



**Excerpt from Tough Karma: A Race Against Time
Chapter 6 – Darkness Falls**

Tough Karma: A Race Against Time (Karma Series Book 1) by Laura Simmons

From the Author of Little Bits of Karma comes a chilling new tale of loss, tragedy, psychic warfare, and eternal love.

Amber Macklin's world is cruelly shattered when she loses her baby girl three months after her husband's sudden death. Her cousin, Bryce, comes to her rescue, moving her into his home for fear she will kill herself from the grief. He provides solace and a shoulder to cry on, and he has loved her as more than a cousin for a long time.

Amber and Bryce soon discover they are not blood relatives, which opens the door for romance as he pulls her through her darkest hours.

When Mike, a college friend of Bryce's, stops by to visit, Amber senses a deadly secret behind his nice guy persona. She has a frightening dream that Mike is trying to kill her and recurring sleepwalking episodes where she draws detailed pictures of him torturing her.

Deeply troubled, Bryce uses his ability to astral travel to investigate Mike and uncover his terrifying past. Mike has had his eye on Amber for some time, and when he learns that Bryce and Amber have become lovers, he is furious.

Mike abducts Amber and takes her to his rural Georgia hideaway, and Bryce must rely on his astral abilities to track her down. But will he be too late?

5 Star Review: I am impressed that Author Laura Simmons takes the time in the beginning of this book to educate her reader on the definition and description of astral projection (astral travel), telekinesis and

clairvoyance. If you have an open mind and believe the human brain is capable of so much more than our normal everyday functions.

Even though I didn't read the authors Karma Series Prequel Titled Little Bits of Karma before this book. The author explained enough for me to know that her main character Amber Conner's life was filled with normalcy rocked by unimaginable grief.

"Tough Karma: A Race Against Time" begins where "Little Bits of Karma" left off. Amber's family, especially her cousin Bryce, who rushes in to assist her through her unbearable heartache, so she would not become a suicide statistic.

Author Laura Simmons quickly and masterfully pulled me into the story where these two cousins discover a romance that goes beyond the physical into a deep, intense psychological, supernatural relationship that will keep you turning the page. I share this quote to draw you into the story. Amber's sleep walking and her sleep walking encounter drawings take a dark turn, which heightens Bryce's astral journeys and causes a rift between Bryce, his college friend Mike and Amber.

"Falling in love and living in its blissful bubble helped her cope with her loss. She still had sad days, yet they were calmed by knowing he was there, and she could count on his loving arms to pull her through. She had a new reason for living, and he had the love of his life. Like most new couples in the first stage of romantic love, they couldn't keep their hands off of each other and made love at every opportunity. They couldn't imagine being any closer.

She still had sleepwalking issues. It happened every two or three days with or without sleep meds. She relied less on sleeping pills and was able to stay asleep without chemical assistance more often. She credited this to her loving relationship with him and feeling better about life in general. Sleeping close to him every night was comforting.

Her drawings during this time became increasingly curious, and she was using colored pencils. Every sleepwalking episode produced a new scene of Mike torturing her. The dead couple was now in color. The woman had long, dark hair and was wearing a yellow dress, and the man's hair was a lighter brown. Their clothes looked like something from the 1800s. The pictures of Mike hurting her bothered Bryce the most, and he was unsettled by the pictures of the couple before they died. She drew a picture of them on a black horse. The horse was spooked, and its front legs were high in the air. The couple was drawn with looks of terror on their faces as they were being thrown to the ground. It was disturbing because he had a fear of horseback riding, and so did she. He began to wonder if her drawings were from a past life."

If you just can't enough Paranormal Romance, this thriller should be your next read. I enjoyed this book and will turn my attention to "Dark Karma: Sword of Vengeance" which is book two in Laura Simmons Karma Series. Reviewed by Theodocia McLean (Book Marketing Global Network.com and Book Reviews Gone Global.com).

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**Excerpt Provided by Author Laura Simmons
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Chapter 6 – Darkness Falls**

Amber walked toward the jewelry store noticing that there were more people around now that it was lunchtime. She walked past a store selling beautiful, formal gowns and cocktail dresses and paused to look at a little black dress in the window, imagining how it might look on her and thinking about trying it on. She didn't linger long and made haste to the restrooms which were between the dress shop and the jewelry store. She didn't like the long, vacant corridor she had to walk through to reach them and quickened her pace . . . *Bryce would have a fit if he knew I was walking alone down a deserted hallway.* There were no entry doors for the men's or women's restrooms, just large signs indicating such and she walked into the appropriate one . . . *I don't like this. What if some strange man wanders in here? I guess it could happen even with regular doors.*

After she finished and washed her hands, she turned and walked around the corner to exit and ran directly into Mike. He looked menacing in a black leather jacket; his eyes and expression were stone cold. She gasped in surprise and terror, knowing this wasn't going to end well.

