

Chapter One

It's enough to drive you nuts. You read tarot for a living and you keep getting emails from people thanking you; they've found their happily ever after, dream career, yadda yadda yadda. And it's amazing, and gratifying, and you feel like you're helping people find happiness.

And you can't do it for yourself.

Oh I'm not saying that I can't read for myself, I can. No problem. But there's no sign of anything love-related in my readings for me. No "tall dark handsome stranger", no "Mr Right", or even "Mr Right Now".

It's a right royal pain in the arse.

And it's not something you can force, or forge, either. The ol' intuition won't come if you try and twist it to your own ends. Trying to get a prediction of something that isn't there is a guaranteed one way path to "I'm not getting anything, sorry".

And that's not good enough for the people I read for. They're paying for my time, my connection to the larger world. The world that others can't see or communicate with and, with some practice, I can.

I've been reading tarot since I was seventeen. I was with an older friend browsing a shop window and my eye was drawn to a brightly coloured box. That was the first time I saw a tarot deck and I was hooked on what it could do.

I started out reading for myself, for my friends and family, and word got round. I hadn't ever spent much time in conventional jobs but that suited me fine - I didn't class myself as a conventional person.

Tarot was a little extra thing I did on the side for a good few years, until the early 2010s when it seemed that it was becoming more mainstream. It wasn't long before I had a website up, offering short readings on love, careers or life paths, and it went from there.

Most of my clients are women. More than 90%, in fact. I guess guys either don't believe in it or don't feel like they need any help with the same things that women do. And the few requests I've had from guys tend to be more sceptical anyway, less open-minded.

I'm rarely as happy with those readings as I am with the majority of ones for women, because I need to be able to tune into the person's energy to find out what's going on with them.

Usually, anyway.

The email came in as they normally did. It was an application through the website, payment had been made, and it should have been straightforward. Signed with the initial "J", there were very few clues about the client. He or she had had a few strange dreams which had

eventually led them to my website, and they wanted to know what was going on in their life. I replied back and said that was a little general; did they have anything particular they wanted to know?

As we emailed back and forth, trying to clarify what "J" wanted to learn, I began to get a feel for their energy.

At length I found out that "J" was a sensitive man who'd had a bad break-up. He was OK in his career but the rest of his life was a chaotic mess. His sister kept trying to set him up on blind dates that he didn't want to go on, his parents kept dropping hints about grandkids and he was at the stage of cutting himself off from everyone just so they'd leave him alone.

He didn't feel ready for all that dating stuff, and he didn't know how to tell them to sod off without hurting their feelings.

Having been hurt himself, the last thing he wanted to do was cause pain to others. He'd finally decided to get a reading, after some very weird dreams, to see if there was any hope of someone - or something - coming his way to get his family to stop. Well-meaning as they were, it was just too much.

Finding out this much took a couple of weeks of coaxing via email, and I was glad I'd studied a little psychology in my spare time. J wanted to be able to turn round to his interfering family and give them something to gain himself some breathing space. My empathy kicked in and I felt for him. He'd been through enough already, from what I'd gathered.

When I actually got to the stage of pulling cards for him, the situation both clarified and mystified. It seemed there was someone out there for him, but getting a read on her proved elusive.

I wrote in my email to him that she had a varied career that involved helping others, but I couldn't discover any more about her work. She was an animal lover, cared about the planet, loved to read and paint. She liked to laugh.

I rolled my eyes at what I was typing. There were probably hundreds of women who matched the description I was giving. He was as likely to meet someone on the train as walking down the street.

But when he pressed me for more details of their meeting, things got fuzzy. It seemed like he already knew her, although not well. I shrugged, saved what I'd done, and turned to another client for a while. I knew better than to try and push when things weren't clear.

The next client was a breeze to read for. There was no lack of clarity with the reading. The woman wanted insights into her spirit guides as she felt drawn to Native American lore. I was able to give her a name she could call her guide, describe him to her, and give her enough clues that she could - if she wished - find some history about him.

I was relieved. At least I wasn't blocked from getting information through from the other side. That would have been a nightmare.

J's reading niggled at me, though. It was like an aching tooth that kept drawing my attention. I decided to concentrate on his lady friend's physical appearance to see if it helped him identify her.

The cards told me she was mid-height with light brown hair that she liked to wear down but generally didn't. Blue-eyed, she liked to wear bright colours and dance, and loved the water. I sighed happily at the information coming through. Hopefully that would help him narrow it down.

