

## **Chapter One**

### **Cara**

Chicago is the city of thriving businesses and joy! The place where all your dreams have a chance to make it.

“Yeah right” I thought. Once covid hit two years ago, the whole city shut down and my dreams were gone. I was fresh out of college back then and had saved up enough money to purchase my L.L.C. and take out a business loan. I planned on starting my own catering service and have it progress into my own store. I was excited and ready to take on the challenge of running a business and having something to call my own. I could leave my job, I had to help pay for college, as an assistant at a law firm for the CEO of Higher Justice Corporation.

Of course, the job was amazing, and the CEO of the company was handsome and mouth-watering. Although getting to work close to him was a bonus, this job wasn't my dream. My dream is do pastries and have my name plastered on every newspaper and billboard. I was going to be the youngest person at the age of 21 to own my own business and grow to riches while still doing what I love. All good things come to an end. After covid hit, my loan was put on hold and then rejected along with my L.L.C. All offices were closed and those stimulus check came first over my application to the city for an L.L.C and those riots and lootings downtown and out south made all the loan places close for months. So, I was stuck at my job for the time being. I worked from home for a while and was only called in when my boss had to represent a client in court.

Two years have passed, and the city has gotten better. The vaccines were given, and the mask mandate was slowly beginning to lift. Welcome to the new year of 2022 where I thought my dreams were no longer on hold, but once again I was wrong. The city was short staff, and my loan application was put on hold because the city funds were still not in order. When the funds were in order, I was put on a 'get back to you' list. The same response was said for my L.L.C. I check the status from time to time but no luck.

It's hard to keep hope but luckily, I have my baking to keep me happy. Plus, it could be worse I could be living off of unemployment like most of the city or homeless. Thanks to my boss and him giving us a raise once we came back to work, I was able to afford this amazing two-bedroom apartment in the Hyde Park area.

It is early September, and I am up early than usual to make some Lemon Meringue Cream Puffs with a twist. I finish dipping them in white chocolate and let them dry. I take a quick shower and change into a white blouse and black skinny leg pants with black wedges. I put on some dark eye shadow and clear lip gloss. I comb the right side of my hair, thankful for the other side being shaved. I check myself out in my body mirror and sigh. I needed to make a gym membership to help get rid of this slight chub on my stomach. I have no problem with my butt though, I have been wanting it to be bigger for a while. Slim thickness, yes, but could be a model, no.

I pack my cream puffs in a box and put them in my small bag. I leave the house and catch the bus to the law firm. The one benefit of living in Hyde Park is only having to catch one bus to get Downtown. I enter the law firm and head to my desk. It was a small desk right outside of my boss's office. I place the cream puffs on my desk and see a familiar hand reaching in the box. I smack his hand away for fun.

"Come on...you know I love your desserts. Please Cara." he begs. I laugh at his begging and nod. He takes a puff and moans with pleasure. "Thank God I still go to the gym to stay fit.". This comedian of a coworker is Justin Blake. My best friend since our college days. We hit it off when we both had English 102 since then we have been strong as glue. He recently lost his job due to covid last year and I was able to get him a job here. After giving an amazing speech to our boss, he nodded and he was in, and since then he has become the best Junior Lawyer in the company. He has become our bosses right hand man.

Some believe he has made it to the top because he is white and it would make our bosses company look good, but they are wrong. Justin puts in the work, and he deserves this promotion. I mean none of these workers will stay till midnight to help solve a case like he does. Plus, the number one thriving law firm in the city of Chicago; and it's black owned. So, our boss does not need Justin to make his firm look good.

“Aw, you are so sweet. Here, have another one before I place them in the break room.” I said. He quickly takes another as I watch several females from the data room walk past me. Justin and I check our phones and nod. We both knew it was about that time. When all the females come to our floor around 9, it means our boss is about to walk in. All the females can’t get enough of his looks and come up here every morning to see him. I mean Justin is hot too, but the ladies prefer the chocolate.

The elevator opens and out walks a man who stands at five feet and nine inches. He has light brown skin with amber eyes and long dark brown dreads. The females love him for his goatee and the fact that he looks twenty-five when he’s actually thirty-six. This man is Lance Lawrence. The owner and CEO of Higher Justice Corp. He walks past me in an all-black suit, and I wave. He stares at me for quite some time. I shiver from it. He smiles at me and walks into his office.

