

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 2

More Than She Could Offer

Doug guided Stewart, his giant marmalade colored cat, into the carrying crate and closed the front latch. Stewart exhaled a half hearted meow and purred rubbing his head against the grate of the door as Doug pulled his hand away.

“What a good boy. When we get to work you can have some kitty-crack and fish flakes.” Doug checked his bag to be sure the new jar of catnip was in there. It was. With some *actual* effort he picked up the crate with the ample cat, slung his bag over his other shoulder and swiped his keys from the kitchen table. Saturdays were usually his day to hike Shoreline or have lunch with Galeena, his late mother’s best friend. But Galeena had called earlier in the week to say she was taking a weekend trip with a “gentleman friend” and Doug hadn’t asked any questions. He was more than happy to be off the hook. His mother had been one of twelve children, but his actual Aunt and Uncles had never left Ukraine. He had only met them once or twice in his entire life, and that was before he had even shaved for the first time. Galeena and his mother immigrated around the same time and met while doing temp work for a small agency before Anya had met Doug’s father, Dennis. Anya and Galeena were fast friends and had even been roommates until Dennis bought a ring. Doug now had that ring in a box in the back of his kitchen junk drawer. Eberly, his boyfriend of the past six years, thought the ring was ugly and besides, Doug had no intentions of ever asking Eberly to marry him no matter what the law now said he could do.

“It’s just gonna be you and me at the office today Stew-pie. Daddy has some paperwork to catch up on.” Doug explained to the cat as he secured the crate to the front passenger seat of his second hand Escape. Stewart just meowed apathetically.

“Well, don’t sound so excited. It’s not like I enjoy this part either. It’s just, well, Daddy’s a sucker, Stew-poo. Crazy people don’t know how to fill out paperwork.”

Doug never brought his files home. He had a strict personal policy about separation of work and home. The two were to never meet! He was seriously concerned that “the crazy” might rub off on him if he let anything of his clients touch anything of his life outside his office. One time a couple years ago he unexpectedly ran into a client at el Rio in The City. It was Cinco de Mayo. He and Eberly had been drinking and were dancing suggestively to a cross-dressing mariachi band when he was shaken from their sloppy sweaty bubble to the sound of someone yelling: “Dr. Spears! Dr.

Spears!" A young trans girl was flagging him with a lipstick stained hanky from across the back courtyard. Doug had grabbed Eberly by the shoulder and pulled him out through the bar next-door without explanation. Once on the street he ran almost dragging poor Eberly on the pavement until they were three blocks away and around the corner looking for a cab. It wasn't that Doug was trying to hide that he was gay...he just thought the majority of the LGBTQ community was crazy and wanted nothing to do with them unless they were sucking his dick or paying him to fix their broken minds. He had made Eberly submit to a barrage of psychological evaluations before he would invite him to come up for a drink. Eberly had only humored him because the blow job in the truck stop restroom where they met had been that good. Neither man had been with another man since that first fateful meeting and neither had been back to any Bay Area clubs since the el Rio incident. They kept their social activities limited mostly to each other, Stewart, Micah (Eberly's cat), Galeena, or Stephanie and Jack, Eberly's favorite niece and her husband. Eberly did free lance copy editing for a couple technical magazines and rarely had to meet with *co-workers* face to face. Three times a year the two men took trips together to go antiquing in BC, New England, or along the Mendocino Coast. Once a year Doug took a week to travel alone, usually to a silent retreat center or a professional conference. For that week Eberly brought Micah over to Doug's and stayed; mostly because Doug had a lot of house plants that needed care but also because Doug liked a good fuck as soon as he got home and Eberly was a happily obliging bottom. When the two men travelled together Stephanie took care of the cats and the plants. Doug knew nothing about Stephanie's sex life and didn't care to. Jack was quite fat and Doug couldn't imagine his dick was possibly long enough to reach out from under his belly to pee standing up let alone reach anyone's vagina.

