

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 9

Either Way The Shoe Fits

Amy yawned and stretched her legs behind her on her bed in Leon and Maddy's house. Liza stirred next to her. She had started to hunt down her copy of *The Consolation of Philosophy* after it was referenced for the third time in the short Pieper piece she had been reading. The nearly ancient text was resonating on a deep level with her at the moment and she wondered, not half jokingly, if she might be headed for decapitation or some other such unjustly imposed demise. Amy had begun to categorize time as before the attack and after the attack. When she began the book just a few days *before the attack* she had been enjoying the poetry and tragic nature of the story and the position of the author. Up to that point she couldn't decide if he was brilliant and brave or merely grasping at crazy straws hoping his unjust oppressors would own up to their oppression. Now, *after the attack*, she decided he was all of the above. She considered her own situation in a similar light. Nothing was either/or. It was and/also. After this, was she going to be able to ever see clients again or was she going to be forced to find a new way of paying her bills? Sure, she could just re-open her office...or open one in a new location. But what would stop them from coming after her again? And what else could she do for work? She'd been making money this way for a very long time. And why were they after her anyway? She truly had no idea. Maybe she could find something a little more affordable in San Jose or Santa Cruz. *Maybe*. But security was always going to be a priority now. Mountain View *was* getting expensive and she hadn't been able to raise her prices as much as rent had increased over the past four years. A month prior to the attack she had sold a couple wood block prints from the exquisite collection that had been left to her by a Great Aunt she had only met twice. The purchasing party was an odd man with unusually small features and a complexion like paste who found her through the appraiser who had helped Amy get the works insured. The proceeds of the sale gave her enough to pay the rent on her apartment through the coming Easter, but if she didn't get back to seeing clients in a couple weeks, she was going to be forced to give up the office space. A woman she took some workshops from saw clients out of a room in her San Mateo apartment. Amy didn't want to do that. That would require her to dedicate the entire living room to work space, and she didn't want her TV into the bedroom. Nor did she want to share her personal bathroom with clients. They'd have to walk through her bedroom to do that. She needed her personal space and privacy. Personal boundaries could sometimes become an issue with clients, particularly new clients, and there were a couple times Amy had

to discontinue seeing a client because of it. She needed her *home* to be her private sanctuary, especially now.

On the floor in front of the night stand Amy found her giant purse and fished out the satin pouch containing the majority of her livelihood for the past decade and a half. The weight of the cards slid, in a solid feeling mass, inside of the silky pouch. She unfastened the drawstring and slid the deck into her hands and sat up. It had been a long time since she had read cards for any reason in the space where she slept. Other than a card now and then when away from the office, she reserved reading for in the office. But these were different times and she desperately needed some unbiased guidance. Amy sat up and propped herself against the bolster pillows Maddy had on the bed and shuffled the deck. After a couple minutes she turned up three cards: *Nine of Wands*, *The Wheel*, *The Page of Cups*. The cards never lied. Yes, she had a life changing experience from which she was recovering. But who, or what was the *Page of Cups*? Certainly not Leon. Though not close friends, they had known each other for a while now. Juno? Maddy? Certainly not her attacker. She wasn't interested in any creative or business ventures with anyone who would harm her that way. As Amy was putting the cards back in their pouch and the pouch back in her bag her phone rang. It was Miriam Gomez, a steady client of the past five years.

"Holla, Amy! It's Miriam. Miriam Gomez?"

"Hi Miriam. Do we have an appointment?"

"Si, Amy. I stopped by the office earlier for our two PM, but you were no there. Just a sign. Family emergency. You are OK, Amy?"

"Yes, Miriam, I'm going to be OK. But it's going to be a few days before I can actually start rescheduling appointments. I'm so glad you called. Can I please have your number again?"

"Oye! Amy? What happen?"

"The office was broken into and I was attacked. I need your number because they stole my client book. Can I please have your number? When I figure out where I am going to be seeing clients I will call you to reschedule immediately."

"Oye! Amy! That is terrible! I glad you are OK. My number is probably on your caller ID right now."

"OK, Miriam. You're right. It is. I will write it down and call you as soon as I'm ready to start scheduling."

"OK, Amy. Feel better soon. I talk to you soon I think."

Amy breathed a sigh of relief as she hung up the phone and decided to just save the number in her phone's contacts instead of writing it down on a piece of paper until she got another client book to fill. Maybe if she had just kept them all there to begin with she wouldn't be in this situation. Then again, maybe she was lucky that they had only taken the book and not her phone as well.