“The one benefit of them lifting the mask mandate. Now all the new female employees can’t get enough of his face.” he explains. I smirk at his comment.

“Yeah, but some of these females actually think they have a shot with him. Like just because we can see your face now doesn’t mean he is going to flirt with you. I mean did you see how much makeup Jessica had on?” I said.

“Yes, I did and now I need a natural beauty of a face to get rid of that image. That is why I came to you. The beautiful lady serving the delicious treats.”

“Aww and I love seeing your handsome face with those gorgeous blue eyes and flowing black hair.” I comment. We both laugh at our flirtation. This is why our friendship was great. We could flirt with each other and cross that line without having to worry about catching feelings. *Tap*. I look at the window behind me and Lance was motioning me to come. Justin knew what time it was, and he walks away to his desk.

I walk into his office. The sun shines through his bay window. I see a huge pile of files on his desk. He leans back in his chair. I can see the exhaustion in his eyes. “You should take a secret nap today. You look awful. What happened?” I asked, while dimming the shades.

“The boys are what happened. Yesterday was there last day of summer vacation, so they wanted to have an all-night movie marathon. Luckily, they fell asleep around ten, but I got so caught up in the movies, the next thing I knew it was five in the morning.” He explains. Lance was the father of two ten-year-old twin boys. When I first started working for him two years ago, his boys were a mean mess. They thought they could keep everyone and everything away from their father. They wanted him all to themselves especially since the divorce three years ago.

My first time meeting them was about a year ago, during the depths of covid. They were being home schooled, and I was often there to go over cases with their father. The boys tried to annoy me to death, but little did they know I had a niece who was younger than them and way more of an annoyance. So, they failed. I tuned them out and played a prank on them and then we both pranked their father. After that, the boys never tried to annoy me again. Instead, we hangout when I see them, and I get to see their true colors. They are true sweethearts and are protective of their father.

“Wow, I expect someone of your age to be out like a light. What movie was it?” I said, while turning on the coffee pot. He has a personal one because he gets caught up in his work and ends up working late like Justin.

“Funny. I am not old yet. It was Transformers. The boys love it like I do. So, my eyes stayed glued to the screen. Thanks.” he said, taking the coffee from me. “But they are back at school, and I can finally get some proper sleep since they will be in bed by eight. Now, let’s discuss this load of files on my desk.”

“Yeah, I was looking at those. Either we are behind with cases or I’m about to hear some good news.” I said.

“Both. These cases are back stock from law firms who took too long to handle their case. Some of these cases are covid related while others are company related. We are taking them on to help them out. They are simple cases, so I trust you to hand them out to the Junior lawyers who will win these cases.” he explains. My eyes go wide at his command. Sure, I have been his assistant for two years, but trusting me to pick out the best lawyers to win each case was too much.

"I can see the horror in your face, but I know you can handle this. I mean you and me have been handing out cases left and right when this was done from home last year. You can do this." he expresses. I stare into his eyes and smile. He had so much confidence in me. How could I say no? I look through the files and then I see a red file. I remove it from the pile and hand it to him. Usually, yellow files were for the Junior and orange was for the Senior lawyers while red was for him.

"So, what is this file?" I questioned.

"This one could win me gold and by that, I mean the chance to open up another business on the north side of Chicago. This case is Lincoln vs. University of Chicago. Lincoln is suing the hospital from an incident two years ago."

"When covid first started?"

"Yes, but this is three months into covid. Lincoln father was emitted into the hospital with a bad case of the flu. They kept him overnight and when Lincoln returned to visit, they had placed him in the ICU with covid victims. They diagnosed him with covid and then within a week he died. Here's the twist, they ran test on him the day he entered the hospital and they confirmed he had the flu." He said while sipping his coffee.

"So, if he had only the flu, why emit him to the ICU?" I questioned.

"Turns out he had no insurance to pay for his stay and the hospital was running out of rooms, plus he is also an elderly man and African-American. Lincoln also provided me with details about how his room was given to someone else who only had a broken leg, but this person had insurance and was young too."

"Not to play the race card, but was this person you know..."

"Yes, they were. So, this will be a hard case and I only have three months to gather the facts, but can you imagine winning a case this big against this shady hospital. I mean the University of Chicago may seem like the number one hospital with the most minority workers, but they are still playing the color profile card. They had no

right to send this man to the ICU just because he had no insurance and was older.” He explains.

