

LUCK OF THE DRAW
(working title)

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an original work of fiction by Larissa Dahroug

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dedicated to keepers of ancient knowledge and traditions

CHAPTER 1

More Interesting than the Living Nine Times out of Ten

Amaranth checked the clock on the wall behind her one more time. Her 2 PM was over 35 minutes late, and this was the second time. Against her better judgement she had let him off the hook the first time without any charge...she knew he had been lying to her about his excuse. It was kind of a big part of her business to know when people were being dishonest. But she regrettably had made the exception because of who Mike was rumored to be. Now she was angry. She had rearranged her entire calendar to accommodate Mike's requested date for rescheduling his appointment. One of her best clients had given up their regular time slot to suit this entitled prick...and now he was nowhere to be seen. It was a good thing Amaranth, or Amy as her friends called her, had enforced her reservation policy and required Mike give her a credit card when scheduling/rescheduling. She got up and crossed the small but comfortable room and locked the door. Then she pulled up the point of sale accounting program on her tablet, punched in the credit card number and charged the full amount of \$350. As the screen popped up "approved" someone attempted to open the door and enter the office. Amy was still for a moment. She looked over her shoulder and saw the door to the back hallway that connected to the kitchen and restrooms shared by the other offices on her floor was also bolted. She relaxed a bit and settled her focus on the front door still being lightly shaken by the knob from the outside. Now a knock came. Five or six short hard raps in quick succession.

"Hey! You in there?" a man's voice said in an annoyed fashion. "I have an appointment!"

Amy pulled up the app for the doorbell camera she had installed a few months back when packages were being stolen. It was him. It was Mike, and he had another man with him which was also not part of the agreement. When Jonas had introduced Mike and Amy at *The Whitewash* a couple weeks back she had explained her services were by appointment only, a minimum of 45 minutes, non-transferable, private and one-on-one, with a 48 hour cancelation policy. The other guy standing just behind Mike at the door shifted his weight uneasily from side to side and looked either way down the exterior hallway. It was Saturday and the only other person who was regularly in their office on her floor was Maggie down the hall. Maggie's office was sound insulated. The landlord had split the cost of the insulation after everyone complained about the sounds coming from her space. Maggie practiced a form of past life regression therapy that involved making and

mimicking guttural animal-like noises. Her clients swore by its effectiveness, but Amy was skeptical. She knew Maggie had at one time desired to be a professional singer, but had been told she was tone-deaf. Amy agreed with the assessment and had the feeling Maggie just liked making noise. All the past life stories she heard from the clients she had spoken with were versions of a similar story, and it just wasn't reasonable to Amy that every single client that came to see Maggie was once a prince or princess. Maggie insisted it was simply her karmic job to care for royals who were re-embodied in this life as commoners. Amy didn't argue with her. Lots of folks believed her line of work to be mumbo-jumbo as well...but Amy never sent any business Maggie's way, though she did sometimes refer folks to Doug Spears, the clinical psychologist in private practice at the other end of the hall.

Amy now watched as Mike's friend pushed past him and impatiently pounded on the door. She couldn't tell for sure, but it looked as if he had a holster under his jacket with a side arm. "Not today." Amy thought to herself as she quickly and as quietly as she could — stood up, put her cards, tablet, cell phone, and client/appointment book in her oversized purse, unlatched the bolt on the back door and slipped out, locking the door behind her. As she reached the stairwell at the end of interior hallway she heard her door busted down and some glass shatter. Keys in hand she ran down the stairs and burst into the back parking lot. Without fumbling she clicked the fob and unlocked the doors of her Elantra parked just a few spots from the stairwell. As she pulled around the front of the building she could see the door to her office was hanging open and the two men had busted things up inside. The glass shelves with her stones and the small Chihuly bowl given to her by a client could usually be seen sparkling through the window above her door from the front parking lot, and right now they were nowhere to be seen. Amy's heart sank. The bowl was insured, but it was totally irreplaceable. The two men were not in sight. They must have gone out the back door looking for her.