He quickly drew his handgun, shoved it into her stomach and said, "If you scream, or try to run, I'll kill you and anyone else who happens to enter. This gun has a silencer."

Amber was speechless and horrified because a woman was entering the ladies room absentmindedly talking on her phone, and Mike turned around and shot her in the forehead. The woman fell backward, landing with a thud on the tile floor. A voice on the cell phone kept repeating her name, "Dory, are you still there? Hello, Dory? Dory, can you hear me?"

Mike stomped his foot down hard on the cell phone, ending the call, "Do you want to be next?" he said hatefully to Amber and she shook her head no.

"Come with me, then," he stated and motioned for her to walk in front of him. She did as instructed, although her heart was beating wildly and it was hard to breathe. She was in shock from seeing the woman get shot and die.

"Take a left; there are doors to the outside," he said.

Amber glanced the opposite way down the corridor, and there was no one else in sight . . . *I hope the security cameras catch this . . .* she thought while trying to remain calm. They went out the exit doors to a parking lot, and Mike placed his arm tightly around her shoulders to make it look like they were a loving couple. *I have to find a way to get free. I know he's going to do awful things to me.* They walked a short distance to a Jeep Grand Cherokee, and he used his remote to unlock the doors.

"Get in!" he demanded.

She opened the door and slid into the passenger seat thinking she would make a run for it when he walked around to the driver's side and hide behind the vehicles in the parking lot while he went crazy shooting his gun. She didn't get the chance to do that because as soon as she sat down, he zapped her with a stun gun and she was temporarily paralyzed. He got in and handcuffed her, started his car and sped through the parking

lot in a hurry to get on the road with his coveted prize. Before exiting onto the highway, he took her purse and threw it out the window. It landed in a gully.

Jenny enjoyed running into Theresa but her stomach was growling, and she needed an excuse to end the lengthy conversation and fetch Amber. Thankfully, Theresa received a phone call she had to take, and they parted promising to get together soon. Jenny walked to the jewelry store, and Amber was nowhere to be found. She asked the sales staff if they had seen a woman who looked like her, only shorter, and they said they hadn't. She walked out of the jewelry store and thought she'd check the restroom next . . . *Maybe she didn't go inside the jewelry store, or the salespeople weren't paying attention when she was looking at rings. I better check the restroom . . .* she thought.

As she walked the long corridor to the restrooms, she saw police officers and mall security at the restroom entrance. The area was cordoned off with yellow tape. She felt a sudden wave of panic and knew that something bad had happened to her sister.

"What happened here?" she asked one of the mall security officers.

"A woman was killed in the ladies room. She was shot in the head," he replied.

"Was she a petite blond with long hair?" Jenny asked wide-eyed with horror, thinking it might be Amber.

"No. The woman was older with short, gray hair," he replied.

"That's terrible," she remarked fighting back tears. "I'm looking for my sister and thought she might be in the ladies room."

"No Ma'am. The woman over there in the green jacket, talking to the police, discovered her lying dead on the ladies room floor with a smashed cell phone. There was no one else in the restroom when she found the body. Unfortunately, we didn't get anything on video because the camera in this section began malfunctioning last night. The repairer will be here within the hour," he lamented.

Jenny felt like she was going to be sick and quickly turned and walked away while dialing Amber's phone number . . . *Please pick up!* She left a message on Amber's voice mail and then sent her a text, "WHERE ARE YOU? TELL ME NOW!" She looked in all the stores close to the jewelry store, asking clerks and people shopping if they had seen her sister . . . *I know that dead woman and Amber's disappearance are related. But who would take her and why?!!* She was panicked and dialed Amber's number again, only to be greeted by her friendly voice mail. Her heart dropped down into her stomach; she had to call Bryce.

Bryce finished his morning meetings and thought he'd walk down the street and grab some lunch. His phone rang, and he saw it was Jenny.

"Hey, Jen, what's happening?" he asked wondering why she called instead of Amber.

"Have you heard from Amber in the last twenty or thirty minutes?" she asked in a breathy voice.