“Wow, if you win this, it could change everything. I mean it won’t change the hospital, but it will bring more awareness to the people. But how can you prove they tampered with his results?” I pondered.

“On the day Lincoln father passed away he heard yelling coming from one of the doctors. She was quitting on the spot.”

“You think this doctor knew what was really going on that day?” I said while standing with the files. He shakes his head.

“Yes, and all I have to do is find out who she is and see if she will testify against them.” he said.

“Sounds good, but you already know against a high hospital like that, she won’t be enough and what is the goal if you can’t win?” I questioned.

“If I can’t prove that the hospital moved a non-covid patient into the ICU where he caught covid because he had no insurance to pay for his room and was an elder. Then the least this law firm can do is try and get the hospital to pay the client ‘relief’ money because they know if this information got released...”

“Bye, bye new minority patience’s and workers as time goes by.” I finished. He smiles at me and for the first time, I couldn’t help but notice how his eyes glimmered.

“Exactly and if it isn’t bad enough, they are already short staff because most of their workers did not want to get the vaccine including some nurses and doctors. Plus, the client does not want the ‘relief’ money. So, after I talked to her two days ago about my plan B with the ‘relief’ money. She agreed to do it for the justice her father deserves.” He informs. I smile at his plan and then remembered a call from yesterday.

“Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you that Randy from our construction department said your plan to expand the first-floor breakroom was approved by the city.” I said. *‘Funny how the city can approve construction but not a L.L.C. right away’* I thought.

“Great. I will give him a call. I plan on doing some remodeling to the breakroom on the first floor. I want to show my appreciation to my workers and open a small café. Now, all I need to do find is a barista for the drinks and a caterer who can provide food and pastries every morning to afternoon.” he said. I wanted to scream out and take the offer, but he would laugh at my suggestion because he doesn’t know I went to culinary school because I didn’t add it to my resume when I applied here. During that time, I was attending business school and added it to my resume instead.

“Sounds great, considering most of the workers are on the first floor and it will be by the main door.” This building has three floors. When clients come to our law firm and they see we are Downtown, some think we are in a huge, combined building. Little do they know we are actually on the outskirts of Downtown in a three-floor small building; and yes, he owns the whole building. Which is why he was on ‘the man of the year’ urban magazine five years ago because he became the first black man to own a successful law firm and building by the age of twenty-nine. He’s a rich bastard now, but what makes him different is he has a heart. Unlike the other high businesspeople.

“Thank you. I mean I wouldn’t be here without you guys. So, this is my extra thanks, plus the extra raise you all received for coming back to work during covid.” he said. I nod and leave out the office with the strange sensation of lingering eyes.

I go through each of the case files and start to decide which case to give each worker. I decided to hand the car dealership case to Randy. While Sarah can get a simple covid case since she is still new to the firm. I see a Washington vs. Marshal case. This case is about Washington suing Marshal over the destruction of his store for not receiving an item he wanted. Marshal claims he is on medication and a side effect of the drug is outburst and rage. I knew this case had to go to Justin. He loves cases like this and would kill for it.

I was about to get up when a familiar hand goes inside my pastry box. “Hello Carla. How are you today?” I said with a smile. She smiles back at me, and her beauty still blows me away. She didn’t look a day over fifty-nine. It explains why Lance still looked so young for his age. Carla is Lances mother and often stops by to chat with her son and bring him lunch before going to pick up her grandchildren from school. She was

wearing a slim knee length black velvet dress with red bottom heels. Her gray hair was done into box braids. Some people think she is mean because her face is always serious, I use to think the same. I was wrong she is nice and heartwarming to people close to her, including me.

“Better, now that I have one of your delicious treats in my hand. Every time you bring pastries, I can’t help but rush here. I love your treats, Cara. They bring a smile to my face. Never stop baking...You know my son is expanding the breakroom downstairs. This could be your chance, dear.” Carla said while chewing.

“Maybe, but I still want to try and wait for my loan and L.L.C. Plus...” I look at my watch and see I am late for a meeting with one of Lance’s international partners and I still had to pass out the files. “...Sorry Carla, I have to run. Take as many treats as you want. People on the third floor are busy as usual and they end up going to waste.” I said dashing off. I caught a glimpse of her wave and her taking the whole box while going into Lance’s office. Why was there a smirk on her face?