Amy pulled out of the parking lot and onto the street. As far as she knew Mike didn't know what she drove, but if he was who he was rumored to be, and today's events seemed to indicate that was the case, he'd have no problem tracking her down. The real question was what did he want with her? It's not like they had anything in common other than drinking at *The Whitewash* and Amy couldn't say she had ever even seen Mike before that night Jonas introduced them. Amy made a note to herself to not break any more of her personal rules about accepting new clients and to never trust Jonas ever again. It's not like she even really knew him. He was just the bartender...

and she had only just told him what she did for work that night. Mercury must have been retrograde. That was the only way Amy could explain why she had given in and told Jonas what she did for a living or why she had let him introduce her to anyone as a potential client. Better yet, she'd just find a new bar. *The Whitewash* had been attracting a strange group of folks lately, and the live music had taken a turn for the worse for a couple months now, and that was why she had started going there to begin with. She liked the music. Amy pulled into a gas station and parked the car in a corner space near the compressed air without turning off the engine. She pulled out her phone and pulled up the address for the nearest police station. She was starting to wonder if the whole thing with Jonas and Mike hadn't been a set-up of some sort.

Most women in Amy's line of work kept offices with lots of neon lights and signs flashing in the window. Most women in Amy's line of work also were beholden to a Big Man and paid dues to operate. Those women's work was always compromised. The Big Man would want to know who was coming and why. What were they asking and how much were they paying. Then he would want his cut. Amy wasn't interested in such an arrangement. She didn't have any signs. Her office was very professional. Her clients were private, her fees reasonable, and all by word of mouth. She also was a certified Reiki Master Teacher, so that was what was listed if anyone bothered to look her up, but she also read tarot, did energy balancing and mediumship work. Reiki was only about a quarter of her business. Most of her clients came to her either for tarot or mediumship but old houses were restless and Amy didn't mind doing house calls from time to time as well. The dead were much more interesting than the living nine times out of ten.

Normally Amy wouldn't have bothered with the police but she anticipated the insurance company was going to want a police report and that bowl was worth nearly half a million dollars. She had nearly shit her pants when she had it appraised for her policy. Mrs. Bunty had been very appreciative of Amy's help finding her lost Pomeranian. Dog people could be strange, but Amy certainly was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth and the bowl was very pretty. The police station was a little over a mile and a half away. Amy really liked her office and hoped she wasn't going to have to move to a new location, but something told her she wasn't going to be that lucky. She set up her GPS to head to the police station but decided to pull a card before backing out of the parking space. She removed the deck from the satin bag that held the cards and shuffled lightly before turning up the top card. It was *The Hanged Man*. She laughed to herself. "I guess that's what I get for not following my own rules," she thought. But then again, this could be any of the

three men: Mike, his friend, or Jonas. Jonas sure felt like a traitor to Amy at this moment. Amy replaced the cards in their satin pouch and tucked the pouch in her bag before backing out of the spot and pulling back out onto the street. The sun was shining off all the windows of the stores on the right hand side of the street as Amy headed north. The sparkle reminded her of the bowl that used to sit in her office window.

A short woman in plain clothes with dyed black shoulder length hair with stark white roots was seated behind a desk in the lobby of the police station. Other than the white roots of her hair and the condition of her hands, this woman looked no older than 30. She smiled at Amy as she approached the desk. Other than the two women, the lobby was deserted. As Amy rested her hands on the edge of the desk the woman inquired, "How can I help you?" Until this moment Amy hadn't realized just how scared she actually was by the unfolding events. Tears welled up under her lids but she held them in as she answered.

"My name is Amaranth Danielle Gonder. My keep an office a couple miles from here. It was just broken into and vandalized by two men." Amy explained.

"Oh my. That's terrible. Are they still there?"

"I have no idea. I'm here."

"Well, how do you know the office was broken into?"

"Because I was there."

"Do you know who did it?"

"Sort of. I know who one of the men is. He was a client. Or, rather, a new client."

"Um. OK. Please have a seat and I will see if an officer is available to speak to you."

"Available to speak to me? I think these men meant me harm. Is someone going to take a report?"

"Ma'am, I need to you to be patient and take a seat. I don't know if there is an officer here to speak to you."

The woman licked up a phone and dialed a number seemingly pleased with herself. Amy watched her for a moment before taking a seat as she was asked. After ten minutes or so a short male uniformed officer came around the corner with a clip board and a pen.

