

LUCK OF THE DRAW
(working title)

Fall 2020 Novella
an original work of fiction by Larissa Dahroug

all rights reserved Larissa Dahroug 2020
(925)320-1000
thekittypantsranch@gmail.com

dedicated to those with the wisdom to keep ancient knowledge and traditions

CHAPTER 10

Someone Said They'd Been Gyped

Juno lifted the razor to his up-stretched throat and dragged it along the skin to the side of his adams apple. He tapped the razor on the edge of the sink sending the gathered shaving foam and tiny hairs into the porcelain bowl with a splat, then rinsed the blade under a stream of hot water and repeated the action methodically until his face and throat were smooth and shadow free. Then he ran the hottest water over a washcloth and wrung it out allowing his hands to blush a bright red against the heat. Blotting shaving foam residue from his cheeks, chin and neck he appraised his reflection in the mirror. The Chief had asked him if he needed to take a little time for R&R the day before when he dropped his car off for the night. Juno scrutinized his face now looking for signs of fatigue the Chief might have been seeing. He didn't see any. His complexion was bright. His eyes were sharp and alert. He wasn't sure what the problem was or why the Chief was concerned. His paperwork was all up to date. His weapons were all clean and accounted for. He was hoping to finally get a permanent partner assignment soon. That was the only thing that was really bothering him about work...that and the fact that no one internally seemed to be interested in returning his calls recently. He had called Sunnyvale with some questions about an open investigation they currently had against this Mike Musgraves because there were some striking similarities. He wanted to see the toxicology report from the other woman who had been similarly assaulted. He had been especially interested to find out more once he learned the victim in the Sunnyvale case also read tarot, had her pubic hair removed, and was around the same age as Amaranth. But so far, no response was forth coming and now the off-hand comment from the Chief wasn't sitting right with him. It almost felt like someone on the force was protecting this Musgraves fella. Juno had heard of other corruption issues in other precincts, but not in Mountain View. He knew he was technically crossing a line taking Amaranth to her apartment today to pick up her car. He knew he really should have Sunnyvale take care of it since she lived in Sunnyvale. But this was his case, damn it. It started in Mountain View and Sunnyvale didn't seem interested in doing a damn thing to help. So, he would do what he thought was right. Amaranth, of course, had no idea that any of this was an issue.

Amaranth. Juno liked saying her name to himself. She asked him to call her Amy, so to her face he did. But in his mind he always called her Amaranth. After their first meeting he had looked up the name, because he had never heard of it before. Upon learning what amaranth was he was a

little confused. It seemed a strange thing to name a child. Would someone ever name their child Wheat or Sorghum or stranger yet, Corn? But somehow the unusual name suited Amy in Juno's mind...far more, at least, than the shortened version, Amy, did. Juno opened the medicine cabinet and found the bottle of aftershave his mother sent him in his stocking last Christmas and opened it for the first time. He brought the open mouth of the bottle up to his nose and sniffed. It smelled of cedar and tobacco and something lightly floral he couldn't quite place. It seemed pleasant enough, not too strong. He dumped a splash into his palm, rubbed his hands together then slapped the stuff on his neck and cheeks. A little spot of blood was rising in a follicle just below his jaw line on the right. He tore a corner off a tissue and stuck it on the spot while he ran water into the sink to rinse the spent shave foam down the drain, then wiped the bowl clean with the wash cloth.

On his way out of the bathroom he picked up his kevlar vest from a chair next to his bed and hoisted it on. Then he opened his closet and pulled a freshly laundered and starched shirt from the rack and secured it over the vest tucking everything neatly into his trousers. He secured his belt and holster then attached his badge and body camera. Last he picked up his duffle bag with his gym clothes, jeans and polo shirt for after work and headed for his front door. Just before walking out the door he stopped to sprinkle a pinch of flake food into his fish tank. The bobble-eyed gold fish swam in excited circles grabbing the brightly colored flakes. Juno sighed as he locked the door behind him. Hopefully the coffee in the staff room wouldn't be burned when he got there and there would be a cherry danish left. Simms usually put one aside for him if he got there first, but Juno didn't count on Simms. No one did.