In the center of the house Amy could hear Maddy greeting Leon coming in the door. She couldn't hear exactly what they were saying, but Leon didn't sound like his usually carefree self. He sounded upset, agitated. It sounded as if Maddy was trying to soothe him. Amy swung her feet onto the floor next to the bed and searched with a big toe for her house shoes. She slipped her feet into them as she stood up and headed to the door. Liza followed and slipped into the courtyard as Amy rounded the hall corner to the center of the house. Maddy was putting a giant vase of sunflowers on the coffee table and Leon was holding Amy's bowl and the big smokey quartz point from above her office door.

"Just slow down, Baby. Put your things down and go wash your face. I'll pour us a couple drinks and then you can tell me everything." Maddy was saying as she sat the vase down and turned back towards Leon. She stopped with a small surprise upon seeing Amy. They were all still getting used to each other. "Oh, Amy! I thought you were sleeping, Dear. The sunflowers are for you, evidently." Maddy said pointing to the strangely familiar looking arrangement.

"Yeah. Those and more." Leon extended his hands with the bowl and the rock towards Amy. "Thank you, Leon. Let me go put these in my room." Amy took the items one at a time from Leon and positioned them carefully in her arms. They fit one in each of Leon's large hands, but Amy needed to cradle them carefully in her arms to hold on to them. She turned to take them back to the room.

"What about the flowers?" Leon asked behind her. Amy stopped for a second while she answered.

"They're so pretty. Just leave them where everyone can enjoy them."

"OK. Do you want Maddy to pour you a drink too? You need to hear what I have to say too." Leon called after Amy who had disappeared down the hall.

"I'll have whatever you guys are having." Amy called from within the room where she was placing the bowl and the stone on the nightstand with the alarm clock and her flashback notebook.

Leon placed his tool box and the small metal lock box containing his gun on the floor just inside the door. Maddy returned with three bourbon sodas and saw the lock box for the first time in over thirty years.

“Leon! Is that what I think it is?” She asked, shocked. Leon was sheepishly looking at his hands.

“I need to wash my hands. Can we talk about *that* later? In private?” He implored her just as Amy appeared around the corner with her hands free.

“If you guys need some privacy, just let me know. I can go for a walk for a bit.” Amy told them with a smile.

“Don’t be silly. We don’t need privacy from you. A husband and wife can naturally have such personal conversation before they go to sleep at night.” Maddy explained to Amy while watching her husband disappear down the other hall towards their bedroom suite. Maddy sat one of the three glasses on a side table and handed one to Amy bumping it lightly with the other glass in a cheers gesture before taking a sip. Amy nodded and took a sip as well.

“Dinner smells great, Maddy. What are you making in there? Do you need any help?”

“That’s OK. There’s not a whole lot to do at this point. Not until the lasagna is done baking. I have the salad done already. It just needs tossed with the dressing when we sit down. Let’s have a seat in the living room until he gets back out here.”

Amy followed Maddy to the sofa. The two women sat on either end turned towards each other. Amy slipped her feet out of her house shoes and tucked them up under herself. Maddy sat reclining somewhat with her legs crossed at the knees.

“Did you have a good rest?” she asked Amy.

“Oh, I napped some, but I was reading just now.”

“Something good, I hope?” Maddy asked.

“It’s very good, but I’m not sure I’m ready to be reading it right now. I think I might need some distance. It’s kind of a serendipity.” Amy started to explain as Leon returned with his hands and face washed, hair damp and brushed back from his face wearing a clean T-shirt and sweat pants instead of his button down and cover-alls.

“Your drink is right over there.” Maddy told him pointing to the sweating glass on the side table. Leon nodded in appreciation and went to it holding it up to the room in a gesture of cheers before taking a sip.

“Man that’s the stuff!” Leon said smacking his lips and heading for one of the two large armchairs adjacent to the sofa and across from the TV. Maddy watched him as he sat down being careful not to spill his drink.

“So, what’s the story with the sunflowers?” Maddy asked Leon nodding with her nose and forehead towards the giant arrangement situated somewhat between them on the coffee table. “They’re real pretty.” Amy offered, thinking Leon had gotten them for her for a second, but then remembering the conversation from earlier.