"Amaranth Goner?" he asked Amy.

“Um, it’s Gonder. Not Goner. Yes. I’m Amaranth. You may call me Amy.” she said as she stood up to greet the policeman. She was at least six inches taller than the man and she was only 5’8”. The officer tipped his chin up to meet her eyes.

“Amy, I’m officer Juno. Please tell me what happened.”

Amy folded her arms across her chest and rolled her head to the right as she exhaled and stared off in space a bit as she began her tale.

“Well, I had a client scheduled for today at two. I normally have a regular client on Saturdays at 1:30 and then I go home, but today was a new client. He was originally supposed to meet with me on Monday last week, but had an emergency come up so we rescheduled.” Amy stopped to give officer Juno time to make notes. “Anyway, he was over half an hour late and I have a 48 hour cancelation policy. Since this was the second time I was pretty irritated and had just run the credit card on file for the full cost of the appointment when he showed up and tried to get in the office. I had locked the door because I was getting ready to leave so he couldn’t come right in. He had another man with him. I know because I have a camera at the door and could see them. The other man pushed past my client and pounded on the door.”

Officer Juno continued to take notes and didn’t even look up at Amy as he asked, “Did they know you were in the office?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t make any sound and the blinds in the front window that is eye level is covered with mini blinds and a curtain for privacy.”

“What type of work do you do, ma’am? What was the appointment for?” Juno asked again without looking up at Amy.

“Um, well, I’m a Reiki Master Teacher, and I also read cards. This was an appointment for a card reading.”

“Reiki? What’s that?” the officer asked, now looking at Amy with a furrowed brow.

“Well, it’s kind of like acupressure...but not exactly. But it doesn’t matter. He was coming to have me read his cards. At least, that’s what he said when he made the appointment. Both times.”

“And you weren’t expecting two people for the appointment?”

“Absolutely not!” Amy answered quickly. “It’s my policy that all appointments are private one-on-one sessions. He knew this.”

“OK, ma’am. It’s OK. Take a breath.”

“I’m fine. It’s just upsetting.”

“I understand. Now what happened next?”

“Well, once they started shaking the door I gathered my things and slipped out the back.”

“What do you mean — the back?”

“My office is over in one of those two story office strip buildings off of Madeline Street. There are 16 offices in my building. Eight on the bottom floor and eight on my floor. Each one has it’s own front entrance and each one has a door in the back to an interior hallway where we have a shared kitchen and restrooms and a stairwell down to a small parking lot for the renters. There is another bigger parking lot in the front for clients.”

“I see. So they didn’t know about the back door then?”

“I guess not.” Amy answered.

“How do you know they broke in?”

“Because I heard it as I was going down the stairs to my car and I could see as I pulled around front and out of the parking lot to come here.”

“Oh. I see. OK. Well, I think I’d like to go over there and check it out. What is the client’s name?”

“Mike. Michael Musgraves.”

The officer stopped and looked at Amy intently for a second before he spoke.

“Mike Musgraves? The loan shark?”

“I have no idea what he does for a living. I only recently was introduced to him.”

“You better not be lying about this, Amy.”

Amy was offended.

“You think I have nothing better to do with my time than make false accusations about gangsters to the police? You think that would be wise in my line of work?”

“I’m just saying. But since you brought it up, whose house do you report to?”

Amy’s nostrils flared, unable to hide her irritation at the assumptions about her and her work.

“To myself and my God. I’m not part of any criminal stable.”

“Of course not, ma’am.” Officer Juno said with a tinge of sarcasm not lost on Amy. “If you give me the address we can head over there right now.”

“And what if they are still there?” Amy asked.

“Then I’ll arrest them. You said there’s a camera right?”

“Yes. There’s a camera.”

“Well, then, whether they are there or not you’ll be able to show me who did what.”

Amy sighed and gave the officer the address then they both headed to the parking lot.

As she pulled back into the parking lot in front of her office Amy saw officer Juno got there first, and a small crowd had gathered in front of her office door. Amy could see Maggie standing with her feet wide spread and her fists on her hips stringing her neck to look into Amy's space. Officer Juno was walking up the stairs. Amy parked her car next to the police cruiser and went to grab her bag from the passenger side seat. Her cards slid out of the purse and onto the seat. The satin pouch opened and four cards slid out of the deck and onto the seat: five of cups, seven of swords, The Empress, and The Fool. "No shit!" Amy exclaimed out loud. "I don't need you to tell me that!" she told the cards as she put them back in their pouch and stuffed the pouch in her purse.