It was quarter after one as Doug pulled into his parking space behind the office building. With any luck he was there in time to see DeeDee arrive, the crusty old faggot who was what's-her-face-Amy's regular Saturday client. DeeDee was a well known fixture in the local gay community. He had survived SF in the 70's and 80's without getting HIV *and* without using condoms. DeeDee was known to flaunt this horrendous fact openly...and claimed his ability to "avoid having the HIV" was wrapped up in always knowing the right astrologer to read his palm or some such nonsense. Doug wasn't sure exactly what Amy did out of her office, but he did know he had a number of regular clients because of her referrals, and she didn't seem to care that he didn't reciprocate referrals. After the last couple referrals she sent his way, however, he was reconsidering the arrangement. Maybe it was time to repay the favor, so to speak. Over the years he had a couple clients that

became something of a stalker but they had all been easily taken care of with the threat of a restraining order. But about six months back Amy referred a trans guy, Alex, to Doug. Alex told Doug that Amy had no idea he was trans, and Doug believed it. Alex had none of the physical tell-tale signs. Alex looked 100% natural unless you got his pants off. Then the lack of outdoor plumbing gave things away. Alex became convinced Doug needed a “real man” in his life and began following him around and leaving messages on his voicemail daily. When Doug turned down Alex’s advances he had broken in and left six dead rats at the back door of his office...or rather, Doug thought Alex did it. After the rat incident, Doug had called Alex and referred him to another therapist, a friend from college who specialized in people going through gender transition. Alex hadn’t taken it well and Doug caught him trying to break in with a bobby pin just the past week. Alex had been arrested, but what Doug didn’t know yet was Alex truly had *nothing* to do with the rats.

Stewart knew they were getting close to the office and began to meow excitedly as Doug parked the Escape. Doug heaved the cat in his carrier out of the vehicle and shut the door using his right foot then clicked the doors locked with his fob. He saw Amy’s car and Maggie’s banged up mint green moped parked opposite his space. There was only one car in the client lot out front when he pulled in so he was excited at the prospect of seeing DeeDee arrive and what ridiculous get up he was wearing. DeeDee was a very masculine looking man, but he insisted on dressing like a menopausal woman in flowing kaftans, scarves, hoop earrings and the like. The bald patch on top of his head shone as if he buffed it with floor wax and it was not unusual to see him with pink foam rollers securing all the stringy fluff circling the gleaming friar’s patch. Seeing the spectacle of DeeDee was the only thing that made a Saturday afternoon of insurance paperwork worth it. Doug believed himself above such “displays of faggotry”. He gathered himself and scurried up the back stairwell to the back door of his office. Stewart meowed in anticipation of catnip and benito flakes.

Doug sat the carrier on the floor inside the door and opened the latch to let Stewart bound out into the sparsely decorated office.

“Stewart! No scarf-and-barf, OK buddy? I’m gonna give you some fish flakes here in your bowl and then I’ll put the crack on your beddy-bed, OK?”

Stewart meowed loudly and wrapped himself back and forth around Doug’s feet as he hung his bag on the hook on the back of the door and fluffed the heated kitty cushion in the basket hanging from the window sill.

“Damn-it, Stew-pie! You’re gonna trip me. If I break my neck, who’s gonna give you crack and flakes?”

Stewart sat and looked at Doug thoughtfully as he placed a generous pinch of benito flakes in a small dish and sprinkled catnip straight from the jar onto the cushion. Stewart darted to the benito flakes as Doug flipped the light switch on the wall. Then he picked up a tiny remote and turned on the surround sound system. The sound of ocean waves crashed in the room as if they were out at Bodega Bay and not in the stuffy little Mountain View office. Doug grabbed the stack of files from the past week from a tray on a shelf behind his desk and a stack of insurance forms from a shelf on the opposite side of the room and flopped onto his overstuffed chair. The clock on the wall above the front door flashed 1:28. Stewart licked benito flakes from his whiskers and proceeded to have a small freak-out, running in circles, then darted out the cat door Doug had installed in the front door.

“DeeDee must be here!” Doug said out loud and stood up to peek between the blinds. As he moved past his desk he knocked the book of IDC-9 codes on the floor and bent over to pick it up. As he stood up Stewart ran back in the office and out the cat door installed on the back door. “Crazy cat. You haven’t even touched the kitty-crack yet.” he called after Stewart. Then, using his right index and middle fingers he pulled open the blinds just enough to look out onto the parking lot. A car *had* just pulled in, but it wasn’t DeeDee in his purple dragon Art Car. It was a black four door Mercedes with tinted windows. Two men got out of the front and third person, Doug couldn’t see other than a pair of legs in black slacks, sat in the back seat.

