

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 4

A Small Discrepancy

Doug rubbed his soapy hands as vigorously as he could under the hot water splashing out of his bathroom spigot. Eberly was downstairs in the living room of the townhouse oblivious to any of the events of the past 24 hours.

“Sweetums, can you please hurry? Stephanie and Jack have been waiting at Buca for twenty minutes already! They told them they won’t seat them until we get there!” Eberly whined loudly from the bottom of the stairs. Doug pumped another blob of soap into his palm and scrubbed again, this time scrubbing up his forearms and getting the edge of the cuffed sleeve of his chambray shirt wet. He splashed some water over his face, rubbed his index finger over his front teeth and blotted his face and arms dry with a towel he had used the night before after his shower. He felt dirty, like the first time he had given a blow job to Fr. DeMarcus in the sacristy the week after his First Communion.

“I’m coming, Babe. I know. We’re late.” Doug’s voice warbled a little. He cleared his throat as he unrolled his sleeves buttoning them at his wrists and tucked a loose shirt tail into his pleated wide wale corduroy trousers. He took one last look at his reflection before bounding down the stairs trying desperately to act as if nothing of the past 24 hours had transpired. Stewart stood in front of the door and promptly coughed up a nasty hairball as Doug hit the bottom stair. Eberly gasped in an exasperated fashion.

“Really Stew-pie? I’d never wear trousers cut like that either, but that’s a bit much don’t you think?” Eberly moved toward the kitchen to get something to wipe up the mess but Doug stopped him with a motion of his hand.

“Eb, really, just leave it. Like you said, we’re already late and who knows how long it’s been since Jack’s last feed.”

Eberly raised a waxed eyebrow at his Lover and pursed his lips. “I told you to knock it off with the passive aggressive fat bashing.” Eberly chided Doug. Doug rolled his eyes and threw his hands in the air.

“Are you kidding? Last time we met them at Buca for brunch *his tab alone* was over \$100! He ate two appetizers by himself along with soup, salad, entrée AND dessert, not to even mention

the beer. I love Stephanie, Eb, but she could do much better than Jack. Jack is a glutton, and it's not like his brains make up for things."

Eberly walked into the kitchen and grabbed a roll of paper towel and bottle of 409 from the counter and proceeded to bend over to wipe the cat vomit up from the slate floor of the foyer in an exaggerated manner. As he sprayed the smeared floor with 409 he spoke softly and evenly to Doug.

"Lover, just because I let you tear up my ass doesn't mean I'm going to allow you to tear up my family. I love Stephanie, and Jack is a very tender soul under all that flub. And most importantly, he loves Stephanie. Love is Love, no?" Eb stood up holding the soiled paper towels away from his body between an index finger and thumb, with the roll under his arm and the 409 in his other hand. He disappeared into the kitchen. Doug heard the cabinet open and shut where the garbage was stowed and the water run in the sink while Eberly washed his graceful hands. Doug's shoulders slumped as he stood in front of the door waiting. He looked across at the opposite wall and could see himself in the gilt mirror that used to hang in his mother's sitting room. He looked old and foreign to himself, entirely changed from the person he had been the morning before. Eberly emerged from the kitchen with a small smile on his lips, pleased with himself as he saw Doug examining his reflection while waiting for him.

"Let's go." Eberly said as he snatched Doug's keys from the coffee table and handed them to him while reaching around for the door knob. Doug took the keys and patted his back pocket finding his wallet where it belonged. Eberly gave him a quick peck on the cheek as he turned the door knob and opened the door. Doug just sighed, moving aside for Eberly to exit before him. As he locked the door behind them he spoke softly to Eberly.

"You're right. I'm a monster for saying anything."

Eberly cackled. "I wouldn't go that far, but yeah, you need to be careful with that, Sugar. You've been collecting a bit of extra padding yourself these days." he informed Doug, patting his right side just above his belt. Doug winced. He was aware.

"I know. I know. I need to start running again."

These days Doug could be found most Saturdays walking at Shoreline, but he used to run. He wasn't sure why he had stopped running. He told himself something about taking time to smell the roses, but really he was just being lazy. As far as he was concerned no one in the Bay Area had any excuse for having any amount of excess body fat. Weather like that was made for the thin and beautiful and Doug loved thin and beautiful. Eberly never exercised, but somehow remained svelte and firm no matter how many glasses of merlot he sipped in the evenings. Doug opened the passenger side door of his Escape for Eberly and had a moment of panic seeing the two coffee cups in the center console. He had totally forgotten to throw them away in his hurry to get in his house after his escapades the day before. Now they sat there, one empty and one half full, screaming his deeds for all to hear...or so that was how he felt. He knew Eberly was going to ask about them. Eberly situated himself in the seat and buckled up as Doug closed the door behind him and made his way around to the drivers side. Eberly was silent as Doug closed his door and secured his own seat belt. It wasn't until they pulled out of the driveway, down the street and onto Evelyn Avenue that he said anything.