Normally Juno wore street clothes into work and dressed in the locker room but he shaved this morning, so he suited up at home. Plus, he wasn't feeling as comfortable in the locker room these days. One of the new hires was gay and had accused another guy of sexual harassment when he said something to him about walking around the locker room naked. Juno just wasn't interested in the drama. He wasn't there when the actual incident happened, and he could believe either side's story. He knew Johnson had a habit of making off-color comments to everyone, including Juno. Juno also knew Guzman was overly sensitive and he just wasn't interested in taking sides. So, he had started to suit up at home more often and had even joined a gym in San Jose to avoid the in-house facility. He still kept stuff in his locker sometimes

though. And he kept all his work files locked in his desk. He never brought things like that home. It wasn't worth it for his own sanity.

As Juno pulled the key out of his Wrangler he caught sight of himself in the rearview mirror. The piece of tissue was still stuck to his jaw. Juno picked the tab of paper from his face and rolled it between his fingers letting it fall to the floor. He locked his doors and trudged into his desk, tucking the duffle bag down by his feet. It was still dark outside as a number of officers trudged in, like him, for the shift change. Guys and gals coming off the night shift were either leaving for home or ducking into the locker room to wash up and change before leaving. Everyone had their own lives and schedules and Juno didn't bother to keep track. He had become even more secluded in his personal practices since picking up the Amaranth Gonder case and the strange way no one seemed to want to answer any of his questions. He was starting to feel like he was being watched. A number of times he thought he had caught co-workers giving him what felt like judgmental sideways stares. But he was probably just imagining things. Or was he? He couldn't be sure.

As Juno opened his laptop to sign in and check his email a small envelope slipped out. His name was printed in even block letters on the front and it was sealed tightly from corner to corner. Juno looked from side to side to see if anyone had seen what had just happened. No one appeared to be paying him any attention. Careful to not expose the envelope to his body cam, Juno folded it in half and stuffed it in his front right pants pocket before sitting down. He'd have a look at the envelope in the bathroom or some other private place. Someone had obviously gone to great lengths to conceal passing whatever the envelope contained on to him.

It was a quarter to six when Juno opened his email. Thankfully, the background inquiry he had submitted on Amaranth had come back. He opened the file. No arrests. No tickets. No marriages. No children. No nothing. She was squeaky. Five years ago she had been entered into LiveScan when she taught a meditation class for high school age kids for the City of Sunnyvale's Community Center. No complaints. No violations. She had an older brother, Dale Herman Gonder, Marine Lieutenant Colonel, currently serving and stationed in Jordan. Wow. He hadn't been expecting that. Her father, Gary Dean Gonder, Esq. was partner in a small firm, Gonder & Ferris, specializing in patent law in Hoboken, New Jersey. Her mother, Elizabeth Shareen (Farouq) Gonder was a retired show dog groomer and amateur stone cutter. Was dog

grooming something you could “retire” from, Juno wondered to himself. Gary had a couple recent tickets for speeding and Elizabeth had an outstanding parking ticket, but other than that, there was nothing strange. All of Amaranth’s other family seemingly lived in other Countries or were non-existent. The only other known associates listed in the file were: Denis Devon Ellington, aka DeeDee, aka Klinger, aka Poop-Shooter-Ellington, retired Air Force Colonel, Kevin Turley, a middle class life insurance salesman in Rochester, New York, and Duane Tibman, deceased, farm worker/drifter. Amy had a couple years of community college in New Jersey years ago, but otherwise had been a Reiki Master/Teacher and Tarot Reader for almost two decades. She’d lived in the same apartment for the past fifteen years. Before her current office she had offered her services through the East/West Book Store on Castro in Mountain View, and she had taught a number of workshops across the US and Canada. Nothing seemed particularly sinister or out of line. No red flags other than she seemed to be a bit of a loner. Juno wanted to get his hands on that client book. He could understand Amaranth not wanting to bring her work into her personal life. He felt quite the same, but he still thought it a bit strange that she didn’t have any information on her clients in her possession. Then again, he had never actually met a *real* Tarot reader. His mother had always warned him against “inviting the devil” into his life with such things. He always thought his mother was a bit extreme in her views, but he also had never been interested in tempting evil, even if it were a farce. While he saw no real harm in Amaranth or the work she did, he also had never been interested in knowing the future, so to speak. He also knew a lot of the women in her line of work were, in fact, in bed with the underground. But the Gypsies he had encountered in a couple cases had office space very different from Amaranth’s set up and had skipped town shortly after he had crossed paths with them. Then it occurred to him...was Amaranth a Gypsy? She didn’t look like the women he had encountered in the pick-pocket ring a couple years back...or the boys he picked up for stripping copper from houses being renovated last fall. He didn’t know what to think. What was a Gypsy anyway? Wasn’t it just a label, like Metalhead, or Drifter, or Thief, or Cop for that matter? He wasn’t sure. But he sure knew what it meant when someone said they’d been “Gyped”.