As Amy approached the small gathering of people in front of her office officer Juno was taking everyone's name and trying to herd everyone away from the door. Amy could see one of the hinges had been pulled out of the door entirely and everything was on the floor, the whole office having been tossed, but why? Whoever Mike Musgraves was or wasn't, Amy had nothing to do with him before this unfortunate string of events and she certainly had never seen the other man who had been with Mike. Amy never gambled, not even pretzel sticks and peanuts with her dad and brothers playing Rummy growing up. Gambling was a fool's game and Amy was no body's fool. Maggie came running in Amy's direction. "Oh Amy! I'm so glad you're alright. Did you see your office?"

Amy just stared at Maggie who abruptly shut up and backed away from her. The other people gathered around were two of Maggie's clients and Tubbs, the building maintenance man. Amy didn't recognize Tubbs at first because he didn't usually work on Saturdays and wasn't wearing his coveralls. Instead he was wearing dark blue creased jeans with a button down oxford and cardigan and loafers. Officer Juno said something to Maggie who thanked him and nodded and headed back to her office with her two clients while Tubbs stayed to talk with Amy and officer Juno. Officer Juno looked at Amy with a hard stare.

"And you have no idea what they were looking for?" he questioned her as if he didn't believe her at all. Amy was shocked.

"No idea at all! I told you. I had only recently been introduced to Mr. Musgraves and this would have been his first appointment."

"And probably his last." Tubbs quipped looking at all the damage in the space.

Amy surveyed the room. All her books were knocked off the shelves. The ficus was toppled and dirt was all over the floor. The Bose radio was on the floor as were all her stones and her desk lamp. The Chihuly bowl, however, was sitting, unbroken, in the center of her table. She approached the bowl and picked it up turning it over in her hands.

"I can't believe it!" she said.

"Believe what?" officer Juno asked.

"That this isn't broken."

"Well, maybe they just didn't get to pushing it on the floor." Juno replied. Tubbs laughed. He knew about the bowl because he had helped Amy install the shelf in the window above the door where it usually sat.

"What's so funny?" Juno said to Tubbs who instantly clammed up.

"Oh, he knows what the bowl is and that it doesn't sit on this table."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. This so happens to be a Chihuly original and sits on that shelf up there above the door." Amy pointed to the now broken glass shelf in the half round window.

"Put that down immediately! It might have useable prints. Excuse me." Officer Juno stepped out of the office leaving Amy and Tubbs staring at each other over the ridiculously expensive glass bowl.

"We got most of it on tape." Tubbs told Amy.

"Huh? What do you mean? I've got a camera on my door out there but not in here."

"Yeah. I know. Mr. Shuppe had me install cameras on either end of the interior hallway just last week. He was watching when they were here. He's the one who called me and asked me to come check things out."

"What?! I wasn't told that. That's not in the lease."

"Yeah. I know. But now he's going to tell everyone about them. I'm supposed to deliver a letter on Monday morning to all the units in the building." Tubbs replied in a matter of fact manner. Amy was feeling violated on many levels.

"Why the cameras? And why weren't we told beforehand?"

Tubbs sighed and shrugged.

"I dunno. Doug had a weirdo last month giving him death threats. He left some dead animals in the back hallway in front of Doug's door but we didn't have any hard proof, so Shuppe told me to put in the cameras. I'm surprised you didn't notice them already. It's not like they're hidden."

"Oh. Well, I guess that's OK." Amy remembered seeing the dead rats in front of Doug's door, but thought maybe a cat had brought them in. Sometimes Doug brought his cat, Stewart, into the office

if he was going to be working late on paperwork. Doug was one of the few specialists Amy knew who still submitted to insurance on behalf of his clients. Stewart was known to patrol the back hall and kitchen in search of treats. He really was an agreeable animal. Amy had no idea about Doug's goofy client. Doug was very professional and never talked about his clients to others, unlike Maggie.