## Twisted Lemon Meringue Cream Puffs

Yields; 3 dozen puffs

Butter, unsalted ½ cup

Water 1 cup

Salt ¼ tsp

Flour 1 cup

Vanilla extract ¼ tsp

4 Eggs

### *Filling*

2 Lemon pudding box (3.5oz)

Heavy Cream 2 cups

Milk 1 cup

Lemon extract ¼ tsp

1 pkg White Almond Bark (*for dipping*)

- ✓ In a medium bowl, mix together the pudding, milk, cream, and extract. Once thickened cover and refrigerate to set for about an hour. Preheat oven to 425. In a large pot, bring water and butter to a rolling boil. Stir in the flour and cook until it turns into a golden paste ball (*weird right*). Use a mixer to combine the eggs one at a time. The texture should be sticky like glue. Stir in the extract. Take a small cookie scoop or a teaspoon and scoop balls onto a cookie pan either greased or with parchment paper. Have them at least 2 inches apart. Place in the oven and bake for 20-25 mins.
- ✓ Let them cool and then take a piping bag (*or a zip-lock bag*) and place your filling in there. Take a toothpick and make a tiny hole at the bottom of the puff. Fill the puff with cream. Now take a microwavable bowl and fill it with the almond bark. Place it on one minute and stir (*do it again if not melted*) Then use a fork

and gently poke the bottom and dip into the chocolate, now let them set until hard.

*Chef Note: This is the twist, the white chocolate will be the meringue on top, plus it's yummiier than any foamy-torched meringue. Enjoy!*

## **Lance**

I feel exhausted from last night. My boys wanted to do a movie marathon to end the last day of summer vacation. How could I say no? Kyle and Kevin are wonderful children. They never put up a fuss unless it's over dessert and they are excelling in school. Plus, they were calm during the pandemic when they had to stay in the house or have to wear a mask outdoors. I rub my eyes while on the elevator. I knew when this door opened all my female employees would stare at me.

The attention is nice when wanted but every day was annoying. I don't know what they see in me, but I can't lose my calm demeanor over it. I say hello to all my workers. I tend not to smile when saying hello because I was never a fan of my smile. It looked goofy to me like the character Goofy from Mickey Mouse. Still the ladies didn't mind, they found my no-smile enticing. I walk past my assistant Cara, and she is talking with Justin. Those two are always close at work. People would mistake them as a couple if seen together.

Cara and I lock eyes for a brief moment. Those dark brown eyes she calls 'creepy', but I find them wonderful. She waves at me, and I feel my whole face do a three-sixty and I smiled at her while waving. Why the hell did I smile? I walk into my office and watch Justin and her finish talking. I feel this weird sensation go through my body when they talk.

Cara has been my assistant for two years and she was the one who convinced me to hire Justin when he lost his job at his old law firm. I have to admit I was questionable of him at first because he was only a year older than Cara. In under a year, he has worked harder than any of my employee's since covid began. So, I promoted him to Junior lawyer, and he is now my right-hand man as well. Since then, I started to take Cara opinions more seriously. She has proven to me that her words and ideas are promising. Especially when we had to work from home last year, she stepped up big time and my business wouldn't be so organized without her.

In my eyes she is more than an assistant, I believe that with time and with her by my side we can make this firm an even better place. So, when I motioned her into my office and told her to assign these cases to the other lawyers, I saw the fear in her face. I can tell she wanted to decline, but after I expressed my confidence in her choices, she nodded. After telling her about my 'special' case and she told me about Randy, she left my office. As she walked away, I couldn't help but stare at her walk. Cara walk was different than most. Her walk was not of a model but of a woman who is walking through the flames of hell with confidence.

*"I wonder what she is keeping secret from me"* I thought. I begin to work on my case. I call the doctors from the hospital and after telling them my reason for calling involved a lawsuit on the company, I got the information I need from the HR department. I found out her name was Linda Woods, and she was the head doctor in charge of the ICU department two years ago. I gather her contact information and decide to call. It goes to voicemail, and I leave a message.

My office door opens and my mother walks in. She is looking radiant as ever in her new clothes. She has never looked so happy in a new pair of red bottoms. It's the least I could do as her son because I would not be where I am today without her. My childhood wasn't perfect. As a child growing up, we were poor. The only place we could afford to live was in the hood. The bad part of the community where drug dealers and gang lords lived. Even then my mother still had to work two jobs to support my little brother and me. I would often wait as a child at the end of our block so my mother wouldn't have to walk alone. When she worked the night shift. It was my way of keeping her safe.

