her face and arms. They were still so relieved that the storm was over that they didn't think about their soiled clothes, or the fact that they walked out arm in arm and flopped onto the sofa.

Abu was just emerging from his room as they came out. His look of surprise and apprehension at this development went unnoticed by the girls. He shoved up his lower lip in thought, resolving to double up the supervision of Cecelia. The hidden money, the loss of Dalia's spying, and there was something about Rafiq that he didn't trust: these things gave him pause.

"You two have become very friendly, all of the sudden," Abu said to the girls.

Their faces snapped toward their father in alarm. Neither of them knew what to say, but eventually Cecelia cautiously stated, "The storm. Sometimes going through something terrible together..."

"Something terrible? This little blustery weather? This is nothing."

"For me, I've never been in something like this," peeped Dalia.

"Me neither," echoed Cecelia hugging Dalia.

Abu rolled his eyes, shaking his head as he headed up to the cockpit.

The ships only made it as far as Fuengirola, where they found two berths for the night.

No escape today, instead meeting with Jordi again

"Palma is one of my most favorite places to visit!" exclaimed Rafiq with exaggerated enunciation, then looking at Cecelia, "Have you been there before? I think you'll *love* it."

"No, I haven't," Cecelia replied, "But I'm sure I'm going to adore it. I've heard so many things about it.

They were finishing up their breakfast near the Mirador Castell Ruins in Benidorm, and everyone had ideas on what the day would look like. Their goal was to arrive in Palma by the evening. Aly, Cecelia's next oldest brother, wanted to stop in Ibiza, but Abu would hear nothing of going to that *Isle of Sin*, as he called it.

"I don't want the girls going anywhere near that place," Abu declared.

"Drop me off with the dinghy," snorted Aly, "and I'll take the ferry and meet up with you the next day."

"No! I need you here!" Abu almost slammed the table, but stopped himself with a slap instead, "I need you to watch over your sisters, and drive them places." His tone had changed from definitive to sweet.

With a deep guttural breath Aly replied, "Yes, father."

"Let's go back to our boat," Cecelia grabbed Dalia's hand, "we should get ready for the day."

They all walked back to the dinghies and road out to the yacht in silence. The girls bounded into their room quickly, Cecelia looking over her shoulder back at Abu as he studied them and their departure. She wondered what he knew.

"You need to gather all of your supplies," whispered Dalia. "What do you need?"

"Let me pull out my list," smiled Cecelia as she pulled up her sleeve to reveal the fading tattoo.

"I don't know how you can read that."

"I invented it, so I can. Did you know that Zain figured it out too?"

"I can't tell if he'd dumb or smart."

"Smart. Definitely smart. Just weird," Cecelia paused, "or complicated really."

"Sure. Tell me what to get out."

"In the lining of my suitcase, really *your* suitcase," she chuckled, "is a wad of money. Get that out."

Dalia pulled out the suitcase from under-bed storage area, but Cecelia grabbed her arm suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Dalia.

"No!" Cecelia clucked Dalia's arm harder, "No, no, no, no, no! The money. I don't remember moving the money. What if I left it in the other suitcase."

They unzipped the case, and started pulling at the lining. There was no money to be found, but Cecelia kept lifting flaps of fabric, poking her hands under the frame, picking it up and shaking it. She looked at Dalia and gasped, "He knows. He has to know something's up. That's why Aly has to stay."

Dalia wrung her hands, "What are we going to do? Maybe I can distract him. Maybe we can get lost somewhere, pretend to be lost and he'll have to ask for directions and we can hide. Oh, Cecelia, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," she replied slowly, her head flopping to the side with a slight shake. With a quivering lip, "I don't know, Dal, I'll never escape. I'll never be free." She fell to the bed and started crying.

Dalia rubbed her back, "We'll think of something. I know we will. We have to! Oh, Cece, we'll figure it out. I'll tell Rafiq." She stopped rubbing Cecelia's back, "Wait, what about seeing Jordi tomorrow. There's a chance there."

"He seems so sweet, I kind of hate having to hurt him."

"He hardly knows you."

"I hardly know him. And we're supposed to be married in less than a week. It just feels like another trap of father's."

"Ok, this is when we try it. Aly and Jabbar will have their guard down when Jordi's around. And Rafiq and I will have our eyes open. Open wide!"