“Well, Amy’s clientele is coming up these days.” he said to no one as the two men mounted the stairs. But they didn’t pass Doug’s door. Instead, the one who had been driving knocked. Doug pulled his fingers from the blinds and held his breath. The sound of the ocean waves crashed over him as if he were drowning. He didn’t know why, but all of a sudden he was frightened and the room felt too hot and small. He was glad Stewart had run off. The driver knocked again.

“Hey. We know you’re in there. I saw you looking out through the blinds and we can hear the radio on in there, man. Open the door and we can be done with this fast and easy.” one of the men said from the other side of the door.

Doug was frozen. He didn't know what to do or say. He didn't know who these men were or why they were knocking on his door.

"I'm with a client. Please take a card and call to make an appointment." Doug had a business card holder mounted just to the right of his door. Most of the offices in the building did.

"Look man, we know you're in there alone. Now open the door. I just want to have a conversation." one of the men said.

"Hey. I get it, but I only have conversations by appointment and with a referral." Doug replied.

"Hey. Put your faggoty face up to the window for a second."

Doug pulled the blinds open as he had before when he was hoping to spy DeeDee in a muumuu.

One of the men held a pistol up to the glass. Doug let the blinds snap back together.

"Now open the door or we'll shoot it open. We don't want to have to do that. We just want to talk. Got it?"

Doug opened the door and the two men pushed in and past him, the gun now holstered. Doug wasn't sure which one was holding it or if they both were carrying.

"How'd you know I'd be here? I don't usually keep Saturday hours." he asked bravely.

"We didn't know. We just got lucky. We're not really here to see you today anyway...but it's lucky. Maybe we can take care of two birds with one, you know." the man who had been driving said while looking around the sparsely filled room.

"No. I don't know. Who are you and what do you want from me?"

The man who had been in the passenger seat looked at Doug intently before he spoke. His houndstooth blazer was well tailored. His jeans were expensive and the fine gauge silk v-neck pull over was in good taste. Doug noticed he wasn't wearing any socks with his Prada loafers. Doug had a pair of the same loafers in faux crocodile, but this man's were classic black. Very LA...or Berlin...or New York...or anywhere but Mountain View.

"You know Casey Anne Rosanova." It was a statement, not a question. In fact, Doug did know Casey. She was a relatively new client referred to him by Amy.

"I can neither confirm or deny any of my patients. I am a licensed medical professional you understand." Doug said carefully. The man looked unimpressed. The other man, the one who had been driving started to feign thumbing through a stack of client paperwork on a shelf. Doug saw the holster under his charcoal grey blazer.

"It wasn't a question. She's my..." The man stumbled on his words for a moment. Doug couldn't quite tell if he was looking for the right word to use because he hadn't thought things through or

because English was not his first language. Doug thought he detected some faint accent but couldn't be sure.

"...my kin, and I understand she has been coming to see you once a week to talk about her private life. What do you know about Amaranth Gonder?" the man finished, running his index and middle fingers over the edge of Doug's desk. Then he rubbed the dust to his thumb and inspected his fingers. They were clean. Doug had a cleaning service that came in early Saturday mornings. He paid them to do the shared bathrooms too. Doug swallowed before answering the question. He wasn't sure whether he should be relieved or more alarmed.

"A-amaranth Gonder? Not much. Sh—sh—she has an office down the hall and sometimes refers clients to me." Doug stuttered nervously.

"Down the hall, huh? Refers clients to you sometimes? Like, how many times? Like for how long?" The man now ran his right hand over the right lapel of his blazer and inhaled sharply without making any expression with his face. Doug looked over to the driver who was leaning on the book case with one elbow and the knee of his opposite leg bent, resting the ball of the foot of his bent leg on the top of the foot of his straight leg. The gun could be seen poking out from below his blazer. Doug looked back to the other man.

"Um, yeah. Like, maybe six or seven clients over the past four years?" Doug offered turning his cheek towards the man in front of him. The man looked satisfied with Doug's answer but still had questions.