Our father was in and out of our lives. He was a mechanic of a small business and worked many hours but refused to help our mother. Then he stops showing up all together. We hardly had proper clothes to wear or a decent meal, but we made do. It wasn't until I saw my mother hit the floor with exhaustion and almost suffer a heart attack, to know I needed to help her somehow. So, I turned to the streets. I joined a drug dealing gang and made money by selling drugs and delivering drugs to other crack houses.

The money was coming in fast, and it was enough to provide more food for the house and better clothes for my brother. My mother wondered where the money was coming from, but since I was fifteen at the time, I told her I got a part time job after school. I kept this double life from her and my brother for as long as I could until I slipped up.

My brother was walking home from school one day and he caught me selling drugs to a junkie. I didn't see him though. When I got home that night my mother was sitting at the table with tears down her face. I saw a bag on the floor near the door.

"No son of mine will live in this house and sell drugs! Either you will stop, or you can leave, Lance." she screamed.

"Mom, I can't watch you struggle anymore with the rent, the bills, and the clothing. You need help! I don't want to come home again and find you on the floor near death!" I yelled with a tear going down my face. My mother looks at me with more tears. She steps closer to me and embraces me.

"I know I am pushing myself too hard. I was dumb to do that, knowing you were getting old enough to catch on...but Lance, this is not the way. You are a smart boy with a caring heart to look out for me, but that is my job. Look you have to believe me when I say a change will come for us. You just have to be patient, and if you can't be then you have to leave. I will not watch my son get gunned down when things turn bad." she said. We look each other in the eyes, and I sigh. I grab my bag off the floor and walk out of the door. "Lance!" she yells.

"I'm sorry Mom, but I need to do what's right to atone for my sins." I said before closing the door. I never looked back. I knew if I wanted to leave my gang it would take time and I couldn't risk my mom getting involved to help. So, since then I lived at a homeless shelter for almost a year. Missing out on all my high school activities because I continued my education online. The plan was to go missing for as long as I could and make the gang leader think I was dead. I secretly still kept in contact with my brother to see how mom was doing.

Another year had passed, and I was close to achieving my high school diploma. I heard from the streets my current gang leader was arrested by the police. I couldn't believe what I heard and decided to finally leave this shelter. I tried to go back and amend to my mother, but when I reached our old block our apartment building was boarded up. I asked some of the neighbors next door and they told me the building had lost power almost a year ago. The owner of the building was sent to court for lack of management and each of the tenants were awarded ten thousand dollars as compensation by the City of Chicago.

I call my brother and I found out that my mother was able to buy a condo complex in the Beverly community. I was happy for her and wondered was this the patience she was talking about? I go to her new home and find my brother waiting outside. He cut his dreads off and dyed it a lighter shade of brown. I thought he would hate me for leaving him, but he gave me a big hug. He points up and I see my mother standing on the balcony. She sees me and immediately runs down the stairs. I run to her, and we embrace, tears running down our face. "Thank God you are home!" she expresses.

We walk inside and her new home was amazing. It was roomie and the best part; the heat was on. "I am sorry I was gone for so long. I needed to stay off the grid so you and my brother wouldn't get hurt. I was the best seller after all." I explained. She shakes her head.

"I know, but no more of this. You are finally home and that is all that matters. Don't you ever leave home again unless it's for college." she said. I laugh at her and for once it felt good to see her smile.

### *Present day*

"Hey Mom. What brings you here?" I asked. She sits down and opens her purse. She hands me a black card.

"This was found in my mailbox. Do you want to explain?" she said. I smirk at her and all she does is roll her eyes. "Listen son, I appreciate all the love and wealth you have shown me since hitting it big, but this is where I draw the line."

“But...”

“No ‘buts’ Lance. I am a grown woman who can fend for herself, or did you forget who raised you? Besides I am fine with the money I have from retirement and being a ‘normal’ grandma.” she confessed. I take the black card and place it in the shredder.

“You say that, but you are rocking those red bottoms.” I laughed. She giggles at my statement. She models them for me, and I take ‘fake’ photos with my fingers.

“Well, I can never say no to new shoes...”

“Or clothes.” I finished. I see a white box in her arms and was going to ask about them, until she brought up my little brother.