“Some guy named Jack brought them by the office for you today. He wanted to see you. He said he was Doug’s boyfriend’s daughter’s husband or something...I can’t quite remember. He’s related to Doug somehow anyway.”

Amy thought the name sounded familiar from the conversation she and Doug had over drinks that one time at *The Whitewash*.

“Yeah? I’m sure Doug just mentioned to him something about what happened at the office.” Amy offered giving Doug and this Jack person the benefit of the doubt — in contrast to the accusatory tone in Leon’s voice. Maddy was biting at the corner of the inside of her lip impatiently.

“So you know this clown, Jack, then?” Leon asked Amy.

“No, but the name sounds familiar. I think I remember Doug mentioning him. Why?”

“Why? Because he told me he felt bad and wanted to give you flowers because Doug said he helped do this to you!”

Amy almost spit out the drink in her mouth. Instead a little went up her nose when she tried to swallow. She covered her face trying to regain her composure.

“What?! Doug did what?”

Leon was nodding his head emphatically up and down. “That’s what I said. Doug helped do this to you. This Jack-guy told me Doug’s boyfriend told him Doug said two guys came to his office to question him about a client he’s seeing currently who happens to be the wife or daughter or something of some mob jerk and they wanted to know about you and your clients and threatened Doug so he drugged some coffee and gave it to you for them and they beat you up and did whatever. He helped carry you into your apartment.” Leon finished looking at Amy as she took in what he was saying to her. Maddy was shaking her head back and forth in disapproval.

“Some people. Did you talk to this Doug person?” Maddy asked.

“Well, no. I wanted to talk to Amy first and maybe even the police. I think I’m going to call Juno.”

“No. Wait.”

Leon and Maddy turned toward Amy who chugged her drink and looked at them.

“Wait. Don’t call him just yet. You’ll probably just get his voice mail anyway and he’s coming here tomorrow morning to pick me up to go get my car anyway. I need to sit with this information right now and I think Maddy has made another delicious dinner. Can’t we just enjoy that?”

“I don’t see why not. Sounds reasonable to me.” Maddy said as she got up and swiped Amy’s empty glass from the coffee table in front of her. “Let me fill that for you.” she said as she moved toward the kitchen.

“Thanks for bringing my stuff, Leon. I can’t imagine how that bowl made it without being broken. It should have been on the floor with that stone and shattered in a hundred pieces.”

“Yeah. I know. I’ve been thinking about that too.” Leon said.

“It’s the strangest thing. I haven’t said anything about it to anyone in a very long time. I think the last person I mentioned something like this to was my last boyfriend, but Lord knows that’s been a while, now.” Amy laughed.

“No, no. What is it Amy? You can tell me.” Leon said making a gesture as if he were locking his mouth with a key. Amy smiled and cocked her head to the side slightly.

“It’s nothing. It’s just, my whole life, whenever something scary has happened there has always been something like that bowl to just, I don’t know, let me know that someone or something is watching out for me. See, it’s nothing. It’s silly.”

“I think you and I both know that isn’t silly. It’s probably a Grandparent loving you from beyond the grave.” Leon offered sincerely. Amy shook her head.

“Maybe, but I don’t know why. I never really knew any of my Grandparents and I think one of them might still be alive in a nursing facility of some sort up in Canada. My family isn’t exactly what you’d call close or anything. But, then again, maybe it’s my Great Aunt Bella. I only met her a couple times, but she left me some Art when she died. I think I’m the only niece she ever actually met.”

Leon laughed. “I don’t know what to tell ya. If I were Maggie I might tell you it was someone from a past life!”

Amy smiled. “And who knows? She might be right about that.”

Maddy appeared between the two of them with her hands covered in oven mitts.

“Dinner is ready and your drink is on the table, Amy.”

Leon finished his drink and handed his glass toward Maddy who just looked at it.

“What about my drink?”

"It's still in the bottle. Come on. Let's eat." Maddy said to Leon and turned toward the already set dining table.

After dinner Amy helped clear the dishes from the table but Leon wouldn't let her wash any of them. Maddy excused herself to take a bubble bath so Amy decided to take a walk. Leon smiled and told her to take her phone with her, just in case. Amy went back to her room and fished a pair of Keds out of her suitcase. She tucked her phone in the pocket of her jeans and the house key in the other pocket. When she got back she'd have to remember to put the key on the ring with her other keys so it didn't get lost. Amy stepped out of her room and slid the sliding glass door open into the center courtyard. Liza was lying on her side next to the koi pond watching the fish swim back and forth. She looked at Amy and meowed softly as she passed by.