"So, who were you sipping lattes with in your car Dr. Spears?"

"No one. They're both mine." Doug lied.

Eberly picked the two cups up and sniffed them. He knew it was a lie.

"No they're not. This empty one is yours. It was a chai latte. But this one...this one that's still half full...this one is hazelnut, and you hate hazelnut. So, who's the bitch?"

Doug quickly glimpsed Eberly to his side and looked back to the road in front of him.

"She's not a bitch. It was a woman from my office building." Doug said, wishing he had some better story other than the truth. Eberly looked relieved.

"Oh. Well, as long as it's an actual bitch with an actual va-jay-jay and not some cheap twink I don't care who you have coffee with. Why didn't you just say so? Which bitch from your office? Not that horrid screeching dyke, Maggie, was it?" Doug relaxed a little. Eberly had no clue even though Doug felt like what he had done was written all over his face and hands and windshield. Eberly put the cups back down in the console.

"Yeah. It was Maggie. She needed a ride to pick up some shelves for her space because all she has is that lesbo-cycle moped. We stopped and grabbed some caffeine so I could get through the afternoon." Doug lied. He hated Maggie and wouldn't have helped her if she were drowning. Eberly laughed.

“O. M. G. Why do lesbians insist on riding those stupid things?! Get something with a trunk already! Get a Subaru like all the carpet munchers up North!” Eberly continued smiling at Doug who was grimacing. “What’s wrong, Boo? You suddenly Love lesbians or something?” Doug didn’t realize his emotions were reading on his face and tried to force a smile.

“No. I’m just embarrassed about being so late for brunch. I might as well order lunch when we get there. You know Eb, Maggie’s not a lesbian. She just looks like one.”

“And rides a moped!” Eberly laughed.

Maggie wasn’t a lesbian, but she wasn’t sought after much by men either. Maggie was kind of a sexless child-woman. Doug found her to be obnoxiously petulant. Everyone except her fan club of clients seems to feel the same way. Two years ago Ed Shuppe had thrown a holiday party for all of his tenants from all of his properties at Tao Tao. Maggie had surprised everyone by showing up with a date — an extremely feminine guy at least 15 years younger than the fifty something pumpkin shaped woman. Eberly hadn’t been able to make it to the event and couldn’t believe it when Doug told him about it. Eberly insisted her date must have been trans or a baby-but. Doug hadn’t thought so, but it wasn’t any of his business so he just dropped the matter and let Eberly think whatever he wanted. Eberly was like that. Once an idea was set in his head there was no changing his mind. Doug had learned from Maggie a few weeks after the party that her date was in fact a young man she had met while giving a lecture to a cohort of students from some shitty massage school. She had broken things off after only a couple dates because she said he was “hung up on the age difference” even though she was positive they had been partners in multiple lives before this one. The only reason Doug had listened to her babble was because he was waiting for his lunch to heat up in the toaster oven in the shared kitchen. Doug glanced at the two coffee cups in the console and rolled down his window. He picked up the half full cup and tossed the liquid out the window. It splattered down the side of the vehicle.

“What did you do that for?” Eb asked.

“The hazelnut smell was turning my stomach.” It was a lie. Doug’s sense of smell stunk. He was just feeling guilty and didn’t want Eberly to somehow figure out what was actually in that cup. Amy’s lipstick mark was still faint on the lip of the cup.

“Are you feeling alright, Lover? Should we just call off brunch. We don’t have to go if you aren’t feeling well.” Eberly was genuinely concerned. Doug didn’t look well. There were circles under his normally bright eyes and a cloud of dis-ease seemed to be hovering about him.

“No. It’s OK. I’m fine. I just slept funny is all.”

Doug had hardly slept at all. He was still in bed when Eberly had shown up and used his key to let himself in that morning with a bunch of sunflowers, kombucha, and some weird vegan-chocolate-coconut-ball things. Doug had forgotten all about brunch with Stephanie and Jack in the fervor of the day before and had barely slept thinking about the look on Amy’s face when Mike had smacked her down on her windshield. Doug had helped carry her into her apartment. He had no idea what all they did to her after that. He hadn’t stayed around to find out.

