

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 7

That's The Best Part

Tubbs was washing his face and hands in the sink when Amy came in the kitchen Wednesday morning. Maddy was over at the Community Center doing Tai Chi with all the old Chinese ladies. Tubbs had been digging around in the very back of his shop looking for a box he had tucked away years before. In the process he had gotten cob webs and dust in his beard, hair, and eyebrows. The small locked metal box was now sitting on the kitchen table. Amy handed Tubbs the tea towel that was hanging on the front of the oven and watched him dry his face and hands.

"I hope you slept OK." Tubbs said somewhat muffled into the towel.

"Yeah. I slept fine." It was a lie, but Amy knew the truth would just upset Tubbs. Besides, it would have been much worse had she been in her own room wondering if they were coming back and exactly what all had happened to her. Liza stayed by her side all night purring and giving her head bumps.

"That's good. Are you going into the office today? You can ride with me." Tubbs told Amy hopefully.

"Um. No. I, uh, I'm not ready to see clients again just yet. I don't even know who I was supposed to see today. I think I had three today, but my head just isn't in it right now. Plus I need to call Juno and what's-her-name from the hospital. Ed put a sign my door, right?"

Tubbs was a bummed. He had been looking forward to spending a little more time with Amy, but he understood.

"Oh yeah. It says — Family Emergency. Please call to reschedule."

"OK. That's good. If anyone wants to reschedule they can call. I'll have to pick up a new appointment book." Amy sat down at the kitchen table and saw the box but didn't say anything. Tubbs saw her notice the thing.

"A little buried treasure I was out hunting for this morning." He smiled and picked up the box. Something small but heavy sounding rattled around inside.

"I wasn't being nosey." Amy replied.

"I know. You're the least nosey person I've ever known. If you're curious though I'll show you what's inside."

"Do I want to know?" Amy smiled coyly. Tubbs raised his brows and pursed his lips tilting his head to the left.

“Well, I don’t know. You just might not.”

“Then let’s let sleeping dogs lie.” Amy concluded.

Tubbs chuckled his small chuckle and tucked the box under his left arm then pat the table lightly with the palm of his right hand.

“That’s my girl. Help yourself to whatever you can find in here. Maddy keeps the place pretty well stocked. Of course, you’re welcome to pick up whatever you want as well. There’s a Wild Oats not too far from here, just a few blocks really. I walk there all the time.” Tubbs headed toward the courtyard as he continued to speak to Amy. “There’s a house key there on the table for you. I have to get going. I have three properties to check on before I head over to your spot. Maggie has some B-S problem again I’ve been told. Is there anything from your office you’d like me to bring back here for you? Maybe that bowl?” Leon stopped by the door waiting for Amy to reply. Amy picked up the house key and turned it over before covering it with her palm.

“Um, yeah. You could bring that bowl here. Everything else is mostly replaceable if they come back. Thanks Leon. You and Maddy are very kind to let me and Liza stay here.” Amy said from the table.

“We’re happy to help. Now if you need anything before Maddy gets home just give me a jingle, but Maddy should be back in an hour or so.”

“OK.”

“Now, I know I don’t really need to tell you this, but, don’t answer the door. Neither Maddy or I are expecting anyone for anything and who knows who these crazy assholes are.”

“I know who they are, Leon.” Amy said in a far off voice. Tubbs whipped around.

“What?! You do? Who are they? Why are they after you?” Tubbs now strode back towards the table waiting for Amy to answer him.

“They’re organized crime. I’ve never had a problem with them before. We’ve always stayed clear of each other. I’m not sure what changed, but it must have something to do with one or more of my clients.”

Tubbs frowned. “Hmm. Well, you’re safe here. I’ll die before I let them touch you again.” he said as he walked back to the door and out through the courtyard leaving Amy alone for the first time since Tubbs and Juno had shown up at her apartment the day before.