“I know you two have not talked in a while...but he could use the black card. You and I both know his student loan debt is climbing.” she said.

“True, but he only has the debt because he lost his full ride scholarship for playing around instead of focusing on his studies. Then when I tried to help him the first time, he blew the money on a weed subscription and his back rent on his ‘man condo’.” I said with irritation.

“That is true, but he is different now. He has kept a stable job for almost two years, and he has cut back his weed intake. Plus, you know if that incident never would have happened when he was a teenager you would not be where you are now.”. My mom has a valet point. I would not be the man I am now without my brother.

When he was sixteen. I had just finished my associate degree in general education. I couldn’t decide on a major, so I took my time to get this degree in basic education. It wasn’t until my brother was man-handled on top of a police car and accused of robbing a gas station, I decided to pursue law. The police were doing what we all know best which is racial profiling. They assumed he was the suspect because the original suspect was black, and we lived not too far from the gas station.

I approach the police car and try to convince them he was not the suspect. They did not listen, and they placed him in the back of the car. In that moment I knew what I needed to do. I called all his friends and got proof he was at the basketball court with them after school. I had one set of proof, but I needed one more piece of evidence to make my finding official. I talked to my mom and asked if she still kept our phones tracked. I had my own phone now, but my brother didn't.

"You are a genius. Well of course you are a genius, Honor Student. You should be a lawyer. Now let's go free your brother from holding!" she said. Even though she was joking, this situation made me know my true major. We went to the station with one of his friends and my mom showed proof of his whereabouts with her phone. The police apologize and release my brother. Since that day, I applied for scholarships and after waiting a year. I got accepted into John Marshall Law school with a full ride.

It was a challenge to keep up my grades while working a full-time job. Some days I wanted to give up and finish working my simple nine to five job as an assistant manager at the Hilton Hotel. I shook off those feelings and pursued forward. Then I met, my now ex-wife, Jasmine Thomas. Back then she was a delight to be around. She saw me struggling with my studies and she helped me. We built a strong bond or at least I thought. When we graduated law school, we both got married and had Kevin and Kyle. I noticed through their infant days she wasn't around always working. She would take on extra shifts to help 'pay' the bills. I knew she was lying because my new job at this amazing law firm paid the bills.

Then when I made it big with my own company, we had no bills. So, why was she never around? We stop being intimate for a year before our divorce. I found out the truth about her 'late shifts' and discovered she was out partying at clubs and bars and worse of all in another relationship with her CEO at her workplace. I hired an investigator to discover this information. She was no longer seen as my wife; I believe she hasn't been since the boys were one. We were just having a 'good time' in her eyes until our kids got in the way. I generally loved her and after getting a divorce, it took a while to get over the betrayal.



So, I threw myself into my work and since then I have grown void to what love feels like in my life. For now, the boys are my importance or at least I thought until a few years ago and she walked into my life. The moment I saw her my heart skipped a beat. A beat I haven't felt since Jasmine and I desperately wanted it to stop.

My mother leaves the office with the mysterious white box, and I finish my work by calling Randy for the construction start date. My coworkers have made this place more successful, and I want to thank them for it. Now, all I needed to do was find a good pastry caterer and a barista. I check the web and start making calls for future interview and taste testing. I look at the clock and saw it was lunch time. *Knock.*

Cara comes in with a Subway sandwich. She sits in my chair with her laptop.

"Here, I know you have been in here like a zombie with only coffee so I got you a sandwich from the place that isn't five dollars anymore. An Italian meat sub with herb and cheese bread." she said.

"Thanks. How'd you know my favorite sandwich?" I asked.

"I remember your mother bringing you this sandwich a few weeks ago. No offense, but for a man with soundproof doors, they don't work to well." she laughed. I smirked at her comment and open my sandwich. "Oh, by the way, Wong said he will be in contact with you soon about the merger. Since our law firm is doing well during covid, he will be doubling his investment too". Wong is one of my investors for the company. He is a young Asian American who started his own financial firm in Tokyo, Japan. When I first started this business and wanted to expand. I took a risk by trying to find investors.

Investors can be a win or lose situation because it all depends on the advancement of your business. If your business isn't up to par then investors will pull, their funds right away. Then comes bankruptcy. Luckily for me I was blessed with finding an investor who believed in my firm and donated money. Wong and Lewis were my lifeline and since then I have not let them down and hopefully I never will.