"Four years? She been here that long?"

Doug was a little surprised. Amy had never given him any reason to think she had anything to do with the unsavory type of individuals standing in front of him right now and Casey was a little odd, but all of his clients were. He wondered what this guy meant by the term "kin". Casey said her parents lived back East and her biggest problem seemed to be home sickness as far as Doug had seen so far, but he had only met with her three times up to now. It was hardly enough time to figure out a human being...particularly one voluntarily seeking therapy. But, Amy, wow. Doug wasn't ever interested in having his cards read, but he understood why other people did. Really, the job Amy did wasn't much different than his, and their clients had many similar issues and concerns. The truth was, Doug respected Amy for knowing when people needed *professional* help and not just something vague to get by.

"At least. But I don't know exactly how long she's been here. I've been here four years and she was here before me." This wasn't entirely true. Doug knew Amy had been here four and half years because they met for the first time the day he moved his stuff into his office. She told him she had

been there for six months so far and really liked it. A couple days after that they had chatted over lunch in the shared kitchen. After that, Amy started referring clients that needed *more than she could offer*, as she had explained it, to Doug. The man bought it, turning down the corners of his mouth and nodding his head up and down slightly.

“Alright. Now tell me everything you know about her and her clients and her business right now and if I think you’re lying to me I’ll go find your cat and kill him. A trust he enjoyed the rats we left for him last week?” The man spoke without blinking or moving his eyes from Doug, even as he moved towards the chair where Doug’s clients usually sat during session. “Feel free to sit down. I’m willing to wait as long as it takes to hear what you know.” The man said smoothing his hands over his pant legs before crossing his right ankle to his left knee. Doug saw a small inscription style tattoo on the inside of the man’s ankle but didn’t recognize the language it was written in. He stumbled backward, nearly tripping, looking for his chair. He found it and sat down grabbing the arm rests first.

“Um. I really don’t know her much at all. We see each other in the kitchen from time to time and one time we had a drink together at The Whitewash, but I don’t even know where she lives, other than to say somewhere around town.”

“Come now, Mr. Spears. You are a clinical psychologist, sir. Are you asking me to believe you have absolutely no other knowledge or understanding of Miss Gonder?” The man chuckled lightly. The driver echoed the chuckle. Doug was becoming increasingly nervous and passed gas. At this the other two men broke out in hilarious laughter. Once they settled themselves the man opposite Doug in the chair continued.

“But seriously now, Mr. Spears. What else can you tell me about darling Amy?”

Doug spent the next half an hour going over in minutia every conversation he had ever had with Amy that he could remember. None of it was anything that was much interesting...she likes chocolate covered orange candies but hates marshmallow...keeps office hours Tuesday through Saturday but only by appointment...reads tarot and practices some New-Agey therapy or some such thing called Reiki...not married...no kids...no family he knew of...likes live music, fancy cheeses and dry rose wine. She referred Casey to him a month ago for therapy because she thought the girl was homesick and needed to deal with growing up, not get her cards read every week. Doug said he agreed with her assessment. Finally, Stewart came back in through the back

door and broke the awkward energy in the room rubbing up against Doug's legs before jumping up in the strange man's lap then into the cat nip lined basket in the window before settling down to lick himself. The man wiped invisible cat fur from his lap and stood up, seemingly satisfied with what Doug had told him about Amy.

"Well, Mr. Spears, now I would like you to suck my dick." he said as simply if he had just said, "Nice to meet you." Doug instinctively got on his knees, scared for his life. He'd had his dick sucked by strangers and sucked enough strangers' dicks in truck stops that this was really only a mild violation as far as those things go. The man laughed and smacked him lightly on his cheek with his open palm.

"Fuck you. I don't actually want you to suck my dick. I just wanted to see if you would."

With that the man motioned to the driver of the car and the two men left out the front door heading toward Amy's office. Doug scooped up Stewart and his bag, quickly locked the front door and left out the back the way he had come in. He didn't know what they wanted with Amy, but he didn't want to stick around to find out either. Stewart meowed softly, placated by catnip and whatever mischief he had gotten into in the hallway.