Amy waited until she heard Tubbs’ Silverado pull out of the driveway and down the street before she got up and walked around the house checking out the floor plan and all the evidence of Leon and Maddy’s life together. There were photos of Leon with a woman who must have been

his mother. The age was about right and the resemblance was obvious. There were photos of Maddy smiling in a long white lab coat with a group of men also in lab coats and smiling in front of a giant metal sphere...photos of Maddy and Leon at some tropical location...paintings of fruit in bowls that looked to have been signed by Maddy. Then, as Amy rounded the corner approaching the door of the bedroom shared by Maddy and Leon there were more than a dozen blue ribbons with musical notes in the center and after the arrangement of ribbons there was a large framed collage of photos of a girl who could only be Celia. The photos ranged in age from infancy to early twenties, some with her seated at a baby grand piano with blue ribbons. It was a kind of shrine, really, and for a moment Amy felt strange, like she were the girl in the photos and not the woman standing in the hall. But that was just silly. Amy didn't play any instrument and Leon was nothing like her father. Amy's father was a calculating and preoccupied man who was much more interested in bragging about his Marine-son than bothering to remember he even had a daughter. David Gonder never wanted a daughter. He was only interested in sons. Growing up he was always trying to push Amy into tom-boy activities. When she stubbornly preferred to draw pictures, sing songs, and play hopscotch instead of play softball, have spitting contests, and go fishing he began to ignore her. When she enrolled at a community college to take some obscure history classes instead of applying to a four year university to study law like he wanted he had stopped paying attention to her entirely. Half way into her first year at community college she met Duane. He was also into esoteric knowledge and introduced her to *The Gnostic Gospels*. Reading the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* had changed her life. When Duane told her he was going out to California to work Crush she followed him, hungry for sunshine and male company that listened when she spoke and thought her brains were something interesting and wonderful, instead of superfluous and useless. Her parents had put on a big show of being distraught she was leaving home but it was just that — a show. Once she was out of site she was out of mind. If she didn't call to check in she never heard from her parents, and eventually that came to suit her just fine. Her mother never had anything positive to say to her about her life and her father only went on and on about Dale. Anything she ever shared with them was met with some story of Dale or some cousin or child of a friend who were doing so much better at life than Amy. Finally, enough was enough. Amy stopped calling the day she met her first deck of cards. That was more than twenty years ago now.

Liza was wrapping herself around Amy's ankles and meowing loudly. She was hungry and so was Amy. Amy shook the memories from her head and walked back toward the kitchen the way she came, leaving the blue ribbons behind her. Liza bounded around the square towards their room. Amy opened the door and the unmade bed revealed itself before her. All of a sudden Amy was lightheaded and her heart began to pound in her ears. A wave of terror flooded her being. She looked from side to side in the room and then took a deep breath. She was alone. There was no one there, but the sight of the sheets like that was upsetting her. She remembered what Naomi had said the day before. On the night stand Amy had a notebook and blue Bic pen. She plopped down on the bed and grabbed the book making a quick note with the date and time. Liza was scratching at the blue Rubbermaid container where the cans of wet food and crunchies were stashed. Amy felt bad and filled the kitty's dish with crunchies. After she filled the dish she made the bed pulling the sheets as tightly as she could on the full sized mattress and got in the shower. As she stepped out of the shower her phone rang on the counter. With a towel wrapped around her hair she picked up the device and looked at the ID. It was an unknown number. The breath caught in Amy's throat as she opted to screen the call.

The person you are calling is screening this call. Please state your reason for calling.

The caller hung up without offering any explanation. Amy put down the phone and quickly finished getting dressed. As she picked up her hairdryer she heard the front door open and Maddy call out, "Amy, it's just me. I'm back!" Amy was relieved. With hair still wet down her back she walked around the house to meet Maddy at the interior courtyard door.

"I'm here." Amy said to Maddy as she was juggling locking the door and a bag of groceries. Amy took the bag from Maddy's arms and carried it to the kitchen counter while Maddy locked the door and smoothed her already smooth hair around her face.

"Have you had anything to eat yet?" she asked Amy.

"No. Not yet. I hadn't even looked."

"Oh, well, that's lucky. I picked up a couple scrambled egg burritos and a few other things on the way home from Tai Chi. Have you ever tried Tai Chi?"

As a matter of fact Amy had tried Tai Chi in high school as a gym elective. She had been willing to try anything to avoid playing basketball and Tai Chi turned out to be kind of like dancing, which Amy enjoyed.

“Yes. A little bit.” Amy told Maddy who was now un-bagging the groceries onto the counter: two foil wrapped burritos, a package of organic strawberries, a block of sharp cheese, waxed paper, milk, orange juice, a giant artichoke, and a copy of Wellbeing Journal.