Juno stared at the photo of Amaranth from her LiveScan on file. Her hair was a good ten inches longer now than it had been then, and she was twenty pounds or so heavier, but that wasn’t so strange for a woman her age. What did seem a little strange though were her eyes. In the photo her eyes seemed so much more bright and youthful. Maybe the attack had stolen the sparkle and smile from her eyes, but maybe it had been something else. Kevin Turley had a couple

complaints for suspected domestic violence in the past twelve months. He made a note to ask Amaranth about Mr. Turley. Mr. Tibman had died in a farm equipment malfunction more than a decade ago. Juno doubted he would have had anything to do with the current issue. But, Mr. Turley may be a different case. Jealous lovers, even ex-lovers, could pull some horrible antics when push came to shove. He remembered when he was in high school and his much older than him sister, Elaine, had a jealous boyfriend who paid some kid to cut her brake lines. Luckily there had also been a problem with the vehicle's ignition unrelated to the sabotage and the car refused to turn over when Elaine had tried to start it and had it towed. They found the cut brake lines when the car was taken to the garage for maintenance. Chuck had been arrested after the kid snitched on him and the whole incident was in large part what had propelled him into a career in law enforcement. Now Elaine was married with five kids out near Mount Shasta. Juno joined them for holidays, but last Christmas had been hard. He felt a sharp pang of loneliness when his brother in law Shane had given Elaine a kiss after she sat the standing rib roast on the table for dinner. He wasn't attracted to his sister, but he did find himself envying the fact that Shane had a strong and loving partner to share his life. Juno was facing down forty in a couple years and was tired of the bar scene and had no idea how or where else to meet women. As soon as he told women he was a cop they either became super clingy and wanted him to look up every guy they had ever swapped spit with, or they ran in the opposite direction. His mother still lived back in Missouri and was always telling him to go back to church. He'd be sure to find a nice girl there. Juno hadn't been to church in years and wasn't interested. The last time had been for his father's funeral, and the time before that had been for his grandfather's funeral. He honestly wasn't sure if he actually believed in a God and thought it would be false advertising and a bit disingenuous for him to attend services just to meet women, particularly women from whom he had such a different perspective. He didn't have the heart to tell his mother the truth of his feelings. Jesus was everything to his mother, especially since his father passed away.

Juno clicked on the print icon to print out the file on Amaranth as well as a couple others for the other two cases he was currently working. He was hoping to make Detective at his next performance review. The printer was located in the staff room next to the coffee cart and he was way over due for his dose of caffeine. Clipboard with pen in hand he headed toward the staff room taking care to make sure his duffle bag was entirely concealed beneath his desk so no one would trip over it. The pages were printing as he entered the staff room. The smell of coffee filled his nose and the box of danish sat with the tape seal still apparently untouched. Juno

smiled and thought it might turn out to be his lucky day. He poured himself a steaming cup of black coffee that smelled fresh and just right and plucked the only cherry danish from the box. Then he scooped the papers from the printer and headed back to his desk. He sipped the coffee and broke off pieces of danish as he continued to review his case files and answer email. As he stuffed the last piece of danish in his mouth he glanced at his watch and saw it was a little after nine. He drank the last sip of coffee and decided it was time to visit the restroom. He didn't really need to go, but he wanted to try before hitting the streets for the day and he wanted to have a look at what was in that envelope before going to pick up Amaranth from the Tubbs' home. He pat his pocket to make sure the envelope was still there then he removed his body cam and headed for the single occupancy bathroom on the next floor.

On his way to the restroom, Juno had to pass the Chief's office. The door was open and he could hear the Chief talking gregariously with another officer as he approached. As he passed the door, the Chief called out to him.

"Juno! Hey, make sure you check in with me before the end of your shift today, OK?"