Their arrival to Palma was later than expected, so most everyone was asleep when they arrived at their berth. Jordi flew in the next morning and met them on the docks.

"I have rented a Mercedes convertible for our trip today," he smiled at Cecelia, "I hope you like fresh air and sunshine."

"I must," she blinked her eyes, looking around, "I'm living on this boat, aren't I?"

He laughed and took her hand with a kiss, "You look like you've been kissed by the sun with your lovely dark skin. I still think I can see some words on your arm here. How curious."

She pulled her arm back, "Where are we going today?"

"It's a bit of a drive to Porto Cristo. There are the most beautiful caves, not as beautiful as you, of course. They're called the Cuevas del Drac. It's said that this is where the dragon used to live. It may even have been the dragon that legends said would attack Barcelona." He waved his hand dramatically. "We can talk in the car, just us, and in the caves we get to have a boat ride." He looked at her with a wide-eyed smile.

"It sounds lovely. But what about the family. That car will only fit two."

"Indeed!" Abu stared down Jordi. "We will all be going. Please come in and make yourself comfortable while we arrange for our cars."

The wait was quite long, as Abu was in no rush and to him to say he'd be ready at 10 was to mean that he'd be ready at 12 or 1, and then it would be lunch time and they would need to eat before going. The time sitting on the yacht was awkward and uncomfortable for Jordi. The brothers cared little to make conversation with him, and Cecelia had no interest in talking to him in front of her family. She kept him company for the most part, but would often excuse herself as she was quite nervous and had to pee frequently.

Rafiq came by, and slapping Jordi on the shoulder, greeted him and then fell silent also. He desperately wanted to talk to Cecelia, but there was no opportunity. He and Dalia slipped off to the bow of the boat, and Dalia filled him in on the developments. All Rafiq could do in response was to slap his forehead and frown.

Finally, lunch had been served and eaten in silence, and everyone started getting into their cars. Aly seemed quite anxious as he was trying to figure out how he was supposed to stick close to Cecelia when she was going to be with Jordi.

Coming up to his car, Jordi found Aly, "Oh, um, uh, you see, Aly, that's going to be Cecelia's seat. I was

thinking she could come with me.”

Aly kept eye contact with Jordi as he stepped out of the car, walking backwards so as to keep his piercing gaze on Jordi. He pushed Dalia out of the shotgun seat in the car behind Jordi's and signaled something to Jabbar, who was driving. His arms waved about, and then pointed directly at Jordi.

Dalia scrambled into the back, and they were off through the city into the farmland.

The awkwardness of the morning had quite shaken Jordi, that for the first half hour he forgot to ask Cecelia any questions, but talked on and on about his favorite classes as a child, and how he would get in trouble for drawing spiders and spider webs on all of his papers. His favorites were when he drew smashed spiders with guts coming out, but the teachers were especially upset with those papers as the picture was usually bigger with lots of colors spread out over the words or math problems. Sometimes his teachers would return the paper ungraded, and ask him to do it all over again.

Eventually he realized his faux pas, and asked Cecelia, “What were your favorite subjects in school?”

Cecelia's hair had come down in the wind from the top being down, and was blowing in her face. She used this moment, where she wound her hair back up and re-threaded her ornate hair sticks to hold the bun, to figure out her response. “I didn't really go to school. Mother, first mother, taught me how to read, and I taught myself anything else I wanted to know. Real mother always said, ‘The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.’ She said it was from a children's book or something.”

“I like that,” he chuckled. “And I like those hair thingies.”

“Real mother gave them to me. They're pearl and jade from China. She said she went there before being married to father.”

Their conversation focused on the farmland they were passing through, the rock walls that farmers built when they unearthed a rock when plowing their fields, whether they liked open fields, beaches, forest, or mountains. The drive seemed short to them, and then they were already parking, Aly opening the door for Cecelia. He didn't do it as a gentleman, rather to make sure that he was right there when she got out.

They gathered their tickets, and after a long wait for the first tour that could accommodate all of them together, they descended down the stairways into the cool cavern. The tour guide went in front to guide the way, Jordi and Cecelia tried to stick to the back of the group, but Aly and Jabbar somehow managed to stay behind them the whole way. Cecelia's heart sank as she felt their overbearing presence, and knew their tenacity for following her around. She tried to focus on the beauty of the cave with the colorful lights shining behind the stalagmites, showing off the stalactites as thin shadowy needles hanging from the ceiling.

