

SAMPLE COPYEDIT

Part One: Setting the Stage

Chapter One

November

Silence is golden, was the first thought in Carmen's mind when the door to the conference room finally closed. After three hours of being hemmed up in a meeting over the future of her company, she was glad to get some relief. The meeting had lasted longer than usual because it was the last one she would attend before her maternity leave.

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Carmen was nervous about the break although she wanted and needed it. She trusted her team with the company, but what she didn't trust was the competition that was on the rise.

Everyone at Flame, Inc. was aware of Mantra Designs, a California-based company that was making headlines in the fashion world. The numbers that company was putting up were too close to the numbers Flame was putting up, at least in Carmen's opinion. There were a slew of things she wanted to do to give Flame an edge, but the timing wasn't right. Carmen believed that her ideas would have to be put on hold until the New Year.

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Just as she walked to the back of the conference room, she heard the sound of someone joining her in the room. She had expected more time to herself, but obviously, she wasn't going to get it.

"Mrs. Kane?" the person asked.

The voice behind her was male, professional sounding, and not recognizable. The latter prompted Carmen to turn around. She stared at the man in front of her, raising her brow. He looked to be of Hispanic descent and wasn't one of her employees. "Yes, I am Mrs. Kane," she

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told him, “Can I help you?” she asked, holding out her hand. He didn’t shake it, choosing to place a large manila envelope inside of her palm.

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“I’m here to drop off a letter from the law offices of Stern & Gomez.”

Carmen bit her lip. She was very aware of the law firm and knew that Gomez was Jay’s lawyer. For some reason, her mind was telling her that Jay was suing her, she just didn’t know why. Without further ado, she ripped the envelope open. “What is this?” she asked the process server as she pulled the papers out. He ignored her, leaving the room. “What is it not,” she muttered as she glanced over the papers. “Mr. Santiago *is* suing me.”

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Carmen threw the papers down onto the conference table as she tried to control her anger. The lawsuit had come out of nowhere. She had spoken to Jay on numerous occasions, and he had never hinted that he was suing her. He also had never questioned Rakim’s paternity aside from when Kane had first presented his test results. Now that he had placed a lawsuit in her hands, Carmen knew Jay was up to something. She thought to call him, but she needed to calm down first. If she didn’t, she would only feed him a mouthful of expletives. He may have deserved it, but she didn’t need anyone hearing a screaming match.

Carmen picked up the court papers and went back into her office where she hid them in her drawer. Only minutes away from five o’clock, she grabbed her purse and headed out of Flame. Traffic was always busy at the five o’clock hour, but somehow her driver, Donnie, had managed to be on time. His presence told her that she was only minutes away from being in the comfort of her home. Though she was upset over the lawsuit, she gave him a slight smile as she walked towards the limo.

When her cell phone sounded in her coat pocket, Carmen knew her drive home may be delayed. She held up her right hand, signaling to Donnie that she was going to be a minute. She

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would have taken the call in the car, but there wasn't a limo partition. Donnie was her regular driver, but she never liked to discuss anything too personal around him. Therefore, when she noticed that it was her father calling, she decided to answer while he waited in the car.

"Daddy," she greeted, taking a quick look up at the sky. "It's a little gloomy here," she told him. "How's the weather in Texas?"

Carmen expected to hear a response, but all she got was silence. She was about to say his name once again, but he finally spoke. His voice sounded troubled, which caught her attention more than the words he was saying.

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"I would've called you earlier," he began, "but I had to get my mind together. You won't believe who paid me a visit yesterday." He didn't give her a chance to reply before he continued. "It was a Puerto Rican gentleman by the name of Jay Santiago. He was even carrying a briefcase."

Carmen felt her anger escalate to new heights. She had just learned that Jay was suing her and now her father was telling her that he had paid him a visit. More than ever, she knew that Jay had something up his sleeve. Her father lived all the way in Texas, which meant that Jay had made a special trip. "You know," she replied, "that doesn't surprise me. It would have if he hadn't sent a process server. Did he tell you during his visit that he's suing me?"

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Lotus' eyes closed when he heard his daughter's words. If Carmen knew about the lawsuit then it was possible that Kane did as well. And he worried that the case would be just another wound in their marriage. "I won't lie to you, Peaches," he told her. "He did mention it. He also mentioned that he wanted a warehouse. Now, I know you co-own Blue Magic. Are you two working on something else together?"