After Doug left his office the day before, he had come home and laid down on the couch with Stewart stretched across his stomach purring trying to relax. He had just started to nod off when his front door opened and the two men from earlier in the day sauntered into his living room. They had used a credit card to open the door. Doug was surprised that was all it had taken to open the heavy door. The two men had closed the door behind them calmly and sat down in the chairs situated to either side of the couch as if they were all old friends. Doug pressed himself up into a seated position. This time Mike introduced himself and Oleg by first name. Oleg was his cousin and Casey Rosanova was Oleg’s wife, or so Mike told Doug. In actuality Oleg was Mike’s second cousin by marriage, but he was also a pimp and had been trying to commodify Casey since shortly after she had moved out West. But they didn’t bother to explain *this* to Doug. Mike called Casey Oleg’s wife. Casey was actually in the process of getting a divorce from a man on the East Coast who her parents had arranged for her to marry. She had only just mentioned this to Doug in their last session. He assumed Oleg was this man, but Casey had said her husband’s name was Gregory, not Oleg, a small discrepancy. Doug simply thought Casey had lied. He had no idea the extent of the malignancy sitting before him. Nor did he have any idea how much of a malignancy he was himself. Mike explained he needed some information from Amy, but that she was not co-operative. He explained that the cops were at her office right now and that Amy was napping in her car waiting for the cops to be done. Then he handed Doug a small bag filled with a fine white powder. He instructed him to go get a couple cups of coffee and wait until the police were leaving then put the powder in one of the cups of coffee and offer it to Amy, as a kindness. Doug was adverse to the idea at first, but Mike and Oleg were quite persuasive. Evidently Galeena’s gentleman friend was also an associate of these two thugs. They promised that as long as he did as they instructed him and didn’t call the cops that Galeena would continue to enjoy her weekend and arrive home safely Monday

evening. They said to keep Amy in the parking lot until they got there. Mike handed Doug a small walkie talkie and told him to use it to call him once he had purchased the coffee. Doug took the device and agreed and the two men left his home as easily as they had entered. Stewart had run to his dish and scarfed the crunchies remaining from the morning and then proceeded to vomit them up in front of the chair where Mike had been sitting. That's why the 409 was still on the counter when Eberly cleaned up the hairball.

After Mike and Oleg left and he had cleaned up Stewart's mess, Doug did as he was told. He drove back to his office and saw Amy napping in her car parked out front of the building. He saw the police were still in her space moving about. He parked his car in the parking lot across the street and waited until the police were coming out of Amy's office and heading for her parked car. There is a small drive up coffee kiosk in the parking lot across the street where Doug was waiting. He drove up and ordered the chai latte and hazelnut latte. One time Amy had gotten coffee for the two of them. He remembered that was what she had ordered. He dumped the baggie of powder into the drink then drove over and parked next to Amy's car. The police were getting in their cars and pulling out of the parking lot. Amy was in her office. Doug pulled out the walkie talkie and pressed the button. Mike had answered him. Doug told him he was going to offer Amy the coffee and the cops were gone. Mike told him they wouldn't be long. Doug tucked the walkie talkie in the console and then mounted the stairs with the hot beverages in hand. As he reached the top of the stairs Amy was just passing Doug's door. All night Doug had played the interaction over and over in his mind.

"Hey Amy!"

"Oh, hi Doug. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm OK, but I hear you've had a rough day." Then he had extended his right hand with the drugged hazelnut latte in Amy's direction. "Thought you might like a cup of something hot."

Amy had smiled and taken the coffee graciously.

"Thanks, Doug. Hey, I heard about your weirdo client trying to break in. Tubbs said you paid for one of the cameras in the back hall."

"Uh, yeah. There's no accounting for folks these days, especially crazy people."

Amy had laughed and taken a sip of her latte. Doug didn't know what to expect. He didn't know if she was going to pass out or what. He had no idea what the powder was. Amy looked quizzically into the cup and Doug got scared for a second.

“What’s wrong? Isn’t it good?” he asked her.