Juno stopped and turned around to face the Chief. He didn't recognize the uniformed officer in the office with him.

"Sure. Let me know if there is a time that works best for you, otherwise I will just make sure I come by to look for you when I turn the car in later."

"That should be fine, Juno. Oh, and Juno."

"What's that, Sir?"

"Don't waste too much of your time on that Gonder case. The Smythe case is the one that really needs your attention."

"OK, Sir. Thank you."

Juno turned and walked quickly to the restroom door that was slightly ajar five yards or so down from the Chief's office and slipped inside. The light came on as the door closed. Juno locked the door and pulled the envelope from his pocket. Why on Earth did the Chief want him to focus on the Smythe case? Since when were a few stolen bikes more important than an attempted homicide and brutal sexual assault? The envelope was difficult to open. It seemed to have been glued shut with something more than just the regular gum of the envelope. He ended up tearing a corner off of the enclosed paper to free the contents from the plain paper pouch. It was a piece of eight and a half by eleven standard printer paper folded into quarters. Juno sat the torn envelope on the edge of the sink as he unfolded the paper. There were two photos on the

paper, one above the other, and to the right of the photos was some print. The first image was of Mike Musgraves. Next to it was some background info including his last known address. Below it was a photo of another man who looked a whole lot like Mike Musgraves just with a different hair cut and wearing an Alameda County Sheriff's Uniform. It said his name was Steve Musgraves and gave some info on him. Bottom line was Mike Musgraves had a slightly older brother, Steve, who was a cop. Well, that explained a few things, but now Juno was angry. He wasn't willing to let this guy get away with what he did to Amaranth just because his big brother was a cop. He had heard how they did things in Alameda and wasn't impressed. If anything he was disgusted. Juno refolded the paper, tucked it back in the envelope and pushed the envelope back into his pocket. Then he took a couple minutes to empty his bowels and wash his hands before heading back to his desk. The Chief's office door was now closed but he could hear the muffled sounds of two men talking behind the door. Juno got the feeling the Chief might know about the envelope.

It was now nine thirty and Juno knew he needed to get moving if he were going to be on time to pick up Amaranth to go get her car. After he might go check out the address for Mike Musgraves. Juno replaced his body cam and gathered his duffle bag and clip board with files and notes and went to pick up his car from the lot. It was a good thing he didn't have a partner yet. Otherwise, he'd have trouble going to pick up Amaranth. Today was feeling like his lucky day. As Juno pulled his car from the lot and onto the street he found himself imagining Amaranth and what she might be wearing or say to him when he arrived. He saw her face with tears like from the days before and the sound of her voice as she had spoke through her bedroom door in her apartment. He knew to expect she'd be wearing black. He only took a quick glance in her bedroom closet, but just about everything in there had been black. It was kind of like her uniform, he thought as he brushed a couple danish crumbs from just above the badge secured on the breast of his uniform's shirt while he waited for a light to turn green.

Just a couple minutes before ten he pulled into the driveway of the Tubbs' residence. Leon was standing in the front doorway of the courtyard when he pulled up. Quickly he checked his breath in a cupped hand and dug around in the console for a mint or piece of gum. As he placed a stick of gum in his mouth he glimpsed himself in the rearview mirror. He had missed a couple hairs just under his nose. Oh well. He was human. He had tucked the duffle bag in the trunk of the

cruiser but his clipboard was on the passenger seat beside him. He picked it up and tucked it in the console to the side of the shotgun closest to the driver side of the vehicle before getting out.

"Boy am I glad to see you!" Leon Tubbs said to Juno as he mounted the wide low steps leading up to the doorway. Juno smoothed a hand over his head as he looked at the older man.

"Oh yeah? Well, that's not something I get to hear very often." Juno replied with a small laugh.

"Yeah. Well, we have some things to tell you." Leon started.

"Is Amy OK? Is she ready." Juno inquired.

"I'm fine. I'm right here. I'm ready to go." Amy said from behind Leon. Juno hadn't seen her there until she spoke and he felt his breath catch slightly. Her long auburn hair was loose around her face and she was wearing a long black T-shirt dress that fit her very well with large stone hoop earrings. She looked beautiful and Juno was acutely aware for the first time that he was smitten with this somewhat mysterious woman. Leon smiled at the younger man recognizing the expression on his face. If Amy saw it she made no indication.