Much of their tour was a muddled memory for her. She hadn't brought a jacket, so the cold started to pierce her. She thought of the dragon living in this cave and wondered how many maidens it had eaten. The time came for the boat ride on the large rowboats. They could fit 12 to a boat, but after everyone else had been ushered onto their boats just Jordi, Cecelia, Jabbar, and Aly were left to get into the last boat. Cecelia sat sullenly in the front, with Jordi squeezing next to her on the two person bench. Jabbar and Aly wanted to sit right behind them, but the boatman told them to sit further back to make the boat more balanced.

“As you look to the ceiling, these stalactites have grown only 1 centimeter every one hundred years. That's one micrometer every year, drip by drip.”

Jordi looked directly up into the stalactites; instead of seeing mineral deposits he saw legs. Legs upon legs of spiders descending on him and Cecelia. He let out a loud cry, and jumped up to cover Cecelia. In the boat he looked like a newborn foal stuck in the middle of a frozen pond. He pushed off with his right leg, which slipped on the wet bottom of the boat and sent his left knee into Cecelia's leg. Jordi threw his arms up in defense of the threatening legs, but being off balance this sent his left elbow into Cecelia's ribs, and his right arm swinging across her head. The sweep of his arms caught Cecelia's hair sticks, sending them flying out into the water, and her hair in a matted

mess across her face.

Cecelia was knocked sideways, her top half over the side of the boat. She tried to hold on to the side, but her hands slipped and her arms splashed into the cold water. Jordi was able to catch himself on the side of the boat, slamming his hands down and grasping on tightly. This prevented him from landing on top of Cecelia, but they were stuck in this uncomfortable position and didn't know how to right themselves.

Aly and Jabbar held onto the sides of the rocking boat, laughing. The tour guide was shouting something at them, but neither Cecelia or Jordi had the presence of mind to hear his words.

"I'm so so sorry. Are you OK?" Jordi shouted into Cecelia's ear, which was right next to his face.

"Ow, get off of me! Don't break my eardrums too!"

He caught his heel under the seat, which gave him leverage to pull himself back. As he sat back down he tried to grab Cecelia's arm to help her up. She instinctively snapped her arm away from his grasp, slamming her pectoral into the wood again.

"Ow!" Cecelia gasped for air as she pulled one arm up, and then the next. "Ow, that hurts." She rubbed her pectoral and armpit, as she turned her head and glared at Jordi as if to say, "What the hell were you thinking?"

"I'm so sorry. I thought I saw spiders," then he thought better of sharing his true vision, "I thought I saw a spider coming down on top of you, and then my foot slipped." Turning to the tour guide he said, "We're fine. We're just fine. So sorry."

The tour guide shook his head and continued with his speech.

Cecelia squeegeed off her arms with the side of her hand, then pushing her hair out of her face discovered that her hair sticks were gone. "My hair sticks. My mother, she gave them to me. Where are they?"

"There," said Jabbar pointing out into the water behind them.

Cecelia ran her hand across her head in a petting motion and started to cry. She refused to look at Jordi. He tried to take her hand.

"I'll see if we can go back and find them. Do you think they float?"

"No!" was all she was willing to say.

He sat hunched back, arms drooping the rest of the boat ride. As they departed the boat he offered her his hand, but she grabbed the boat instead, and climbed out with the grace of a toddler learning to step over a small toy—arms down, butt in the air, legs lifted higher than they needed to be. Aly and Jabbar continued to giggle at her.

Rafiq and Dalia tried to come alongside Cecelia and comfort her. They also wanted to communicate with her when the opportunity would be for escape, but Aly and Jabbar kept so close no conversation was possible. They day passed without a break from these brothers, with little conversation between Cecelia and Jordi. Cecelia had to hold her hair in her right hand on the drive home to keep it from whipping into her face from the convertible's backdraft. Her left arm was too sore for her to lift it more than a few inches.

"I hope that when we see each other again in a few days you will have forgiven me. I just wanted to protect you, that's all." Jordi said, bowing his head and he returned to his car and then flew back home.

My dear readers, the next few days were busy with wedding preparations, and you know already how the wedding went, and why she ran from it. It's time for me to tell you now what Cecelia and Aurelio are up to.