

LUCK OF THE DRAW
(working title)

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an original work of fiction by Larissa Dahroug

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dedicated to those with the wisdom to keep ancient knowledge and traditions

CHAPTER 13

I'm Sorry I Love You

Jack pushed his feet into his shoes by the door then walked back over to Stephanie sitting at the dining room table where she was eating a bowl of cereal. He kissed her on the top of her head.

"I'm sorry. I want to get in early before Jeff shows up and get the place ready for today's delivery." Jack lied.

"Are you sure you can't just take the day off and rest a bit?" Stephanie asked. Jack had been released later Thursday evening. Doug's right arm was paralyzed and his lung was punctured but he was going to make it and live a mostly normal life. Jack was not going to be charged. Footage from the camera behind the counter confirmed his story of self defense and neither man was interested in pressing charges against each other. In fact, once he had woken up and was stabilized, Doug told the police everything that had happened with Mike Musgraves and Oleg and was willing to testify against them. The only catch was Doug might be forced into witness protection, but that was yet to be seen. Eberly had gone to the hospital and been by Doug's side and was still there as far as Stephanie knew. She wanted Jack to just take it easy for a day or two. They had all been through a lot lately. But he insisted on going in to the shop even though Jeff and Dana, the undergrad Jack had recently hired for weekends, were more than able to run the shop for a couple days.

"I want to make sure there's no blood on the floor and there's a big delivery coming in today and I want the back room cleared this time." Jack lied again. The shipment coming in today was no bigger than any other shipment. He just wanted some time in the shop by himself to think.

"OK. Well, call me when you're on your way home. I want to have dinner ready and waiting for you." Stephanie smiled sadly at her husband who was walking out the front door.

"OK." Jack said over his shoulder.

"I Love you, Honey Bear!" Stephanie cried.

"I Love you too." Jack said without turning around.

Once in the shop Jack looked around. Jeff had done a good job cleaning up. Jack knew he would. Jeff was a good employee and an even better person. He had cleaned up and filled in for Jack without even asking questions or complaining. Jack closed the door behind him but didn't bother to lock the door. He walked into the back room workshop area and surveyed the

collection of vases on the wall. A beautiful blue glass mosaic finished barrel shaped vase stuck out to him. He plucked it from the wall and set it in the middle of the work station. Then he fit a piece of soaked floral foam into the bottom before turning toward the cooler. Inside the cooler he pulled twelve of the most beautiful and expensive long stem roses and giant pom pom spider mums from buckets and carried them gently in his arms back into the workshop. He carefully wrapped the stems of each mum with fine floral wire then expertly arranged the roses and mums in the floral foam in the base of the vase. He finished the arrangement with a modest spray of baby's breath and a couple sprigs of greenery before choosing a card with a shiny red heart on the front. On the back of the card he wrote: *To my Stephanie: I'm sorry I Love you.* - Jack. Then he sealed the card in an envelope, clearly wrote Stephanie's name on it, placed it in a plastic card holder near the front of the arrangement and tucked the arrangement on a table in the center of the walk in flower cooler. Then he walked around the shop giving everything a once over one last time. Then he walked into the front of the shop and found his gun where he had left it in the cubby hole and sat it on the counter.

Back at married student housing the phone was ringing. Stephanie answered it.

"Oh, hi Uncle Eb."

"Hi Steph-Steph. Is Jack-Jack there?"

"No Uncle Eb. He went in to work early. He said something about clearing out the back for a big delivery today."

"Something about that doesn't sound right, Steph-Steph."

"I agree Uncle Eb, but I don't want to push it with Jack right now. He's had such a horrible couple months and we've both been under a lot of stress with the house in escrow and my final panel coming up and his Dad and everything with that and now the Doug stuff. How is Doug, anyway?"

"Steph-Steph you are a true angel. I can't believe you're even asking after Doug after everything."

"Doug's been a real asshole to Jack, Uncle Eb, but he didn't deserve what that Musgraves guy did to him either. I can't even imagine! He must have been terrified. For all of us!"

"He is, Steph. He is. And to be honest, I'm pretty scared too. I just wanted to talk to Jack and let him know how sorry Doug and I both are."

"Well, you're gonna have to catch him on his cell because he's not here. I'm sure he's at the shop by now, but he won't answer the phone until after nine."

“Oh, well, I think I might just walk over there. I’m just around the corner at a coffee shop right now. I have a meeting with an expert at the University in an hour. After my meeting you want to go get some lunchy-lunch?”

“Sure Uncle Eb. I’m just working on editing today. Just ring me when you’re on your way over.”

“It’s a plan. See you later, Steph-Steph. Love you.”

“Love you too, Uncle Eb.”

Stephanie hung up the phone feeling better about everything. Maybe things were going to start going back to normal now. Uncle Eb would go talk to Jack and work his Eberly-magic and they would all go back to having brunch and drinking good wine and talking about Art.

Eberly hung up the phone feeling ominous. Something wasn’t right with Jack and he was going to get to the bottom of things so his niece could focus on finishing her paper and preparing the catalog he’d been helping her compile of the Gettleman family Art and Antique Collection that was going on exhibit the coming Spring at City Hall back in Tuscaloosa where (Great) Grammy and Pop-Pop were buried. Eberly tossed his empty paper coffee cup in the trash and smiled at the barista as he walked out toward Jack’s shop around the corner. It was just after eight Friday morning and the Palo Alto streets were just starting to really show signs of life. As Eberly turned the corner he saw the lights were on in Jack’s shop. With a skip in his step he quickened his pace to the door. As he clasped the handle of the door he saw in horror, Jack standing behind the counter holding a pistol to the side of his head. Eberly desperately pulled at the door expecting it to be locked, but it wasn’t and swung into his chest causing him to stumble as he pressed forward into the shop.

“Jack-Jack! No!” he screamed with hands out-stretched toward Jack. Jack opened his eyes in shock at being caught by Eberly. He calmly turned the gun away from himself and at Eberly who kept running toward Jack in horror. Jack pulled the trigger hitting Eberly squarely in the forehead. Eberly fell dead to the ground in the same place Doug had laid bleeding just a couple days before. Not even looking to see if Eberly were still breathing, Jack turned the gun on himself wrapping his mouth around the barrel and pulled the trigger slumping to the ground. By the time Jeff and Dana arrived an hour later both had stopped bleeding. No one knew it yet, but Stephanie was about to come into a sizable chunk of money. On Tuesday Eberly had updated his ten million dollar life insurance policy changing the beneficiary from Doug to Stephanie. She was going to be able to pay for her new house outright and still have enough left over to pay for the funerals and her student loans.