

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 3

The Hair Down There

Amy lifted her head from her pillow ever so slightly and squinted her eyes. The sun light coming through her window seemed unnaturally bright. It hurt her head. She lifted her right hand to her forehead to shield her eyes and noticed she was still wearing her clothes from the day before — and that was very strange. She lifted the blankets over her head and looked at her legs. Yes. She was still dressed from the day before...black long sleeve t-shirt, black maxi skirt, and belt. At least she had taken her shoes off before getting in bed, but something didn't seem right. Her head hurt like she had been out for a few days drinking — if that was something she ever did, which it wasn't. Seriously though, she felt strange, disoriented, and sore all over. She flung the covers from her head and saw her purse on the floor in the corner, also strange. She usually hung it on the hook by her bedroom door at night. She tried to sit up and found she was quite woozy. Closing her eyes she willed the contents of her stomach to settle. With her eyes still closed she reached out to her night stand looking for her cell phone which usually sat plugged in to charge next to the box of tissues. It wasn't there. Once again she opened her eyes and slowly eased herself upright in bed. The room started to shift as if it might spin, but she stuck her pinkies in her ears and swallowed hard. That seemed to adjust whatever was amiss with her inner ear. She opened her eyes and allowed her pupils to adjust. For a couple seconds all she could see was a big glowing green dot in the center of her vision. Slowly the the room came into focus as her eyes adjusted. It struck her then, Liza, wasn't there next to her. Her kitty, Liza, was always right next to her, especially at bed time.

"Liza?! Kitty-cat?!" Amy croaked. Her throat seemed affected by the mystery affliction as well. It was dry and sore as if she had been screaming. There was no response from Liza. Her bedroom door was closed and locked from the inside, another strange fact. Amy never locked her bedroom door. That would be silly. She lived alone in a space that wasn't quite 500 square feet. Now she was frightened. Everything was still and seemed quiet in the apartment. She felt alone, but she wasn't sure if that was true or not. When she swung her legs over the side of the bed she felt a sharp pain in her left hip. Feet dangling off the bed just a couple inches from the floor she peeled down her skirt over her hip from the top. The stretchy t-shirt material easily gave way revealing a huge purplish welt with two infected looking puncture wounds just behind the top crest of her pelvic bone. She lightly touched the area around the wounds and winced,

finding it both tender and hot to the touch. Replacing the top of her skirt and planting her feet on the cold floor she slowly stood up. Her joints ached under her average weight. Her hip felt like it was on fire and when she moved to walk it felt as though a thick blade was lodged in the joint. Limping heavily she made it to her purse slumped in the corner. Bending carefully, she picked it up and limped back to her bed. Once again situated on the tousled sheets she saw a streak of blood she assumed had come from the wound on her hip. She dumped the contents of her purse out on the bed in front of her: wallet, keys, lip balm, a wad of gum wrapped in an old receipt, hand lotion, two pens, a quarter, tampon, brush, pepper spray, and her phone. What was missing: her tablet, the pouch with her bottle of Holy Water and grandmother's church head-scarf, and her client book. She opened the wallet to find everything there except the business card with officer Juno's contact information. She picked up the phone and was relieved it still had 30% charge, but was terrified to see it was Tuesday morning. Last she remembered it was late Saturday afternoon and she locked up her office, said good bye to Juno and the two women officers who came to dust her office for prints and was heading back to her car to go home. But she didn't remember actually getting in her car or driving home, and now it was 10 AM on Tuesday. She remembered she had a client scheduled on Monday. Someone must have missed her. She opened the call feature of her phone and looked at the history. Nothing outgoing since Saturday morning, but there were three incoming with two messages. The last two calls were from Danica, her Monday appointment. She left an angry message on the last call. But the first incoming call was late Saturday evening and was from an "unknown number"... and they left a message. Hesitantly Amy pressed the play option and held the phone up to her ear to listen. It was a strangely halting man's voice.

"Darling, Amy. If you are listening to this you must have woken up, but trust me when I tell you I have not held my breath waiting for you to do so, and I'll be very impressed should you wake at all. Your answers were quite unacceptable and so I have taken your client book and will look for what I need myself without your help. Your kitty didn't stick around to help you out. She ran down the hall, in case you're looking for her. Ciao, Sweetie. I'll be back to check on you mañana."