“That is great! This merger will improve our client population. We can get more minorities besides African Americans who will bring this firm to the top. Having an Asian lawyer here will be amazing. We can help more people this way who other law firms turn away due to a language barrier.” I explained. I see her pull out a meatball sub while nodding. I can see a small smile form on the corner of her lips. I stare for too long and she notices.

“Do I have something on my face?” she asked.

“What? Oh, no, you don’t. I’m sorry I had dazed out for a moment. So, besides the meeting, did you hand out the folders?” I questioned.

“I did...but I am stuck on one case file. It’s the Adam vs. Lee case. Adam is suing Lee over damages to his car. When Lee had a red light, he continued to drive through it. Lee claims the streetlights were broken and he had the right of way when driving. Adam did not.” she said. I tell her to let me see the file and she nods. Seconds later she returns, and I observe the file. It was a simple case and when I look at Adam’s background, I knew who to give it to.

“Give it to Harry.” I answered. I watch her eyes go wide. “How are you so sure?”

“Easy. I looked at the background of Adam and read more into the case.” I said.

“Okay, I did the same. So, what did I miss Mr. Lawrence?” Cara saying mister to me made me shiver. Everyone in the offices calls me Mr. Lawrence, but her calling me that filled me with dislike. I wanted to say something months ago but if this name made her comfortable, who was I to reject.

“You missed Adam witness. His stepfather who is Hispanic and cannot speak English was in the car with him. So, if we want to win this case then we need him to have a translator which would be Harry. He can speak fluent Spanish.” I show her my findings and she slap her forehead.

“Wow...and I am your assistant why again? Thanks Lance... I mean Mr. Lawrence.” I snicker at her saying my name and nod.

"You can call me Lance if you like. I mean you have been an amazing assistant these past two years." I hand her the file and she grab her lunch.

"I'll think about it. Call me if you need me." she said leaving the office.

After a good eight-hour shift, I decided to call it a day and head home. My kids should be home and finishing their homework with their grandma. The drive home was short because I lived in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. I pull up to my small manor in a private community and opened the door.

"Dad!" Kyle and Kevin yelled. We embrace and I give them both head rubs.

"It's almost time to get your dreads retwisted. So, how was school?" I asked.

"Horrible! Kevin and I are in different classes this year." Kyle said.

"Yeah Dad, can't you talk to the school and let them change me over to Kyle class?" he asked. These two were close to one another. Which is part of the reason they had little friends. They have clung to each other so much, that some of the kids felt awkward being near them. They were too overprotective of the other and they needed to let their walls down.

"No, I will not boys. Now, listen I am not doing this because I don't love you but it's the complete opposite. I am doing this because I love you and you two need to grow out of your shell. You two have been close since birth. Plus, you will always have home and recess to spend time together. But now is the time to make friends and learn what it is like to have new people in your life that can make you even happier than you two make each other." I spoke. Both of them look at each other with sad faces. It breaks my heart to make them sad, but they need to learn the hard lessons of life. I may be a rich dad, but I will not spoil them.

"Okay." they said. They walk to their room and I head to my own. I change into some gray sweatpants and a black tank. I let my dreads hang as I head to the kitchen. "Mom, you didn't have to cook dinner." I said. She was wearing an apron and flipping some pancakes.

“Oh, I don’t mind. Besides the boys were sad about being in separate classes so I made them breakfast for dinner. Their favorite: plus, they didn’t get a chance to eat breakfast this morning anyway.” she explained. I smile at her kindness. I bring my brief case to the counter while looking at a familiar white box.

“By the way, what’s in the box?” I asked. I was too busy looking at my case to see my mother smile.

“There are some Lemon Meringue Cream Puffs in there. One of your workers made them and they are amazing. They went to pastry and baking school and has their own side hustle too. You should try one.” she said. I was reading so deep that all I heard was cream puffs and pastry school.

“Interesting...” I mumbled. After saying those words, my mother knew I wasn’t listening anymore. I feel my phone ring and I see it is Linda number. I motion for my mother to turn the music down. I answered.

“Hi Mr. Lawrence, I received your voicemail, and I am afraid I will have to decline being a witness in your case against the hospital.” she said. My face falls from her choice but I needed to know ‘why’.

“Oh, I completely understand but may I ask why?” The phone went silent for a second.