"No. She texted me when you arrived at the mall, and that's it. Is something wrong?" he asked alarmed at her tone of voice.

"*She disappeared!!*" Jenny shrieked and continued with a great deal of angst, "I ran into an old friend, and we got to talking, and Amber said she was going to the ladies room and then to the jewelry store and for me to come and get her when we were done catching up. I went to the jewelry store, and she wasn't there, the clerks said they hadn't seen anyone who fit her description. When I went to check the restroom, the cops had it roped off and said a woman was shot and killed in there! I was terrified it was Amber, but the mall guard said

it was an older woman with gray hair. And to make things worse, the security camera in that section of the mall isn't working. She's not answering my calls or texts, and I can't find her. I don't know what to do!"

"*He's coming to get me; we won't be able to stop him.*" Amber's words ran through his head, and he knew exactly what had happened. "He's taken her," Bryce stated immediately thinking of how he was going to find and rescue her.

"Who is he?" Jenny asked.

"Mike Collins, he's been stalking her," he replied with disgust.

"WHAT? Why didn't you tell me?! How do you know that?" Jenny exclaimed angrily.

"It's a long story and stranger than fiction, but I know for a fact he's been stalking her for a long time," he replied. "He's got pictures of her plastered on a large corkboard in his basement and a secret home down in Georgia."

"How do you know this?"

"I saw it during an out of body experience. I can astral travel and started investigating him because Amber was drawing pictures of him torturing her whenever she sleepwalked," he said taking a deep breath, trying to keep it together.

"If I had known that, I would never let her out of my sight! Someone should have told me!" Jenny was crying, and Bryce wanted to punch a hole in the wall. It never occurred to him or Amber to tell her, and now he wished they had.

"I'm so sorry, Jenny, but I'm going to get her. I know where he's taking her. I'm leaving right now to head home and pack my bags and get my gun," he said while leaving his office. "I think you should keep searching the mall, and we both should keep calling her. If you don't find her within an hour, stop by the nearest police station and file a missing person's report. Let's call each other if we make contact with her."

"Okay, bye," she said feeling helpless, angry, and scared. She continued her frantic search through the mall, never finding her sister.

Bryce decided to call American Steak and find out if Mike was there. He had a sinking feeling he wasn't.

"Good afternoon, American Steak," a friendly female voice answered.

"Hi, is Mike Collins working today?" Bryce asked.

"No. He quit last week," she replied.

"Okay, thank you," he said . . . *I better call Luke and tell him what's going on.*

The stun gun's effect on her lasted longer than Mike expected. An hour and a half later she was starting to make groaning noises and moving her legs even though it hurt like hell to do so. Her entire body ached; it even hurt to cry as tears rolled down her face. They were out of the northern Virginia area and heading south. He pulled off the interstate into a large shopping complex and parked in a vacant area. He calmly prepared the shot of lorazepam which he liked to call 'benzo' since it was from the class of medicines known as benzodiazepines. He leaned across the seat and pushed up her sleeve, happy she was wearing a thin hoodie and a short-sleeved shirt.

"Why are you doing this to me?" she said weakly. "If you're trying to win my affection this isn't the way to do it," . . . *Geez, it hurts to talk.*

"This will relax you and help dull the pain," he stated coolly, sticking the needle in her arm. "We have a long drive ahead of us."

"I have to pee," she said . . . *His eyes look so cold.*

"There's a Burger Hut across the street. We'll drive over there, and I'll wait for you outside the restroom door," he said with annoyance.

I hate you . . . she thought . . . If I get the chance to run, and I'm not too drugged, I'm going to go for it. He's not going to kill me right away; he'll want to rape me first. I'm going to look for ways to escape before that happens.

He got back into the driver's seat and headed to the restaurant. It was a typical fast food joint with single, one-person restrooms for men and women. He knew he would have to unlock her handcuffs, yet he wasn't worried. In her weakened physical state and the shot of benzo, she would most likely fall if she tried to run. He helped her out of the Jeep and put his arm around her to help her walk, hoping they looked like a couple to strangers in the restaurant. She was already getting drowsy. He waited outside the ladies room while she took care of business. She was fighting to stay upright and knew she would collapse if she tried to run. When she was finished, she opened the door and fell to the floor.