"Did you have something you needed to tell me before we leave?" Juno asked Leon and Amy feeling his face blushing a bit.

"You bet we do!" Leon said excitedly. "Why don't you step into the courtyard for a minute?" Leon stepped aside making room for Juno to enter the courtyard and closed the door behind him.

"What is it?" Juno asked Amy who was now standing directly in front of him. She was wearing flat shoes so the height difference wasn't so pronounced as it had been the other day. He was a strong five foot four inches and she was probably five foot seven or eight. Not as big of a difference as it had seemed at first.

"Doug Spears did it! Well, he helped do it to her!" Leon spat before Amy could say anything. She was just looking at Juno, the two having locked eyes. The air between them seemed to stand still until Leon's words sunk into Juno's ears. He turned toward Leon.

"Doug Spears? I thought he was gay?"

"Well, I didn't say he raped her. But he was the one who drugged her and he helped carry her into her apartment."

Juno looked back and forth between Leon and Amy as the two explained to him about Jack and the sunflowers and Doug and what they had pieced together. When they finished Leon had his arm around Amy's shoulder and Juno was very aware of being jealous of Leon's position. At this moment there was nothing he wanted more than to hold Amaranth close to him and whisper in her ear that he would keep her safe forever. But first things first.

"I can follow you two over to Amy's place to pick up her car if you want." Leon offered. Juno was a little disappointed at the idea but remembered his authority quickly.

"No, that's not necessary. I expect you have work to attend to today Mr. Tubbs and I don't want to keep you." Juno replied. Leon smirked a knowing smile at the younger man.

"You're right. I do. If you need me I will be at Amy's office site after lunch. I have to go to one of the other sites first today. And Doug should be in his office until around five thirty today. He usually has clients all day on Wednesdays." Leon offered helpfully.

"Thank you." Juno replied and turned to Amy. "Are you ready?" he asked her somewhat nervously.

"Yes." Amy said tugging at her bag on her right shoulder.

"Follow me." Juno said and headed toward his car. Amy followed a couple steps behind.

"You kids be careful out there!" Leon offered hopefully after them. Juno just nodded a bit annoyed and opened the passenger side door for Amy indicating for her to sit up front and not in the back like a criminal would.

As Juno situated himself behind the steering wheel he smoothed his hand over the front of his shirt resting the palm of his hand securely over his body cam and looked at Amy. She was looking around the car at all the law enforcement vehicle modifications. Her eyes finally rested on the shotgun positioned between her and the very nervous Juno.

"Amy. I..." Juno stopped for a moment lowering his gaze from her un-expecting face.

"Amy. I'm sorry. I have to tell you something and I don't know that it's the right thing to do, but I know I just can't not say anything."

The expression on Amy's face went from un-expecting and calm to a questioning furrowed brow.

"Is there something wrong? Have Leon or I done something wrong? Should we have called you last night when we found out about Doug?"

"No. I mean, yeah you could have, but that's not what I'm trying to say to you here." They were still in Leon's drive way but Leon had gone in the house and was nowhere to be seen. Juno decided to take a chance.

"Amy, it's totally inappropriate, but I think I'd regret it if I didn't say anything. Amy, I'm very attracted to you." Juno said then lifted his eyes to meet Amy's but she had sat back in her seat and was looking straight ahead out the windshield.

"Amy. Please say something. You have no idea. I'm so embarrassed. This is entirely unfair of me."

"No. It's OK." Amy said. She was thinking of the Paige of Cups from the day before. "It's OK. You've been very kind to me." Amy said and turned to Juno with a smile. Juno still had his hand over the camera.

"Do you think I could take you to dinner some time?" Juno asked bravely.

"Sure. My schedule opened up recently." She joked. Juno relaxed.

"That would be great. How about this Friday night, then?"

"Sure. Pick me up at eight?"

Juno smiled and rubbed the back of his hand under his nose where the stray hairs missed by his razor tickled his knuckle.

"I'll look forward to it. Now, let's not talk about it anymore. Let's stick to business." Juno said as he started the car and backed out of the driveway. Amy sat back into her seat and looked out the passenger side window with her face turned away from Juno as he drove. She had a strange light feeling in her chest. Juno was sweet, and more than a little handsome.