“Well, you’ll have to join me some time then! We practice three times a week next to the duck pond at the Community Center.” Maddy handed one of the burritos to Amy who was standing watching her.

“Maybe. We’ll see how quickly I get back into the swing of things with my clients.” Amy began to peel the foil from the corner of her burrito. Maddy pulled two glasses from the cupboard and filled them with juice and put them on the table before she sat down with her burrito. Amy joined her.

“You know, you can stay with us as long as you need. Leon has been so happy to have you here with us. I don’t know if he mentioned it to you or not, but he and our daughter don’t speak anymore and he misses her. You’re what, forty two — forty three?”

“I’ll be forty two end of January.” Amy answered then took a bite of the burrito.

“Ah. Celia is thirty nine. She had enough of being treated like a little girl and left the Country. Leon just didn’t know how to let her go, so he lost her.” Maddy sighed heavily and took a sip of juice.

“Um, yeah. He said something about bugs in Brazil.”

Maddy laughed. “He still doesn’t get it.” Amy chewed thoughtfully. “So, is there anything I can help you with today? Or are you just going to take it easy?” Maddy finally asked Amy.

“I need to make a couple phone calls, but other than that, I think I’m just going to take it easy. If there’s anything *I* can help *you* with, though, let me know.”

“That’s quite alright for today. You just take time to rest or do whatever you feel like you need to do. In a few days you can start helping me with things if you like, but really all we need you to do is keep your space clean and pick up after Liza. Did Leon show you where the laundry is in the garage?”

Amy swallowed a mouthful of breakfast before answering Maddy, “Yeah, he did. He gave me a quick tour of his shop after dinner last night.”

“Oh, of course...his shop. Did he show you his little guys?”

Amy smiled. He had. In his garage workshop Leon carved these wonderfully whimsical little creatures and built diorama style environments to place them in. They were sculptures. He said he had started them when Celia was just a tiny girl as props for story time before bed and they

had become quite popular. A couple boutique style toy stores had been carrying them in Sebastopol, Carmel, and Mendocino for over thirty years now.

“Yes. They are wonderful.” Amy admitted. Maddy smiled.

“Well, every now and then he gets a bunch of them together and hides them around the house just to annoy me. But really, I Love them too and making them makes him so happy. That’s the best part.”

“I suppose it is.”

Amy finished the last couple bites of her breakfast then excused herself from the table where Maddy was still absently munching and thumbing through her new magazine. Liza followed her Mummy.

Back in her room Amy pulled out her cell phone and dialed Juno’s number, which she now had programmed in her contacts list. It rang five times before he answered.

“Juno here. Amy?”

“Yeah. It’s me.”

“How are you today?” he inquired.

“Fine. I guess.”

“I understand you are staying with Mr. Tubbs and his wife.”

“Yes. That’s right.”

“Well, when I went back and checked on your car yesterday it was unlocked so I went through things.”

“Yeah? I saw blood on the back seat.”

“It’s yours. I also found one black sandal-thing shoe.”

“Yeah. I was wearing those. But you only found one? Did you find the Holy Water?”

“Just one shoe in the car. No Holy Water. Sorry. But I did find your Tablet. It was wedged between the front passenger seat and the console. Maybe you hid it there? Also, I found the other shoe in the bushes out in front of your office building.” Amy inhaled fast and sharp. Juno continued. “It looks like they knocked you out some way and began the assault in the parking lot then put you in the back of your car and drove you to your apartment. Are you sure you don’t remember eating or drinking anything before the blackout?”

"No. I told you. The last thing I remember is locking my office door after you guys left. Wait..."

Amy was having a faint recollection of talking to someone — someone she knew. Juno was getting impatient.

"Wait, what, Amy? Do you remember something?"

"Maybe. I feel like I talked to someone as I came out of the office. But I can't tell you who or about what."

"OK. Well, if you remember anything else, write it down and then give me a call. I'm going to go back over to the office again today and ask some questions. Not a whole lot of folks were around yesterday when I stopped by. How well do you know Doug Spears?"

"Not well, really. Just professionally. I sometimes refer clients to him. We went out one time for drinks and music, but not like a date. He's super gay, you know."