“Trust me I want to help you and bring justice to the family, but I started a new job at another hospital, and I can’t risk losing my job. I have bills to pay and a child to support. Even though the University of Chicago was wrong for their deeds, they are still a huge hospital. If word gets out how I betrayed them then it could risk, my new job and they will believe...”

“You will rat them out too. I understand your concern Ms. Woods. I do, but don’t you believe you should be able to work for a hospital without having to live in fear of betraying them just for noticing a wrong and wanting to fix it? I know you do not want to risk your job. I have children as well and before I made it big, I was struggling too.

Although your job is important, is there any way you can reconsider?" I said. I see the boys and my mother eating dinner and I couldn't help but envy them.

Everyone else got to leave work at work while I had to bring it home. Sure, I am thankful for the business success, but I do miss the family time. "I want to help but the money. It took me so long to find this job. This job is perfect and during covid they played it clean with their patients. No dirty work just to make room..."

"What if there is a way for you to testify and your job will not be harmed in any way? I know you do not know me, but I promise you I will not make you lose your job. I want justice for this family, same as you, and if you let me, I can discuss our plan to win the case if you like?" The phone goes quiet again and I look at my phone to make sure she didn't hang up.

"I'm listening." she answered. I tell her about my plan, and we discuss various tasks to complete so her job would not be harmed. We talked on the phone for almost two hours, and I was famished. I absentmindedly grabbed a puff from the box and my whole conversation with Linda went blank. The flavor of this pastry was unbelievable. The outer exterior was flakey yet soft and the coating of the white chocolate wasn't too thick which was perfect. The sweet chocolate complements the tangy yet sweet filling. Usually, a meringue would mean this cream puff would have an egg foam torched top, but this version was better.

I could tell the filling was a pudding mix but this person found a way to enhance the mix and make it their own and even better, addicting. I needed to know which one of my workers made this dessert. I needed a pastry caterer for the café, and they would be perfect. "Yes, we will talk more about this tomorrow Ms. Woods. Have a goodnight." I hang up and head to the guest room. When my mom was too lazy to go home after tucking in the twins, she would stay the night in the guest room. I knock on the door and walk in.

"Mom, you have to tell me who made those puffs. They are amazing and unique. You know I need a caterer for the café for the morning and this person could be the

one.” I asked. I watch her smile while folding her clothes. It was the kind of smile that told me to ‘sit down’, and I should have listened.

“It was Cara dear.” I almost lose my stance while leaning against the doorway.

“You are lying. I have known her for two years and she has never brought a pastry to me.”

“I am not son. Plus, she told me that you told her you do not like sweets. Which is true, so she never offered you any and instead gave them to her coworkers or sits them in the breakroom. Which you never enter as well.” she answered. I think about her words and slap my own head. I did tell Cara I hated sweets and the breakroom had too many female eyes. I felt uncomfortable trying to eat my lunch in there.

“Damn you are right. If I knew her treats tasted like that, my hate for sweets would be over. I mean Mom she has talent and I have had treats from around the world on business trips.”

“I know son. Which is why I wish the city would not have put her on the hold list to obtain her L.L.C and loan.” she mentioned. “*L.L.C. and loan?*” I thought. I close the door behind me with a serious face. A face I haven’t made in such a long time. Could this be the fire I mentioned when she would walk?

“Tell me everything.” I said.

It was the next day and after dropping my kids off, I went into work. I greeted all the female workers as usual. I pass Cara desk and motion for her to come to my office. She follows me inside and sits. I make the both of us a cup of coffee. I remember she liked a lot of sugar and cream with a hint of caramel. I preferred a simple coffee.

“You remembered. Thank you.” She said taking a sip.

“Of course. How could I forget after the mess you made by spilling the sugar on your first day? It was funny *Chef Cara*.” She nearly chokes on her coffee.

“How did...”

“I must say you have an amazing Instagram page. It could use a bit more work, but it is still good. My mother bought home your cream puffs and I tasted one. Cara it was amazing, and you know I don’t have a sweet tooth. Your puff made me want to forget that problem.” I explained. Cara is still staring at me. This woman had strong eye contact and it made me shiver. I shake it off and continue.

“She told me about your rejected L.L.C and loan and I am sorry. Which is why I want to help you reach your dreams and offer you the job of head caterer when the café opens. So, what do you say? Would you like to bring ‘Miniature Delights’ to Higher Justice Corporation?” I spoke. I think she stopped breathing.