

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 12

It Was An Attitude

Juno had gotten up early that morning even though he didn't have anywhere special to be. After everything that had happened over the past two days he was, on one hand, relieved to have some time off, especially with pay. On the other hand, he felt like he was being punished for the bad behavior of other people, and that was something he resented. He had just left Amaranth with her car and was on his way to check out Mike Musgraves' last known address on Wednesday when he had gotten the call from the Chief over his radio to return to the station immediately. It was now Friday morning and he wasn't sure what, if anything, Amaranth knew yet. At least they'd have something to talk about over dinner later. He was pretty sure the Chief wouldn't approve of him having dinner with Amy but he didn't care at this point. He knew when he was being lied to and he didn't have any intentions of covering for crooked cops, even if it cost him his job. He had spent most of Thursday searching the internal job board for positions in other States. He was ready to leave California. There was so little support for officers, particularly if you weren't in the inner circle of "cool kids" on the force, which he most certainly wasn't. He never had been. California politics had been getting increasingly oppressive over the past couple years. At first he had enjoyed California's lingering remnants of Hippy Culture, but lately he was beginning to understand why his parents were so anti-hippie when he was growing up.

Juno had attended the Police Academy in Missouri the autumn following his high school graduation. After graduating from the Academy he had worked in his hometown of Parkville for almost two years before taking a beat position in Mountain View, following his big sister's lead, and moving out West. His mother had cried for a week when he told his parents he had taken the job and he had been in Mountain View ever since. He had been hoping to make detective now for almost five years. After seventeen years on the Mountain View Force he was starting to get the feeling that it was a futile case...especially now. Understanding that there were guys on the Force in California with brothers like Mike Musgraves he was starting to understand why his career was stalled and he was at home on a two week paid vacation. On a frustrated whim he had pulled up the internal jobs posting page Thursday morning...after going out and getting shit-faced drunk Wednesday night. It was the first time he had done that since he had turned twenty one and his buddy Franky had gotten engaged. That bachelor party had been wild and Franky

and Victoria divorced after only six months. After the ridiculous conversation he had with the Chief Wednesday afternoon, he had gone home, locked his weapons, badge and belt in his safe, changed into street clothes and headed out on foot looking for some kind of wholesome-ish trouble to get into to take his mind off everything. That was around four in the afternoon. He had stumbled back into his apartment around two thirty Thursday morning with the number of some woman called Sharon in his back pocket. He had no idea who Sharon was and was most certainly not going to call to find out. He was just glad to know he hadn't been a total loser sitting drinking alone all night. He had talked to at least one woman.

When he made it back to the station Wednesday, the Chief told him the case was being taken over by someone from Sunnyvale and that he was to take the next two weeks off to get his head straight and get some distance from his emotional attachments. Another officer had followed him out to the parking lot and told him "off the record" that there had been calls from Alameda County earlier in the day, after Doug Spears ended up in Stanford's emergency room. The paper with the photos of Mike and his Alameda County Sheriff big brother was now in Juno's safe with his weapons, belt and badge. He wasn't suspended or even getting any official reprimand for anything. He was just strongly encouraged to take a two week leave of absence, though it was implied that it was not optional. Juno had begrudgingly accommodated the request.

There were tons of openings all over the State and Country for Juno to apply to. Theoretically he could move just about anywhere if he played his cards right, even Hawai'i. But he wasn't interested in Hawai'i. He had taken a trip to Maui with a couple buddies years ago and while he enjoyed the trip he had decided island life was not a full-time thing for him. He was a pretty mellow guy most of the time, but not *that* mellow. Detroit sounded like an interesting option. He had a cousin that lived in the suburbs there and had mentioned something about being able to buy a two bath three bedroom house for well under ten grand, and that had blown Juno's mind at the time. New England was also attractive to Juno, who was no stranger to winter storms having grown up in the Mid-West. He was familiar with small town dynamics, old farm houses and old family money. Part of his discontent in California came from the fickleness of the culture. It was hard to make friends and no one seemed to have any loyalty to anyone but themselves. He knew he didn't really belong. Maybe this was a blessing in disguise. Maybe it was his lucky day.

Juno closed his laptop and sat it on the pillow next to him and looked out the window. It was a day like any other in The Bay. The sun was golden and shining against a bright blue sky. It was neither too warm or too cool. The birds were singing and people were out and about. He could see a couple of women power walking along the walk way in the park just across the street from Juno's apartment. They looked like all the women out power walking on any given day in The Bay: yoga pants, yoga top, designer tennis shoes, floppy messy pony-tail/bun, fake tits, wrist and ankle weights. Some pushed strollers others didn't. Either way, none of those women had ever interested Juno. They were all the same. Boring and average.