"I didn't know. Does he have a partner?"

"Yeah. He and Eb have been together almost as long as I've known him."

"Eb? Does he have a last name? Do they live together?"

"I think his last name is Gentry but don't quote me on that. He edits some tech rag. I've only met him a couple times in passing. I don't think they live together. Doug once said something about Eb staying at his place to watch Stewart while he was away one time. Stewart is his cat."

"Ah yes, Stewart. I've heard all about Stewart from Mr. Shuppe."

"Oh yeah, Ed Loves all furry creatures and Stewart mouses the building for us."

"OK, Amy. If there is anything else you remember, let me know."

"Can I get my car?"

"What?"

"My car? Can I get it and drive it?"

"Yes, but, it's probably best that you have an escort when picking it up. I can do that tomorrow morning at ten if you like."

"Yes. That works for me. Do you have the address here?"

"Yes. I'll see you tomorrow at ten. Try to have a nice day and not think too hard about things."

"OK. Thanks, Juno."

"You're welcome. Bye."

Juno hung up before Amy could say goodbye. Amy dug Naomi's card from her purse and dialed the number to check in as she had requested. It rang three times before going to voicemail. Amy left a short message.

"Hi Naomi. This is Amy, from yesterday. Just checking in. I'm fine. You were right. I think I've had a couple flashbacks, but I'm not sure. I'll call you back if I feel like I need to talk. Thanks." Amy hung up the phone then fell back onto the made bed and fell into a fitful sleep. Liza kept a close watch. Around 5:30 she was roused from her sleep by the ringing of her phone. It was Tubbs.

"Hi Leon."

"Hi Amers. How's your day been?"

"Fine. Mostly I've slept."

"Well, after what you've been through I bet you're tired all the way down to the bottom of your soul."

"You said it."

"Hey, I'm about to grab that bowl and finish up here then head home for the day. You sure there isn't anything else here you want? How about that big stone that sits next to the bowl?"

"Yeah. If you want, you can bring that too. But I don't want to put you out."

"It's not a problem. Oh wait..."

"What?"

"There's someone walking up to your door. Not one of your clients that I recognize." Tubbs felt the back of his waistband for the gun he had dug out of the storage in his garage earlier that day. He bought it back in the 60's when he was still living in Oakland and the riots were at their peak. He had tucked it away when they bought the house just before Celia was born. Maddy didn't even know he had it anymore. It was there. The safety was on.

"What do they look like?" Amy asked.

"Late twenties, early thirties. Six foot or so. A little dumpy, pudgie-like. Brown hair. Medium-olive skin. Glasses. He's got a vase of sunflowers."

It didn't sound like any of Amy's clients.

"Maybe it's just a delivery guy, Leon."

"Did you order anything?"

"No, but..."

"But nothing...I'll be home in a bit, right after I check on this and get your stuff."

"Tubbs, don't go getting...." but Tubbs hung up before Amy could finish telling him not to put himself in danger for her.

Tubbs approached the man who was now standing at Amy's office door. He watched as he knocked. When no one answered he sat the vase in front of the door and took a brochure from a plastic receptacle to the right of Amy's door.

"Hey. You down there. Hold on." Tubbs said. Jack looked up startled.

"Oh, hi there. I was just looking for Ms. Gonder."

"Oh yeah? And what do you want with Ms. Gonder?" Tubbs asked as he stopped just a couple feet from Jack.

"Nothing. I just heard what happened to her and wanted to give her these flowers." Jack made sure to come by when he knew Doug was with a client. He sat in the parking lot across the street for almost two hours waiting to see someone enter the office for a session before he got out of his car and crossed the street with the vase. He had no idea what to expect to find. He didn't even know if Amy was alive or not. He didn't even know what Amy looked like.

"Oh yeah? And who are you to be giving Amy flowers?"

"Is she OK?"

"Who are you?"

Jack didn't know how to answer the pointed question. He knew the cops had been around earlier asking questions. He had seen them come out of Doug's office shortly after he arrived and watched as they knocked on every door except Amy's. Tubbs had only just finished speaking with Juno before he called Amy. Juno was already on his way back to the station.

"Um, no one really. A friend of a friend. I just heard she had been hurt and wanted to give her some flowers. That's all."