Amy dropped the phone shaking. She looked around the room and saw everything else around her looked in place. Had they had come back on Sunday to check on her? Had they assumed she was dead? Did she lock her bedroom door? Was Liza OK? Why hadn't any of her neighbors

noticed anything? Any other day Mrs. Dwyer across the hall was so nosey it verged on harassment. Amy picked the phone back up and cleared her throat. She found that as long as she whispered she could talk without a problem. She opened her contacts and looked for Tubbs. The number she had for him was his direct cell phone. She knew she was the only one in the building besides Doug who had it. Tubbs had told her so the day they hung the glass shelves. She and Doug were the only people in the building Tubbs didn't think were crazy. Everyone else had to call Ed to get to Tubbs. She pressed the send button. It rang twice.

"Ye—llo. Tubbs." Tubbs answered.

"Tubbs, it's me, Amy." Amy whispered.

"What's that? Amy? I can hardly hear you. Speak up."

"I can't Tubbs. I don't know what's wrong. This is as loud as I can talk right now. Please."

"Amy? Are you OK? Do you need me to fix something? I'm down at Maggie's right now."

"No, no...Tubbs. I don't know what to do. Don't say anything to Maggie, please. I don't know what happened. I'm so scared."

Tubbs interrupted her. "Amy. Slow down. Hold on. I'm stepping outside."

Amy could hear Maggie protesting in the background as Tubbs explained he would be right back.

"Amy, where are you? What's the problem? You know you had an angry woman here yesterday pounding on your door and the doors of everyone else in the building? She said she had an appointment. Are you OK?"

"No Tubbs. I'm not OK."

"Where are you?!"

"I'm at home...but it's not so simple. I just woke up."

"What do you mean you just woke up?"

"I mean...last I remember it was Saturday evening and I was heading home. Now it's Tuesday morning!" Amy tried to shriek, but only a squeak came out. Amy could audibly hear Tubbs gasp on the other end of the line.

"Amy, where are you?"

"I told you. I'm at home, but I'm afraid to leave my room. It's all so strange and I'm scared, Tubbs. I'm really scared."

"Well, why don't you call that officer Juno?"

"Because they took his card. They took some other things too."

"They? Who's they?" Tubbs asked.

"I don't know Tubbs! I think they hurt me. I think they tried to kill me. I think they think I'm dead!"

"What?! Amy I don't understand. What do you want me to do?"

"I don't know Tubbs. I don't know. Can you come over?"

"Amy, I don't even know where you live. Don't you think you should call the police?"

"Tubbs, I'm scared. They left me a message on Saturday evening after they did whatever they did. I don't know what to do. Liza, my cat, is missing and I don't know what has happened to me for the past almost three days!" Amy was breathing hard and tears were falling down her cheeks silently. Tubbs was beside himself.

"Amy, what's your address?"

"You know where the Sunnyvale Community Center is?"

"Yeah."

"I live in the complex right behind the Senior building. Between there and the houses."

"OK. I'm going to call Juno and see if he'll meet me there."

"Juno has the address. I gave it to him last night, I mean Saturday evening...before I went to my car. Tubbs, I don't even know if my car is here!"

"Well, it's not at the office, front or back, I can tell ya that much." Tubbs told her frantically. "Now, I'm gonna hang up, but you hang in there, Amy. Don't leave the room and don't let anyone in."

Tubbs hung up the phone and Amy flopped back on her pillow. Her mouth was really dry and there was a terrible metallic taste, like she had been sucking on rusty nails. She got up and spied herself in the dresser mirror. The corners of her mouth were crusted with what appeared to be blood and she had a cut over her right eye. Her t-shirt was torn at the neck and there was something dried on the back of the shirt. She decided to not change anything so Juno would see it all if and when he got there. Suddenly Amy was hit by the urgent and overwhelming need to urinate. Instinctively she doubled over and grabbed at her crotch and immediately wished she hadn't. She winced in pain. It felt as if she had been beaten between her legs. Amy was afraid to look, but also knew it was important to pee into something and save it. A formerly regular client had been the survivor of a particularly horrible assault situation and had told her that part of the reason they weren't able to put the guy away who had done it was because after he was done with her he took her home and dropped her off and instead of calling the police immediately she had taken a shower and washed herself. She had scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed trying to gain distance between herself and the assault. She scrubbed so well they didn't have any