Plodding into the bathroom, Juno turned the water on in the shower to heat up while he undressed and chose a clean towel and wash cloth from the linen closet. The last date he had been on had been with Naomi, the social worker from El Camino Hospital. They had met through an online dating service and had laughed when they realized they knew each other from work, so to speak. They had gone out for lunch one Saturday. Naomi had been nice enough, but was very Jewish and adamant that her mother expected any man she marry either also be Jewish or be willing to convert. Juno was not and had politely excused himself from the table. He paid the bill for both of them and told her he saw no reason to continue the date. Naomi had been somewhat surprised, but accepting. Juno was glad they had chosen to meet for lunch instead of him picking her up for dinner. He explained to her that while he was sure she was very nice that he had no interest in converting to any religion and wasn't in the market for a "fuck buddy", so he was going to go home and hope she had a nice rest of her day. Then he went home and deactivated his online dating profile. He wasn't interested in any more dates like that and resigned himself to letting fate do its thing instead.

Lathering up in the shower he found himself wondering where Amaranth was going to want to have dinner. He wondered what she'd be wearing, whether she'd be happy or sad, or some other way. He wondered if she would let him hold her hand, open doors for her, or even kiss her cheek. He wanted so much more than that. He wanted to hold her. He wanted to see her...he wanted to see her NOW! He wanted to see her everyday. Eyes closed and hair full of suds Juno scrubbed and scrubbed imagining Amy's face before him. If he took a position somewhere else how was he going to see Amaranth everyday? It would figure that he's meet someone he was actually interested in at the same time he was looking to leave. Maybe it wasn't his lucky day after all. Then again...oh, it was too crazy to even fantasize about. Or was it?

Juno stepped out of the shower and rubbed himself dry with his fresh clean towel starting with his hair and working down to his feet. He was in pretty good shape. He was a decent looking guy. He knew he was on the short side, but that had never really been an issue, other than reaching things on the top shelf. No one in his family was particularly tall with the exception of his Uncle Ben, but Ben wasn't a blood relative. He was his father's sister's husband. Aunt Pauline had been a cheerleader in high school and college and Ben played college basket ball. Now they were both old. Ben was retired from the post office and Pauline was a retired preschool teacher. Amaranth didn't seem to notice the height difference so why should he even think about it. He knew when women were turned off by his height. They would treat him in a joking manner, as if he were a child. It was an attitude he was keenly aware of when he encountered it. Amaranth had no such attitude. Pulling a beige henley over his head Juno looked at himself in the mirror. No. Today was his lucky day. He felt good. He pulled on a clean pair of jeans over his stark white boxer briefs and pulled the shirt over the waistband of the pants, combed his short hair and slapped some cologne on over his light stubble. He hadn't shaved in a couple days now and he kind of liked the rugged look. It helped him gain some distance between being officer Juno and being Harold Juno, guy on the street.

Juno walked bare foot into his living room. The clock on the wall read one thirty. He had spent the morning in bed sipping coffee and reading every job posting. He had even ended up applying to two — one in downtown Detroit and one just outside of Philly in a place called Pottstown. Now he was all cleaned up and feeling hungry. He really wanted to go see Amy now. He wasn't at work and she wasn't either. What had she said, her schedule had recently opened up. He really wanted to go pick her up and drive away and never come back. That's what he really wanted to do, but he knew that was just a fantasy. Or was it? He could certainly call and see what Amaranth was doing right now. Maybe she'd want to go have ice cream and walk at Shoreline, or catch a movie, or run away and get married and live happily ever after. Juno sighed heavily and scanned the room for his personal phone. It was plugged in next to the TV charging. He picked up the phone and went back into his bedroom to find Amy's number. Seeing his bed was still unmade he sat the phone on his dresser and fixed the sheets and comforter neatly. Then he sat on the corner of the bed and dialed Amaranth's cell phone. It rang three times.

"Hello?" Amaranth answered sounding somewhat apprehensive.

"Hello? Amy?"

"Yes. This is Amy. With whom am I speaking?"

"Amy, it's me, Juno."

"Oh, Juno. I didn't recognize the number. Usually you come up as unknown on the caller ID."

"Yeah. That's how all the work phones are."

"Oh. So this is your personal number?"

"Yes."

"Then I will save it and make sure I keep it."

"Yes. I'd like that. Amy..."

"What's that, Juno."

"Amy, my name's Harold."

"I know."

"You know? How'd you know?"

"Because Naomi called you Harold at the hospital."

"She did?"