"That's nice and everything, but you still haven't told me who you are."

"Yeah, well I don't know who you are either. For all I know you're the one who hurt Amy." Jack spat. Tubbs was not amused.

"Now, listen here son, you need to tell me who you are and why your here or I'm gonna call the cops."

Jack thought about it and decided to take a chance.

"My name's Jack. Is there somewhere else we can talk where we can sit down in private?" Jack was looking nervously down towards Doug's office. Doug often walked his clients to the door at the end of a session and he didn't want to be seen.

"I'm Tubbs. I take care of this building. I was just going to go in here and pick a couple things up for Amy. Come on in with me for a minute." Tubbs had a feeling about this guy. He didn't seem like the type that would do what was done to Amy. He didn't seem like some slick mobster. He

seemed like a doughy book-reading momma's boy. Besides, if he was trouble Tubbs had his leaded friend tucked in his belt to help out. Jack relaxed a bit. Tubbs opened the door to Amy's office and the two men entered. There was still glass on the floor. Leon closed the door as Jack sat the vase on Amy's table next to the Chihuly bowl. Leon grabbed a broom from behind the door and began sweeping up the mess from the previous week. Jack sat down in the comfy chair where Amy's clients normally sat.

"Is she OK? I know what happened, well, some of it anyway." Jack was genuinely concerned and Tubbs could see that. Tubbs was also very keen to learn what Jack had to say.

"What do you mean you *know what happened*? What do you know?" Tubbs asked cautiously.

"Well, I know Doug Spears is a class A, royal asshole."

Tubs just stood leaning on the broom next to the pile of shattered glass waiting for Jack to continue. Jack obliged.

"I guess Amy referred a client to him recently who is some mob-boss's wife or daughter or girlfriend or something and they came around looking for Amy because she's the one who referred her to Doug, the class A asshole. They ruffed Doug up a bit and left some dead rats or something at his door then they followed him home and made him help them get her."

Tubbs eyes widened at the revelation that Doug had helped harm Amy.

"What do you mean he helped them get her?" Tubbs asked.

"Look man, I don't know why I'm even telling you this." Jack replied.

"You're telling me because you know it's the right thing to do. Now finish. Tell me the rest. How did Doug help?"

"He came back and gave her a cup of drugged coffee. Then these gangsters beat her up and stuffed her in her own car and made Doug follow them back to her apartment to help carry her in. Then he said he left. He didn't know what if anything happened to her after that."

Tubbs vision began to narrow. He recognized the wave of rage and closed his eyes as he let the emotion crash over him and recede.

"Seriously...that's all I know. Is she OK?" Jack asked once more.

Tubbs took a breath and gathered himself before he spoke to the now terrified Jack.

"She's well enough. How do you know Doug?"

Jack rubbed the wedding ring on his finger with the tip of his thumb. as he spoke.

"He's my wife's, uncle's boyfriend. And for the record he's a piece of shit."

Tubbs breathed heavily through his nose a couple times.

"If what you say is true, he's more than a piece of shit. He's the whole stinking pile."

"I've been saying that for years now." Jack replied pushing himself up and out of the chair. "Can I leave the flowers here?" he asked Tubbs.

"Yes. I'll see she gets them."

Jack opened the front door and peeked out to see the coast was clear before leaving.

"Hey, don't tell Doug I was here, OK?"

"I won't, but I am going to tell the cops what you told me."

"Do what you want. I don't care anymore." Jack slipped out the door and made it back to his car without Doug being any the wiser.

Tubbs sank down in the chair where Jack had been sitting and cried hot angry tears into his wide hands. After a couple minutes he finished sweeping the broken glass into the garbage, picked up the bowl, the big smokey quartz point, and the vase of sunflowers and piled into his truck. He took the pistol from his waistband and replaced it in the lockbox and slid the box into the hidden storage compartment under his console. Doug was still in his office with a client.

Tubbs wasn't sure exactly what he wanted to do. Did he want to call Juno immediately, or did he want to try and find a little more information on his own first? What he really wanted to do was go home and see Amy was still safe, kiss his beautiful wife and have some dinner. He'd decide what to do next once he had eaten. It was never a good idea to make a decision like this on an empty stomach. He was lucky Maddy was such a good cook.