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Carmen rolled her eyes in agitation. She didn't have one single clue as to why Jay would want a warehouse. He didn't need it for Blue Magic or his other businesses. In her opinion, Jay was embarking on something new that he hadn't shared with anyone. "Daddy, I'm being honest," she said, trying not to let her frustration show. "I don't really talk to Jay. We're not on the best of terms because of the break-up. If we do talk, then it's about Blue Magic and our kids. I don't know what he has going on."

"Well, I guess we're in the same boat," he replied with a sigh. "What about Rakim's paternity? What are you going to do about that?"

Carmen grunted as she turned to face Flame. She stared up at the high-rise building, planting her eyes on her office window where she had stashed the court papers. "I'm going to let this one play out in court. Jay will do his test, and Kane will do his. If it comes out in Jay's favor then I'm going to do what's right. I will make sure that Jay has a relationship with his son. I will also change Rakim's name."

Carmen took her eyes off the window, staring back into the street. It was then that she noticed the white limousine slowly pulling up behind her own. She could hear her father speaking to her on the other end, but the car had taken her attention away from the conversation. Once the back window of the limo rolled down she interrupted her father and said, "Well, well, well, Jay has decided to pay me a visit, too. Daddy, let me call you back. I need to see what this bastard wants." Carmen hung up the phone without bothering to wait for her father say to goodbye. Now that she had the chance, she was going to unleash her frustration on its source. She walked towards his limo and waved his driver away when he tried to open the door for her. Carmen grabbed the door handle herself and pushed her way inside. "So you know we need to talk," she blurted, nearly sitting on Jay as she got into the limo.

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Jay sat back in his seat as he caught Carmen's tone. For her to have an attitude, he knew that the process server had gotten in contact with her. He didn't want an argument, but he did want Carmen to know that he was serious. From the way she was looking at him, he knew they were about to have it out. "You first," he told her.

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At that moment, Carmen wished that she had the papers with her. If she did, she would have torn them up right in his face. Instead, she ranted, "You are one sick motherfucker, you know that? Out of all the meetings we've had, the checkups you've come to, you never said one word about Rakim's paternity. Now, you want to file a lawsuit. Did you read about Mantra Designs and said, 'Hey, let me find another way to fuck up Carmen's day?' Tell me, Jay, what is really going on?"

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Jay's reply would have been filled with just as many curse words if Carmen's anger wasn't a turn-on. He smiled evilly at her as she continued to fuss.

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"Then, my father calls me from Texas to tell me that you visited him. He said you asked him for a warehouse. Now, if I remember correctly, and it was like twenty fuckin' years ago, you asked him for a warehouse before. Is it for the same purpose?"

Jay's eyes narrowed as he realized just how much Lotus had revealed. He never expected him to tell Carmen about the warehouse. Not wanting her to know just yet, he decided to change the conversation back to Rakim. "Number one," he said, sternly, "if *I* remember correctly, your husband can't have kids. If he hasn't produced a child in twenty years then I'm certain that one night of fuckin' isn't going to make a difference. I let it slide for a long time because I thought that maybe a miracle had happened, but I'm not anymore. God knows and I know that I'm Rakim's father. Number two," he continued, "I did ask your father for a warehouse, and no was his final answer so we don't have to discuss that any further."

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Carmen hated the tone he was using. It was firm yet he wasn't displaying the same **angst** that she was. He wouldn't give her an argument back. "I have a very strong feeling that you're doing this because I broke up with you. If you felt like Rakim was yours then you should have done a test after Kane presented his. Wouldn't you want your child?"

Commented [CDH1]: Angst means anxiety. Do you mean anger here?
If so you could combine this and the next sentence to read...It was firm yet he wasn't displaying the same anger that she was given that he wouldn't argue back. Or...given that he wouldn't engage her in arguing.

Jay agreed with her. He should have done the test a long time ago. If he had, **he** wouldn't have missed some of Rakim's milestones. Now, after they went to court, he would **have** to play catch up. "I do want my child, which is why I'm going to **just** let this play out in court. Do you agree?"