DNA to convict the monster and his attorney convinced the jury it was a simple case of unfortunate mistaken identity. Six months after the trial ended the guy did almost exactly the same thing to another woman who looked eerily similar to Amy's client, but this time he killed the woman. *That* woman's husband came home as the monster was washing his hands in their kitchen sink and killed him with his bare hands. Ironically, the hero husband was now serving a five year sentence for killing the monster who raped and killed his wife in their kitchen. All of this now bounced around inside Amy's throbbing head.

She went to the bathroom that adjoined her bedroom making it a master suite. The medicine cabinet was open and a bottle of Percocet she had been prescribed when she broke her ankle a couple years back was empty with the lid missing. The bottle had been nearly full. She dug through the cabinet looking for something she could pee into. Finding nothing suitable she opened the cupboard under the sink and, behind a box of pregnancy tests, found an actual specimen cup, sealed and still sterile. A couple years ago she had been dating Kevin Turley and things had been pretty serious. They had even started trying to have a baby. But when Amy pressed him about getting married Kevin freaked out. A week after the blow-out fight he up and moved to New York. Amy turned up pregnant a few weeks after that and never told him. She had the pregnancy terminated and told the doctor she had no idea who the father was. It was a lie. Kevin was the only guy she had been sleeping with. In fact, she hadn't had sex with anyone since. After the abortion she was kind of turned off dating and decided to let God decide when Mr. Right came along. She was done looking. Six months ago she heard Kevin married a woman Amy had once considered a friend. Amy harbored no jealousy or bitterness. Quite the opposite...she thought the two deserved each other; both were shallow and impulsive. All of these memories rolled around in her mind as she now held the sterile specimen cup before her face triumphantly. Quickly she hiked up her skirt and pulled at her panties and squatted over the toilet to pee into the cup. She saw the blood in the cup before lifting the skirt more to reveal her badly beaten up looking genitalia. It looked as though they had pulled the hair from her labia and pubis. Tufts were left around the edges at her bikini line. There was a cut running along the inner part of the outer labia the whole area was swollen and bruised looking. She gently pat herself dry with a wad of toilet paper and sat the cup on the edge of the sink along with the wad of toilet paper. Then she sat back onto the toilet and cried heaving sobs, each one sending a shot of pain through her abdomen.

After a short time she covered the specimen cup leaving it in the bathroom then gathered herself together and laid back down on the bed. She closed her eyes for what seemed like just a moment when she heard the sound of Juno and Tubbs calling from outside the locked bedroom door.

“Amy! It’s officer Juno.”

“And Tubbs too!”

“Amy, are you in there?”

Amy rolled over and croaked to the two men.

“Yes. I’m here. Hold on. Let me unlock the door.”

Amy stood up and had to steady herself against the wall. She limped around the bed and over to the door. As she opened the door Tubbs inhaled sharply at the sight of Amy in such disarray. Juno showed no emotion. Amy could see things were a mess behind them in the rest of her apartment. Thankfully, Liza jumped up onto the dining table and meowed to let Amy know she was back and safe. Amy opened the bedroom door wide and pushed past Juno and Tubbs toward Liza and scooped the tiny tabby up in her arms.

“Oh Liza! Mummy’s so glad you are safe and sound! Let me get you some food.”

“Really, Amy. Don’t you think that can wait?” Juno asked her.

Amy swung around to look at him holding the kitty close to her heart. Liza was rubbing her head hard and deep into her Mummy’s chest, purring, happy she was OK.

“Look, I haven’t fed my kitty since Saturday morning. I’m glad you’re here, but please try to put yourself in my shoes.”

Juno and Tubbs both instinctively looked to Amy’s feet which were bare except for some dried blood dripped over the left big toe and ankle.

“Amy, I think we should call the paramedics. You need medical attention.”

“I need to feed my kitty. And yes, I need medical attention. I don’t even want to tell you what I’ve found so far and I’m not looking forward to learning the extent of what they’ve done to me.”

Tubbs began to cry. Tears silently were running down his face and dripping from his chin. Juno looked away embarrassed.