Except it didn't. When presented with the new insights, J denied knowing anyone like that at all. He didn't have many female friends and the ones he did were nothing like the woman I'd described. It was all very puzzling for us both.

I put the information aside and did some housework instead. That didn't help, but at least it took my mind off it. I was aware that the longer J was without his lady friend, the more pressure would come from his family and I felt he was getting closer to breaking point.

Perhaps that's why I suggested a phone consultation, where I'd "tune in" while J and I talked, to see if there was anything further that "them upstairs" or whoever could tell me. I didn't do them as a rule because it wasn't always possible to get the right frame of mind in a short time frame before stuff was revealed. But it was worth a try, and we arranged a time to speak.

I was as nervous as an actress on the first night of the performance. What if I couldn't get through? What if nothing was forthcoming? I was starting to feel like J must be feeling himself - fast heading towards the point of giving up.

I had never failed a client before, and as I meditated in advance of the phone call, I told "them upstairs" I wasn't going to fail now, either.

They had other ideas.

J, or rather Jamie, to give him his proper name, had a pleasant voice to listen to. He spoke fairly typical Estuary English which didn't surprise me as we'd established through emails that he was from the Home Counties.

As I'm a Sussex girl there were no accent barriers or peculiar words to contend with that needed explanation either way. We chatted in general for a few minutes - he did something in IT which I didn't really understand - but as we discovered a common love for the classics of English literature I began to feel less nervous and more at ease with trying a reading while I actually spoke to someone.

I'd often shied away from reading in person for someone I didn't know, as they were sometimes agitated or stressed and their energy jarred with mine. I'd learned that quite early.

"I'm going to put you on loudspeaker while I shuffle the cards, OK?" I told Jamie, placing my mobile on the low table in what I called my "reading room". It was just the box room in my one-slash-two bedroom flat, but it was separate space from the everyday rooms and no-one went in there but me.

Candles and crystals were on every shelf in a large bookcase, along with my numerous tarot decks. I wasn't someone who believed in keeping things tucked away when they should be enjoyed and visible at any moment.

"OK Lori," Jamie's voice came from the tiny speaker of my phone, and I felt a momentary dissatisfaction that it didn't really sound like him at all like that. Never mind, on to the job at hand.

I chose the deck - one of my favourites - and lit a large pink candle, waving the deck through the smoke to clear it of any past perceptions. I didn't always clear my decks, they didn't usually need it, but I wanted to be more thorough for the patient man at the other end of the phone.

"Choose a number between one and ten."

"Seven."

I grinned, although he couldn't see it. "My lucky number."

"Ha, mine too."

"You seem pretty uncommon for someone in computers, having lucky numbers and consulting a tarot reader," I teased and was replied by a chuckle. At least he seemed relaxed. I began to shuffle the deck, thinking specifically about Jamie and his future lady.

Who was she? Where had they met? What else could the cards tell me about her?

As it turned out, diddly squat. No matter which combination of seven cards I tried, I couldn't get more than I already had in the previous readings. He knew this brunette who liked dancing and had a sense of humour.

I thought somewhat grouchily that if they ever did get to meet she could have a good laugh over how much of a runaround the cards had given me. I even called Jamie back partway through, to see if I could get a clearer psychic signal, but to no avail.

Eventually I admitted defeat.

"I'm really sorry Jamie, I'm still getting nowhere. I think I'm just going to have to send you a refund. Maybe you should try someone else? They might have better luck."

There was a pause and I could tell he was considering it, but he finally spoke. "Call it a hunch, but I don't feel we should give up yet."

Perhaps he didn't, but I was getting a headache and I wasn't in the frame of mind to keep trying. Once you get irritated the flow of intuition is disrupted and you'll get nowhere.

"OK I'll try again, but not tonight. I'm exhausted."

He sighed. "I'm sorry it's so difficult for you. I hope all your clients aren't this hard to read for."

I managed a laugh. "No, if they were I wouldn't still be doing it. I've never come across a situation like this before. I'll have a think about what else we can try. Give me a couple of days, and I'll email you. Let you know what I come up with. OK?"

"Yeah that's great. Thanks."

"Goodnight Jamie."

"Goodnight Lori."

We ended the call and I leaned back on my hands, puzzled and not a little pissed off. I couldn't understand why it was proving so hard to get a handle on the situation, but wasn't mentally settled enough to ask my guides.

I did something unusual for me instead - I opened a bottle of wine - and two glasses later I was ready for bed.