"Honey, I told you not to drink so much. Come on, let's get you home," he said hoping to deter suspicion from onlookers as he helped her up. They walked out to his Jeep, and he put her in the passenger seat. When he got into the driver's side, she was unconscious . . . *I'll keep her drugged, that way she won't fight me. She'll get used to it and after a short period of time, she'll fall in love with me. This one will be a piece of cake. Things work out when you find the right person.*

Bryce arrived home and started packing his suitcase and one for Amber too. He was going to leave as soon he got everything together. He made arrangements for his assistant director, Ricky Wong, to take charge until he returned. He kept checking his phone, hoping in vain that she would contact him and hadn't been abducted. He heard the doorbell ring and saw it was Luke. He ran down the stairs and opened the door for him.

"Do you want to take my shotgun?" Luke asked stepping inside and handing him the weapon. "You should take an ax too."

"Thanks, but I'll pass on the shotgun. I'm taking my handgun. It's more compact. Although, my preferred method is breaking his neck," he replied.

"Are you absolutely positive he's abducted her?" he asked wanting to make sure Bryce wasn't acting too hastily and running down to Georgia for nothing.

"Yes. I haven't heard from her since 9:30 this morning. Jenny's searched the mall and can't find her, and Amber hasn't called either of us back. Mike saw a chance and took her," he responded with contempt.

"What if some other nut took her?" he asked. "What if you go racing down to Georgia, and Mike turns up here?"

"That's a possibility, but I seriously doubt it. If he turns up here, let me know, and I'll turn around. I've been calling him, and he doesn't answer. I called the restaurant, and they said he quit last week. I stopped at his house, and his convertible is parked in the garage, and no one answered when I rang the doorbell. I wouldn't put it past him to use a different vehicle. He'd be a fool to use his convertible. He's bound to know that I've notified the police, he's going to use every trick in the book to vanish undetected," he stated.

Their conversation was interrupted when the doorbell rang.

"It's Jenny," Luke said and opened the door.

"I wanted to stop by before you left. I still haven't heard from her, and I searched the entire mall. From the look of things, I see you haven't heard from her either," Jenny said and walked inside. "These are the things she bought this morning," she said setting the shopping bags down on the floor.

Bryce opened the suitcase he packed for Amber and placed the new clothes inside saying, "I know she'll be happy to wear these on the trip home."

"Be careful. I'm just a phone call away if you need anything. Give me the address and I'll see what I can do," Luke offered as Bryce forwarded Mike's address to his phone.

“You need to stop and rest at points along the way. Use your astral ability to locate her and make sure you’re going in the right direction. He might have another safe house somewhere else,” Luke cautioned. “If he does, send me that address.”

“Good idea. I’ll do that. I think I’m ready to go,” he said.

Jenny hugged him tight and said, “I can’t bear to lose both of you. You two MUST come back in one piece!” Her eyes were red from crying, and the tears started falling again.

“That’s the plan,” he said gently releasing her and kissing her cheek.

“Stay safe, bro,” Luke said, and the brothers hugged.

“I will, and I’ll be in touch,” he replied as the three of them walked out of the house, and Bryce got into his H3 and backed out of the driveway. He waved as he drove away.

Luke put his arm around Jenny’s shoulders and said, “Hang in there. If anyone can track down Mike and rescue Amber, it’s Bryce.”

“I sure hope so,” she replied softly. “I better get home and tell my family the bad news. I feel like this is my fault. If I hadn’t gotten into a long conversation with Theresa Jones, Amber wouldn’t have wandered off and been kidnapped!”

“Jenny . . . you didn’t know Mike was stalking her, and we should have told you. You are NOT at fault here,” he stated.

“I hope and pray they come back,” she said with a sigh. “I’m heading home. Please call and keep me updated on his progress.”

“Definitely. I’ll talk to you soon,” he said and hugged her.

When Luke got into his car to drive home, he still had doubts as to whether Mike had really abducted her. He was concerned that someone else might have taken her and Bryce was going in the wrong direction. He tried thinking of ways he could help and thought of a special friend he hadn’t seen in almost a year . . . *Nina*.

Seven hours had passed since Mike shot her up with benzo, and they were a little over half-way to his hideout. As the effects started wearing off, she had a vivid dream . . .

. . . She is running through the woods, terrified because Mike is chasing her. She calls out frantically for Bryce over and over, trying to outrun her pursuer, “BRYCE, WHERE ARE YOU? HELP ME! HE’S GOT ME. PLEASE HELP ME!” She hears his voice echoing through the woods, “Amber, baby, I’m on my way to get you. Hang in there; I WILL find you”. . .