“OK. Feed the cat, but I’m calling for an ambulance.”

“Seriously, you don’t need to do that. I can drive myself to the emergency room, if that’s where we’re going. But don’t you want to look around here first? Don’t you want to hear what happened?” Amy asked placing Liza back on the table and looking for her dish on the floor. She found it in the corner where it always was. She picked up the shallow dish and carried it into the small kitchen and placed it on the counter. The kitchen had been left untouched. In the living room the TV was on the floor with the screen shattered and the drapes were pulled from the sliding glass door and were strewn over the couch. Amy found a can of wet food in the cupboard and pulled the tab to open it. She dug a fork from a near by drawer and scooped a generous serving from the can and mashed it down in the dish with the back of the fork. Then she placed a plastic lid over the open can and put it in the refrigerator. Liza was meowing like crazy, running back and forth between the kitchen and the corner where her water dish was still sitting. Amy put the food dish down and Liza began to eat ferociously. Amy picked up the water dish and filled it with fresh water for the hungry kitty before turning toward officer Juno and Tubbs who were up to this point just watching her go back and forth with the dishes for the cat.

“Well? Don’t you?” She asked them again.

“Uh, yes Amy. Please tell me what happened.” Juno asked softly. Amy pulled a chair out from the small dining table and eased herself onto it. Sitting was uncomfortable and the longer she was awake to more her body hurt. Juno pulled out the opposite chair and sat down. Tubbs perched himself on the edge of an overstuffed armchair next to the couch in the living room just beyond the dining table.

“I don’t really know what all happened. The last thing I remember is walking to my car after you guys were done at my office Saturday evening.” Amy began. Juno was digging in a pocket looking for a pen to take notes. “After that I woke up here just before 10. My head hurt. It still does. Everything hurts! But when I woke up the light hurt my eyes. I was still wearing the clothes I have on now. The same clothes from Saturday. And I have some horrible...” Amy struggled for the right word. “...wounds.” she finished. Juno looked up at her with sympathy.

“What kind of wounds, Amy?” he asked gently.

“I have a giant welt on the left cheek of my ass with what looks like two puncture wounds, like they stuck nails in me or something. I think they’re infected. They’re hot to the touch. And, there’s this blood in the corners of my mouth, and the cut on my head. And...and...and my... my...” Amy began to sob. Juno was at a loss. Tubbs ran to Amy’s side and wrapped his arms

around her. Amy was a little surprised, but grateful. She needed a hug, some gentle affection. She let herself sink into Tubbs' chest as she sobbed and he lightly rubbed her back.

"Amy, there's something on your back. It's all dried." Tubbs inspected the palm of his hand sniffing it. "I think it's semen." Tubbs assessed and told Juno. Amy spoke with her face still buried in Tubbs' chest.

"I wouldn't be surprised. My hair is gone...they pulled out my hair. And I've been cut." Tubbs held her tighter while her words settled in Juno's ears.

"What? What hair?" the clueless officer asked.

"My...my...the hair down there." Amy pointed to between her legs without looking at Juno.

Tubbs smoothed the hair on top of Amy's head. Amy pulled away from Tubbs, who lightly touched her cheek and went into the kitchen to find a glass to fill with water for the violated woman. Amy wiped under her nose with the back of her hand and noticed a cut on the outside of her hand running up the side of her arm. It looked similar to the cut along her labia.

"I think they raped me. I had to pee. I had a specimen cup under my sink. I have it in the bathroom with the paper I wiped with. There's probably more. I haven't taken my clothes off yet. And they left me a voicemail."

Juno dropped his pen on the table and looked at Amy, marveling that the woman was alive.

"They did what?" he asked half seriously half rhetorically.

"They left a message. I can play it for you. I don't think they thought I was going to make it. I think they thought I was dead." Amy got up and went to the bedroom to get her cell phone which she had left on her night stand to charge. When she came back out Liza was sitting in Tubbs' lap getting a massage. Amy put the phone on speaker and played the message. Juno shook his head.

"And the number came up unknown?"

"Yes." Amy replied.

"Well, depending on how they managed that we may or may not be able to find where they were calling from. It sounded like they used something to alter the sound of their voice. At least we know they in fact were trying to kill you. That might help me get some resources on this case. So they took your client book. Did they take anything else?"