"It's OK, Liza. Mummy is going to take a short walk...to get out and get some fresh air."

The kitty seemed satisfied with this explanation and went back to watching the fish swim. Amy could hear the water running in Maddy's tub. She had mentioned earlier in passing they had a jacuzzi. Amy slipped out the front gate locking it behind her.

The shadows were long against the sidewalk as Amy headed to her right and down the long curved street. Across the street she saw the magnolia tree in the neighbors yard across the street. It's leaves were green and glossy but there were no buds or flowers. Amy didn't know when a magnolia tree was supposed to bloom. She just knew they smelled lovely when they did. Being alone outside, Amy felt exposed and a little like a child being given the privilege of crossing the street alone for the first time. It was just a common suburban street, but Amy saw the World through new eyes. It was only a little before seven but there could be danger around any corner. Who knew when and where her attacker might find her again. Amy's heart began to pound in her throat and she looked back toward the house nearly deciding it was too dangerous to continue her walk, but she stopped herself. She wouldn't live in fear. She couldn't just give up and stay in the bedroom in Maddy and Leon's house for the rest of her life. Something told her Leon wouldn't mind if she did, but that wasn't the kind of life she wanted to live. That's not the type of person she was. She was pretty sure just around the curve the street became a cul du sac. She made a deal with herself that she would walk down to the cul du sac and back. That would be enough for today. Tomorrow she was going to have to face driving and time alone with Juno in his car, and probably more questions.

As she walked Amy thought about Boethius and his conversations with Lady Philosophy. Amy tossed around whether or not it was reasonable of Lady Philosophy to have been so hard on the poor guy for feeling bereft. After all, wasn't it reasonable to feel hurt at being unjustly attacked, having your life turned upside down and ultimately put to death without any good reason or recourse? Wasn't it human? Wasn't the desire for justice justified? Wasn't it reasonable? At the same time Amy was keenly aware of how out of control the situation was. She couldn't be held accountable for the actions of the men who hurt her...even Doug. Especially Doug! Goodness, Doug! She couldn't believe Doug would do something like this to her — to anyone. Why didn't he tell the police? What had they threatened him with? She could only imagine. If they did what they did to her, what were they willing to do to Doug? Still, he betrayed her! Then she remembered the cards that fell from her deck when she left her office as it was being vandalized. She had assumed Jonas was who the Hanged Man card was talking about, but maybe it was Doug. Either way, the shoe fit. There was enough betrayal to go around. Just as she started to think about the Paige of Cups a loud ruckus above her caused her to look to the skies. Above her a flock of over thirty parrots flew in an elongated yoni-like formation overhead. The green, blue, yellow and red of their feathers flashed like a team of paper kites at Shoreline on a Sunday in June. The birds squeaked and flapped and dipped and swooped in synchrony. Amy turned around in awe following them with her eyes raised. Soon they disappeared out of site back around the corner from where she had come and were gone. Amy walked along the curb of the cul du sac and headed back towards the house. The sun was low in the sky and in the short time since she left it had switched from early evening to dusk. As she turned the corner she could hear the birds once more and remembered what Maddy said about the magnolia tree. As she approached the house she saw them, all thirty some of them, perched in the flowerless tree squawking merrily. Just before Leon and Maddy's driveway she saw a long green feather and picked it up. Liza would love to play with that. She put it in her pocket with her phone.

As she entered the house through the main door in the courtyard Amy saw Liza was curled up on Leon's lap in his arm chair. Maddy was in the arm chair next to him and they were watching Wheel of Fortune. Amy wondered what Maddy would have to say to Lady Philosophy about things. As Amy passed the old couple, Liza didn't even lift her face to look in Amy's direction. "Well, I guess I know where Leon stands with Liza." Amy thought to herself as she slipped down the hall to her room to draw herself her own hot bath. Maybe Juno would walk her up to her apartment tomorrow while she picked up a few other things. She was pretty sure she had a

couple bath bombs from Lush one of her clients had given her last Christmas. She had kept them in her lingerie drawer since her apartment only had a stand up shower, not a tub; and she wanted to check her mail as well. Every couple years or so her brother broke down and sent her a letter around this time of year. It's not that she expected the letter from him or anything, but it was the time of year one might arrive and it sure would be nice to feel like she actually had a family right now.