"Yeah...after you left. She referred to you and called you Harold then corrected herself and called you officer Juno. I'd just never called you Harold because you never told me I could."

"Oh. Well, please. Call me Harold...or Harry. My friends call me Harry."

Amaranth giggled.

"What's so funny?" Juno asked.

"I don't know. You seem like a Harry to me. I'll call you Harold, but I'm not calling you Harry."

"Well, I'm not calling you Amy anymore then."

"Why?"

"Because you don't seem like an Amy to me. I never think of you as an Amy. I always think of you as Amaranth."

"Oh. Well, OK. But the only other people who actually calls me Amaranth are my parents and my brother."

"Well, that sounds like company I wouldn't mind keeping."

Amaranth and Harold were both silent for a long awkward moment. Juno spoke first.

"Amaranth, I have so much I want to tell you. Are you busy right now?" Amy laughed.

"Busy doing what? Me and Liza have just been sitting around Tubbs' house reading and drinking iced tea. Maddy is at some book club or something and Tubbs is on site at one of the properties. Until I figure out where I'm going to be setting up office for sure I've been postponing rescheduling any clients. Why? Don't we still have plans later tonight?"

"Yeah. We do. But I was hoping we could get together a little sooner, like maybe in the next half hour?" Juno said nervously.

"Sure. That's fine with me, but don't you have work?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about."

"Did they fire you?" Amy asked abruptly. Juno was taken aback.

"Uh, no. What made you ask that?"

"Oh, nothing serious, not really for any reason at all. Just a feeling."

"Well, it's not exactly like that, but I don't want to talk about it over the phone anyway. Can I come pick you up? Juno asked in an almost desperate plea. Amy was silent for a moment on the other end of the line. Juno was getting worried that he was being too forward with this woman who had already been through so much.

"Yeah. Please. I'd Love to get out of the house. See you soon?"

"Yes. I'm on my way. Love you." Juno hung up and then realized what he had just said to Amaranth. Love you? Where had that come from?

Back at Leon and Maddy's Amy sat on her bed staring at the phone in her hand. Had Harold just told her he Loved her? She was going to have to think about this fast. Amy grabbed her purse and dug around for the satin pouch of cards. She slid the cards out of their pouch into her left hand and began to shuffle. Then she took a deep breath and turned up three cards: The Lovers, Queen of Cups, and one again, The Paige of Cups. Well, the cards couldn't be more clear. She closed her eyes and placed one hand over her third eye and one over her heart and breathed deeply into each center seeking to clear away any distraction. Yes. She found Harold attractive. Yes. It was kind of soon for him to be telling her he loved her. No. She did not feel threatened or afraid of Harold. Amy opened her eyes and took another deep breath before slipping the cards back into their pouch. Then, going to the bathroom she washed her face and hands, brushed her teeth and combed her hair. Just as she was slipping her feet into a pair of sling back sandals the door bell rang. Liza meowed and walked out into the hallway pawing at the sliding glass door into the center courtyard. Amy opened the door letting the cat out, walked to the front door and slipped the metal shutter back from the peep hole. It was Harold. He had his hands in his pocket and was looking behind him at his Jeep parked on the street in front of Leon and Maddy's house. Amy smiled before opening the door.

“Hi Harold.” Amy said as Juno turned around to face her. His face froze for a moment before breaking into a smile reflecting the smile on Amy’s face.

“Hi Amaranth. Can I come in?”

“Well, I don’t see why not. Just into the court yard here. Maddy and Leon haven’t told me I can’t have anyone over, but they haven’t told me I could either and I don’t want to overstep. Come on in and wait here while I get my purse and wrangle Liza in the house and...” Amy turned away from Juno making room for him to pass and to turn back towards her room. Juno stepped in the door and surprised Amy by taking her hand and closing the door behind himself.

“Amaranth. I know it’s presumptuous of me to touch you like this.” He said looking down at her hand in his. Amy looked at their hands together as well.

“It is a bit presumptuous, Harold.” Amy pulled her hand away from his gentle clasp. “Let me get my things and we can go somewhere else to talk.”

Juno watched as Amy disappeared into her room and reappeared with her purse. She sat the bag on a metal table in the courtyard and shooed Liza back into the house then followed the kitty in the sliding glass door so she could lock it from the inside before coming back out through the center door. Then she fished her keys from her purse and locked the interior door and motioned to Juno to exit through the door he had come in. Amy locked the door behind them and pulled out her phone.

“I just want to text Maddy and let her know I’m going out so she doesn’t worry.”

Juno nodded. His hands were back in his pockets. “Yeah. That’s a good idea.”