"My tablet is gone. Other than that I don't know. I haven't looked around. I only came out of my room when you got here. Was the door open?" Amy asked.

"Um, not open, but unlocked." Tubbs answered her. Amy nodded at him.

“Oh, and I don’t know if they took it, but there was something else missing from my purse.”

“Oh? What’s that?” Juno inquired.

“It’s really strange. I don’t know what they’d want it for. It’s nothing unless you’re family. I had a little pouch in my purse that I got from my grandmother. It was an old jewelry pouch, but it didn’t have jewelry in it.”

“Well, they didn’t know that.”

“Yeah, well it would have been easy to tell, even without opening it.”

“What was in it then?”

“It was a tiny bottle of Holy Water from the Vatican blessed by John Paul and a silk head covering for church. It was my grandmother’s. She gave me the pouch with the water and the scarf on her deathbed. She told me to never enter her church without my head covered and well...”

“Well what?”

“Well, I haven’t told you everything about my work.”

“Are you an escort, Miss Gonder?”

“WHAT?!” Amy was disgusted. “Absolutely not.” The recent memory of Kevin made her laugh and this scared Juno who now shifted uncomfortably in front of Amy. “We’re not all like that you know?” she spat at him.

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“No. You’re not. You don’t even know what you’ve just said to me or why that’s absurd. There’s no way I could do the work I do AND be a whore.”

“I told you. I’m sorry. Please continue. What haven’t you told me about your work?”

“Well, I clear spaces.”

Juno shook his head back and forth. “And just what does that mean? You clear spaces?”

Tubbs smiled and chuckled lightly under his breath. He had suspected but hadn’t known for sure until just now. Tubbs had an aunt in the same line of work as Amy down in the Florida Panhandle.

“Ghosts. Spirits. Demons...I get them to leave people’s houses, cars, barns, whatever. The Holy Water is for the tough cases, for Demons or other malignant beings.” Amy said flatly. Juno stared at her without blinking. He didn’t know what to say or believe. “I guess you could call me a ghost-buster.” Amy finished. Juno brushed imaginary hair back from his brow and scratched the top of his head before making another note on his clip board.

“Um. OK. So they took your Holy Water?” Juno asked.

“I don’t know. I guess they did. But I have no idea how I got home let alone what or who took or did what. I’m guessing they drugged me, but you’re the cop. You figure it out.” Amy began to cry again. Tubbs looked at Amy with sincere concern. He had a daughter just a few years younger than Amy. They had been estranged for the past ten years. Fatherly emotions were being triggered in his heart and all he wanted to do was find who did this to Amy and beat the shit out of them.

“Amy, I can drive you to the emergency room.” Tubbs offered.

“That’s a very good idea.” Juno added. “The sooner the better. Go get your specimen and gather your things. Let’s go.” Juno made a couple last notes and gestured toward the door with his head. Amy got up and got her purse then looked for the shoes she had been wearing last. They were nowhere in the apartment to be found.

“My shoes are gone.” she told Juno.

“OK. I’ll add them to the list. Get another pair and let’s go.”

Amy went back into the bedroom and dug around in her closet until she found a pair of foam flip flops and slid her tiny feet into them. She picked up the specimen and wad of paper and emerged back in the living room where Tubbs was waiting standing next to the couch. Liza was standing on the cushion next to him letting him rub her ears. Juno was standing just outside the front door talking to nosey widow Dwyer. Amy approached Tubbs who wrapped his arm around her shoulder and ushered her towards the front door. Amy bent down and kissed Liza on the head telling her, “Mummy will be home soon and we’ll clean all this mess up.” Then she darted into the kitchen and grabbed a ziplock bag placing the cup and toilet paper inside before locking the door and following Tubbs past Juno and the old nosey widow down to his Silverado. Amy saw her car parked a few spots away and noticed a crack in the windshield. Juno followed shortly and approached Tubbs’ window. He rolled it down to speak to the officer.

“Meet me at el Camino Hospital?” Juno asked Tubbs.

“Yeah. I’ll follow you.”

“Great.” Juno turned away from Amy and Tubbs and patted the hood of the truck as he walked toward his car.