“No. It’s fine. I think they added more syrup than usual, that’s all. It’s a little sweeter than normal. Thanks for the coffee. I really need to get home though. It’s been a long day and I just want to take a shower and crawl in bed with a book or something.” Amy brushed past Doug who could see Mike and Oleg were already parked next to his car in such a way that it was blocking in Amy’s car and obscuring the view anyone from the street might have of Amy’s driver side door. Amy took a big gulp of the coffee before she started down the stairs. Doug followed nervously. By the time they got to the bottom of the stairs Amy was swaying slightly on her feet. She started to stumble a bit but Mike was there and grabbed her by the elbow. Doug had grabbed the coffee from her hand just before she dropped it down the front of herself. Amy had gasped recognizing Mike and stammered.

“Wha...what...what do you want? What’s going on? Doug!”

Mike had lead Amy to her car and whispered something in her ear that Doug couldn’t hear. Amy was whimpering and trying to push Mike off of her. Oleg grabbed Doug and demanded the walkie talkie back. Doug had fished it from his car and given it to him. By then Amy was backed up against the side of her car and Mike was standing over her talking close to the side of her face. She was turning her face trying to turn away from him. Mike didn’t look pleased or calm, as he had up until now. Amy squirmed enough to turn her back to Mike who abruptly grabbed her by the low ponytail at the nape of her neck and smashed her face against the windshield of her car hard enough to crack it. Doug was surprised to see Amy’s face didn’t bruise. There was a cut on her forehead and she was knocked unconscious. Oleg rushed over and grabbed the keys from Amy’s bag and handed them to Mike. They put Amy in the back seat then Mike got in the drivers seat. Oleg had looked at Doug and instructed him to follow them. Doug didn’t dare disobey. He had followed them all the way to what he learned was Amy’s apartment. Oleg had kept a look out while Doug helped Mike carry Amy up the two flights of stairs to her third floor unit. It was strange. It had been nearly 6PM on a Saturday and the place seemed deserted. There were hardly even any cars parked in the parking lot. Once Doug and Mike got Amy in her apartment she started to stir somewhat. Her cat sniffed at her bare feet. Her shoes must have fallen off in the car. Then the cat darted out the door as Oleg came in after them. Doug looked at Mike and said, “I don’t want anything else to do with this. I’m leaving.” Mike had answered him simply, “That’s fine. You’ve done your part. Now just keep your mouth shut. Don’t worry. She’ll do the same.”

Doug had stood frozen for a moment before turning and almost running to his car and driving home. Once he arrived home he got in the shower and cried as he washed himself over and over then drank four shots of bourbon in succession before laying down on his bed.

Now in the car with Eberly he truly did feel like a monster. Amy seemed so innocent. What had he done? And why? What was she doing in that line of work anyway? She should have been some mediocre primary school teacher or a baby factory for some tech guru schmuck, not reading tarot and doing woo-woo bullshit for creepy old faggots and mob darlings. Who was this woman anyway to put him in this position? The more he thought about it the more angry he became. Really, this was all Amy's fault. She brought this on him and herself. Shit, he had probably done her a favor yesterday. While Doug was reasoning things out in his head Eberly was talking on and on about his upcoming deadline and the boring article he was editing. Doug didn't hear a word as he pulled into a parking space on a side street around the corner from Buca.

"So I told him my boyfriend was a clinical psychologist and he should give you a call and get a diagnosis." Eberly was saying as Doug pulled the key from the ignition. He snapped his head at Eberly at hearing these words.

"You did what?! I don't need any new weirdo clients, Eb!"

Eberly was caught off guard. He hadn't actually given the jerk Doug's name or contact, he had just been insulting a backward tech asshole.

"You haven't been listening to a word I've been saying for the past ten minutes. Really, Doug. What the fuck is your problem today? Do you want to have brunch or not? I didn't give the fool your contact. I was just insulting him." Eberly watched as Doug angrily grabbed both paper coffee cups and crushed them looking for a trash receptacle as he exited the vehicle. Eberly watched Doug through the driver side window as Doug stomped over to a trash can and forcefully threw the paper cups in. Then he calmly unbuckled himself and waited for Doug to come around and open the door for him to get out. Doug opened the door and Eberly got out stepping past him with his nose in the air headed for Buca's door. Doug closed the Escape's door, locked the vehicle, shoved his hands in his pockets and followed his partner into the busy restaurant lobby.

Eb was already greeting Stephanie with hugs and kisses. Jack was at the hostess stand telling the irritated looking hostess that the entire party was finally present. Doug scuffed the toe of his

Campers on the tile floor waiting to follow the hostess to their table. Jack looked at Doug with disgust and waved hello. Jack and Eberly got along, but the feelings between Jack and Doug were mutual. All Doug wanted was a Bellini and a nap.