Juno started to walk toward his car and Amy followed. He opened the passenger sided door and waited until Amy was seated comfortably before closing the door. Then he walked around and climbed in the driver side. He looked over at Amy who was watching him without scrutiny.

“Doug Spears is in the hospital and I’ve been asked to take a two week leave of absence. Your case is going to be handled by someone from Sunnyvale PD.”

“I know.” Amy replied.

“You do?”

“Yeah. They called from Sunnyvale this morning and told me I could go back to my apartment if I wanted. I do want to, but Leon was upset when I said I was going to pack up.”

“Well, I would be too. I can’t believe they told you to go back to that apartment.”

“I don’t know. The officer told me he was certain I didn’t need to worry about Mike Musgraves anymore but wouldn’t tell me how or why he knew that. I’m sorry about your leave of absence. I

didn't know anything about that. All I was told was it was being handled by Sunnyvale because they had jurisdiction or something."

"Well there's more to it than that, but I don't know exactly how much more. But we have time. Do you like ice cream?"

Amy smiled. "Sure."

"Let's go get some ice cream and maybe walk around Shoreline?"

"That sounds nice."

Juno put on his seat belt and started the car. As they headed down El Camino Real toward Mountain View he told Amy everything, from the secret envelope with the information about Mike and his older brother to the Chief demanding his leave of absence and the job openings he had applied for. Amy listened quietly just nodding from time to time. Juno finished just as they were pulling into the parking lot at Shoreline Park.

"Well, that's all just crazy." Amy said in a matter of fact tone.

"I know." Juno replied. "None of it makes any sense to me." Juno removed his key from the ignition and unbuckled himself as Amy wrestled with her seat belt. He quickly moved around to the passenger side and opened Amy's door. As he closed the door behind her he offered his elbow to her to take as they walked. Amy pulled her purse over her right shoulder and linked her left elbow through Juno's. The man smiled and pulled his sunglasses out of a pocket and placed them on his face and they headed toward the snack bar.

At the snack bar they both got an ice cream sandwich and then headed to walk the path around the water. The sun cast shadows equal to their height behind them as they walked arm in arm largely in silence. When they got to the side of the estuary opposite the snack bar Juno gestured toward a bench under an oak tree. Amy sat down placing her purse on the seat beside her. Juno sat down beside her and boldly put his arm around her shoulder. Amy sat stiffly for a moment before relaxing and leaning into his shoulder. There were a three or four couples out on the water in paddle boats.

"That looks like fun." Amy said.

"You wanna go back and rent one?" Juno asked.

"No. Not today. But next time."

"Yeah. Next time." Juno smiled reassured that there was going to be a next time. But he wanted more than that and he didn't feel like he had much time. Before leaving his apartment Juno had

done something that bordered on crazy. He had opened his freezer and dug around until he found the plastic baggie stuffed in a small Rubbermaid container in the bottom back left corner. He opened the container and retrieved from among the contents his Grandmother's diamond ring and put it in his front left pocket. He pat his pocket now and felt the ring there digging slightly into his upper thigh.

"Amaranth, I'm going to leave California. I don't know where I'm going yet, but it's only a matter of time before I find a place to transfer, and I know we hardly know each other, but I'm not a young man anymore and I don't want to leave you."

Amy turned her body to face Juno while he spoke. She removed her sunglasses and put them on top of her purse then gently removed the sunglasses from Juno's face so she could see his blue eyes as he spoke to her. He didn't even flinch as her hand brushed his cheek.

"You can tell me I'm crazy and I will take you home right now and never bother you again. Or..."

"Or what?" Amy asked. Juno was digging around in his pocket for something. He pulled out a very large antique looking diamond ring and held it up between his and Amy's faces. Amy's mouth opened slightly in genuine surprise.

"Or, you could put this ring on your hand and come home with me tonight." Juno lowered the ring and placed it in the palm of Amy's hand and leaned forward kissing Amy's slightly parted lips softly. Amy didn't pull away. She closed her hand around the ring and kissed Juno back. She was old enough. There was no reason to drag things out any more, and besides, his kiss was sincere and the cards never lied.

Amy whispered in Juno's ear, "Put it on my finger."

Juno took the ring that had been in his family since his Great Grandmother and Grandfather and slipped it on Amy's right ring finger. It fit perfectly.

"I'm, I'm sorry." Amy said looking at the ring on her finger.

"For what?" Juno was confused.

"I'm sorry, I'm not healed yet, you know, down there. They cut me."

Juno closed his eyes and willed the anger about what had been done to Amy recede.

"It's OK. I'm happy to wait until you're ready. You tell me when you're ready. You tell me what's too much and what's OK. We have the rest of our lives."

"I believe we do, Harold. I believe we do."