A sudden back-handed smack in the face jolted her awake. “SHUT UP!” Mike yelled. “Do you know that you talk in your sleep? Bryce isn’t coming to rescue you. He will never find you. Get that through your head right now.”

He’s surrounded by black, is that his aura?! That’s why I felt a dark heaviness around him and from the pictures I drew . . . the drugs are making me see things. Don’t backtalk, don’t let him know that Bryce knows where to find me . . . I have to survive this; I don’t want him to kill me . . . she thought and looked down at her hands. He had put the handcuffs back on . . . *If I weren’t afraid of dying in a car crash or worse, I would attempt to hit him right now. I can do more with my arms and hands in front of me . . .* “I have to pee again,” she stated choking back the tears and still feeling the sting from his slap.

“There’s a rest stop ten miles ahead. We’ll stop there. It’s time for another shot of benzo. If you try to put up a fight, I’ll make sure you hurt the rest of the way, badly,” he said coldly.

“Why are you doing this? Why me? Do you really think that you can abduct a woman and make her fall in love with you?” she asked trying to stay calm and thinking of Bryce’s voice from her dream . . . *I wonder if that was really him communicating with me. I want to believe it was.* Mike didn’t respond to her question and kept his eyes on the road. He wasn’t used to women behaving so calmly. Then again, he was handling her differently than the others and hoping for better results.

Ten miles seemed like forever to her, and they finally arrived at the rest area. She debated different scenarios of getting away from him and screaming for help. Her legs weren’t shackled, and her mouth wasn’t duct taped, yet. He seemed to read her mind and threatened her as he pulled into a parking space close to the restrooms. He drew a handgun from a side compartment in the door, shoving it into her stomach and said, “If you try ANYTHING, including screaming for help, I will gun down everyone I see, and innocent people will pay for your selfish behavior. I’ll make sure you’re killed along with the rest of them,” he threatened with the coldest look in his eyes she had ever seen.

She was getting angry and even though he had a gun shoved into her stomach she responded with disdain, “I don’t want anyone killed because of me, except for you!”

He just laughed and pushed the gun deeper into her stomach, making her wince in pain. “Keep talking like that and I’ll kill you before we get there,” he said. She decided to cooperate and try to escape at a later time. She didn’t think he would kill her this soon, but she was going to play it safe. He shot her up with more benzo and helped her walk to the restroom while he stood outside and waited. In her drugged state she looked longingly at the small windows in the restroom and briefly contemplated how she might escape through them, knowing that she would never make it. When she was finished, she stumbled out the door and he caught her before she hit the ground.

“Come on, honey, let’s get you home,” he said kindly putting his arms around her to help her stay upright. *I hate you and your ugly aura . . .* she thought and passed out a few seconds after getting into the Jeep.

Bryce was driving down the highway when he heard her panicked voice, “BRYCE, WHERE ARE YOU? HELP ME! HE’S GOT ME. PLEASE HELP ME!” He was shocked and heard it again two more times before it stopped. The tiny flicker of doubt he had about whether or not he was doing the right thing was gone. He replied, hoping she could hear him, “*Amber baby, I’m on my way to get you. Hang in there; I WILL find you.*” The desperation in her voice was heart wrenching, and tears ran down his face while he flew down the highway, not caring if he got pulled over for a speeding ticket. He no longer wanted Mike to end up in jail. He wanted to be the one to put him in the ground and wished he had taken out a hit on him. He blamed himself for not doing that, knowing she would be home safe and happy with him instead of being at the mercy of a madman who would probably beat, rape, and kill her. He continued down the road, fantasizing about the many different ways he would like to torture and kill Mike. He vowed to make him pay.



About The Author: I enjoy reading books on psychic phenomena and all things metaphysical. Most of my life I've been fascinated with astral travel, dreams, the ability to see the future, and reincarnation.

I've wanted to write a book since I was a child, it was the first thing I can ever remember saying I wanted to do when I grow up. I love creating worlds in my mind and writing about them. My best days are when my characters decide to have lively conversations. They have developed a habit of giving me their best ideas and plot twists while I'm driving and can't write them down!

Little Bits of Karma and Tough Karma can be read as standalone books. For best enjoyment, Dark Karma should be read after Tough Karma. The characters carry over into the following story with the major ones becoming a supporting cast and the previous supporting cast taking front and center to tell their particular story.

Thank you for stopping by and taking the time to look at my books.

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