"Is Doug OK?"

"Doug? Oh my God, yeah. He caught the guy trying to pick the front lock a few days ago and the goof ball was arrested. Doug bought one of the cameras for the hallway back there."

Officer Juno entered the space tucking his phone in his pocket.

"Well, Amy, is there anything missing?"

Amy was taken off guard. She hadn't even thought to look.

"Um, I don't know. Let me look. The only thing really worth taking would have been that bowl." She pointed to the Chihuly piece now sitting back on the table where the intruders left it but started to take a closer inventory of the items now strewn about the room.

"No. Everything looks like it's here, but I'm definitely going to do a serious clearing. The energy in here is just terrible."

"Yeah. Your fung-shooey must be all mess up." officer Juno chided in an insulting tone.

"Look, no one said you need to believe in what I do for work, but I'm a professional and people do pay me for my services. The rent in this place isn't free. Far from it." This was no lie. Amy's office had parking and was situated just off the Main Street strip near the train station. The rent of her office was three times per square foot what her apartment was just five miles away. Juno rolled his eyes and Tubbs disappeared into the back hallway then reappeared with a tool box and started to rehang and secure the front door while Amy and officer Juno continued to talk.

"Look Mrs. Gonder..."

"Miss, not Mrs."

"Whatever. Miss Gonder, you never had any interaction with Mr. Musgraves before today?"

"Only when we met and scheduling and rescheduling his appointment."

"And where did you meet Mr. Musgraves?"

"At The Whitewash."

"The Whitewash! Do you work there too, I suppose?"

Now Amy was ready to lose her patience with this cop.

“Hardly. I’ve been going there a couple times a week for the past five years. Tuesday and Friday nights. I like the live music and they have decent wine and appetizers.”

“I see. And do you meet clients there frequently?”

“Never! This was the first time. I don’t even tell people what I do for work.”

“Well how did Mr. Musgraves find out?”

Amy felt like she was being accused of something.

“Jonas, the bartender, had been asking me for the past few months about what I did for work. I wouldn’t tell him, because you have no idea how people can be about my line of work and I didn’t feel like being hassled by drunks and strangers. But a few weeks ago I told Jonas that if the band didn’t show up I’d tell him what I did for work. The band always shows up and I just wanted him to leave me alone. But guess what? The band didn’t show up and so I had to tell him what I did. Next thing I know he’s calling some guy over to the bar and telling him that I was some big time madame and wanted to read his cards for him. It was this guy, Mike Musgraves. I never said any such thing, wanted no such thing. But I was backed into a corner. So when he asked to make an appointment I said OK.”

Tubbs finished hanging the door and secured the lock. Amy and Juno watched as he dug around in his back pocket for something and produced a bent business card.

“I’m Leon Tubbs. I live a couple blocks away. I do the maintenance for all of Ed Shuppe’s buildings in town. If you have any more questions for me you can reach me at the number on that card.”

Tubbs extended his hand holding the card to officer Juno who took it and handed a business card to both Amy and Leon at the same time. Amy never knew Tubbs’ first name and Leon didn’t seem to fit. It sounded like a black name to her and Tubbs was anything but black.

“Thank you, Mr. Tubbs. And if you have anything else to add or anything else happens in the next couple days please don’t hesitate to call me”

Tubbs nodded taking the card and tucking it in the breast pocket of his shirt. “Will do. Thanks. Now I’m going home. Saturday’s my day off.” And Tubbs lumbered off with his tool box. Juno turned back to Amy.

“Do you keep notes on your clients, Amy?”

“Other than contact info and credit card information for holding appointments, no. I’m not a medical practitioner and I’ve never seen any reason to track what cards come up for people. Most folks only come see me a few times at most and my regulars tend to take their own notes.”

"If you say so. I will want a list of everyone you have seen for the past week and there is a team on their way to process the space for fingerprints. Maybe we can figure out who Mr. Musgraves' friend is. Are you able to email me the footage from your camera?"

"Yes. I think I can do that."

"Then please do that. In the mean time, why don't you go get a bite to eat. By the time you're done we will probably be finished over here."

Amy wasn't feeling particularly hungry. "I think I'll just wait in my car if you don't mind."

"Suit yourself." Juno told her.