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"**I** most definitely **agree!**" Carmen shouted. She set her purse down in between them, readjusting herself. Nyla was starting to kick, making her position rather uncomfortable. "If you win, you'll get what you rightfully deserve. If you lose, oh, I suggest you run back to that damn island. I got enough shit **written about me**, **on** the blogs already."

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Jay snickered as he reached his hand out to touch her stomach. She pushed it away, but he **reached** out once more. This time, she allowed him to feel Nyla's kicks. "Speaking of winning, I want to **voice** another business proposition. We both know that I can't do this drug shit forever. It caught up with me once before and I want to bow out before it does again. I've been **birthing** a new idea."

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Commented [CDH3]: Instead of voice I suggest you use share or discuss. The sentence will read better. People don't typically voice a business proposition, rather they share or discuss it with someone.

Commented [CDH4]: Same thing here. I know what you are trying to say but the sentence would read better if instead of birthing you used conjure or think. Conjuring up... or thinking of...

Carmen pushed his hands away from her in disbelief. There he was admitting that he was suing her and in the same breath, he was asking her to team up with him. The last thing **she** wanted to do was go into business with him. It was bad enough that her name was on Blue Magic. "Have you been getting high? Why would I go into business with you if **you have** a fuckin' lawsuit hanging over my head?"

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“I realized,” Jay began, ignoring her question, “that you were the greatest asset that the cartel had. We never had a girl in the crew or at least it wasn’t known. The whole time I thought it was Carlos who was stacking paper, but it was you. I see now that we work well together. be it legal or illegal. Your father turned down my offer, but he didn’t have anything to lose or gain. As for you, if you help me, I’ll drop the lawsuit.”

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Carmen’s eyes narrowed in anger as she realized Jay’s game. He wanted her hand in his business in exchange for a lawsuit. The thought of it all made her chuckle. Jay was definitely pulling out all of the stops. It made her wonder what it was that he was working on. “Drop the lawsuit? Well, it’s obvious that Rakim’s paternity isn’t as important to you as getting my signature on your new project. That was a little low for even you to stoop.”

Although Carmen made it seem as if she had him figured out, Jay knew that she didn’t. If she had fully read the court papers then she would have known that she wasn’t the only person he was suing. He had named her husband as well. “Don’t get it twisted, Carm. I’m doing the paternity test. I just won’t take you to court. I’ll still sue your husband. Right now, though, I want to get back to my proposal. If you really think about it, you’ve always been my Bonnie. Blue Magic was my idea, but without you, it wouldn’t exist. We work well together. Our restaurant is evidencece of that. Our kids are, too.”

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Carmen shook her head at how Jay continued to look past her anger. He kept trying to coax her as if she hadn’t just been handed a lawsuit. A large part of her wanted to slap him for his insensitivity, but she didn’t. Instead, she grabbed the door handle. She couldn’t sit there any longer and listen to anything else he had to say. He had turned her entire day upside down and it was getting worse the longer she stayed in his presence. Before she closed the door, she leaned back in to reply to his question. “My answer is no,” she told him. “Not just no, but hell fuckin’

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no.” Not bothering to wait for his reaction, she walked back to her limousine, got inside, and directed Donnie to take her home.

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Jay grabbed his seat belt, putting it back on. He watched patiently as Carmen’s limo merged in with the rest of the traffic. He then ordered his driver, Gus, to do the same. As he started to think things over, he realized that Carmen was the last lifeline he had when it came to his project. Other than her father, he didn’t see himself collaborating with anyone else. He had no choice, but to convince Carmen to help him. He had done it before with Blue Magic so he was certain that he could do it again.

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Carmen would never admit it to him, but he knew she loved diamonds just as much as he did. If she hadn’t left so abruptly, he would have told her more about his plans. So he knew he had to meet up with her again. The question of where was stuck in his mind. If he asked her to dinner, he knew she would say no. Approaching her at work wasn’t always the best option either. Still, he needed to do something to show Carmen that he was serious.

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He ended up deciding to go with his first thought, which was to give her a bag of diamonds. If he did that, he knew the tables would turn. Carmen would become inquisitive about his project and possibly want to know more. The sooner she had the diamonds, the better. He made a mental note to put together her gift as soon as he got home. Once that was settled, his mind could move on to other things. The first being the meeting at Blue Magic he was having in the morning.

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