

Justice Inc

Chapter 1

April 2019

Rev. Jamaal Wilkes leaned back in the chair and placed his feet on the mayor's desk as he looked around the room. The office was decorated with the requisite photos of the mayor with other politicians, celebrities, and athletes, as well as signed jerseys and other sports memorabilia. "Really, Chuck, you need to update your office. Your furniture looks like it has been here since the Depression. And those drapes make this place look like a Tijuana whorehouse. But I digress. So, what's it going to be, Chuck?"

Mayor Charles Benton took a deep breath, put his head in his hands, and closed his eyes. Jamaal was the only person on Earth that he wouldn't punch in the nose for calling him Chuck. And Jamaal knew it. "Jamaal," he said softly, "we go back a long way. You know I'd do anything for you, but I can't do this."

Jamaal shook his head. "Don't say that you'd do anything for me, and then refuse to do something for me. What is that called? Oh yeah, hypocrisy. After all I have done for you over, what has it been, twenty years? You have forgotten that I was the one who got you into this office. Regardless, you're goddamn straight that you'll do anything for me. Maybe you need to reconsider your position." Jamaal didn't say it, but his tone conveyed "or else."

Charles opened his eyes and glared at the man he had essentially raised as one of his own. One mistake over twenty years ago, and Jamaal had never let him forget about it. In recent years, the younger man had used their secret like a leash to control his surrogate father. Charles knew he would never have had a successful political career without Jamaal, but every man has limits as to what he can tolerate. Jamaal was pushing him to the edge. What Jamaal wanted him to do would be political suicide, and Charles had his eyes set on a higher office. The mayor shook his head.

"You know I support what you want to accomplish, but now simply isn't the time," Charles said slowly. "It wouldn't be politically acceptable. Half the council fights damn near every proposal I make simply because I made it. And this campaign would make the fight over zoning back in the 1990s look like a stroll through the park. Houston has come a long way from the good-old boy network that ran the city for decades, but the city isn't ready for what you propose. Hell, other than Seattle, San Francisco, and maybe Austin, it would be dead on arrival almost anywhere else in the country. These kinds of policies take time to implement. You must plant the seeds, nurture them to maturity, and then you can reap what you have sown." The mayor thought for a moment. "You are trying to hit a home run when a series of singles will net the same result and be easier to achieve. You need to curb your enthusiasm and be patient."

Jamaal laughed. "Sometimes your grammar is simply atrocious. That is a really lame excuse, Chuck, even for you. You need to grow a pair. Need I remind you that you have a re-election campaign coming up in seven months? Just because you are the incumbent doesn't guarantee re-election. Look at the first Bush. You have a couple of serious challengers, and you are going to need every penny that I can direct your way. That old lady who's running might be more appreciative of my efforts. And she might even be open to my proposal. After all, she keeps shouting that you

aren't progressive enough, and she is right. What's her name? Martha Wilkerson? Yes, that's it. Maybe I'll call her and offer my services."

Charles struggled to control his anger. He desperately wanted to beat Jamaal to a pulp, but he knew that attempting to do so would be a mistake. First, it wouldn't look very good for the mayor to get into a fistfight with a visitor to his office. And second, he had every reason to believe that he'd come out on the worse end of a brawl. Though he was in decent shape for a fifty-five-year-old, Jamaal was a black belt in Brazilian Ju Jitsu. Charles had been a Golden Gloves champion in Houston many years prior, but he was now a middle-aged man. And he had the stomach bulge and graying hair to prove it. No, trying to beat the daylights out of Jamaal would be dumber than supporting his proposal.

"I'm not saying that I would never support your plan. I just don't think this is the right time. It will be very controversial and contentious, and it isn't a brilliant strategy to make radical proposals leading up to an election." The mayor thought for a moment. "But once I get re-elected—"

"If you get re-elected," Jamaal interjected. "Don't count your chickens...."

Charles ignored the attempt to anger him further. "When I am re-elected, I can do a lot more. I won't be able to run for mayor again because of term limits. I can support you then and not worry about the political fallout. I won't be running again until the gubernatorial race in 2026, and if your plan blows up in our face, voters will have forgotten about it by then. The average voter has the memory of a rock."

Jamaal frowned and narrowed his eyes. "Sometimes I think that you have no goddamn sense at all. If you made this your main campaign promise, you'd get the vote of every renter and poor person in the city. That's nearly half of the people in Houston. And you'd probably get most of the votes from those guilt-ridden white progressives. Yes, it's audacious. But greatness only comes to those who will take bold steps. And if you proposed this now, that Wilkerson bitch wouldn't have anything to complain about. Hell, she might even drop out of the race and endorse you."

Charles shook his head and looked out his window towards Tranquillity Park. He chuckled to himself at the irony. The mood in his office was anything but tranquil. That was usually the case when Jamaal visited. Charles could see a small encampment of homeless people in the park, even though it was illegal to camp in public parks. I'm going to have to get on the police chief's ass, he thought. Those people should be rounded up and moved somewhere where I can't see them. "There is no justification for taking such actions. How would I sell it to voters? If I had made this a part of my campaign from the beginning, it might be easier. But there is no way to make a strong case at this time. I'd need something to justify such a drastic action at this point in the game. If I supported your proposal without adequate justification, I'd look crazier than Sheila Jackson Lee."

"That's chickenshit," Jamaal shouted. "The justification is that rents are soaring and have been for years. Homelessness is at an all-time high. Hell, people are camping out in the park in front of City Hall. And nobody likes their landlord. If you put the reins on those greedy sons-a-bitches, you'd be a hero. This is such an easy sell that my dog could do it."

Charles took another deep breath and stared at Jamaal. How did it come to this? he asked himself silently. He had known long ago that Jamaal was intelligent and resourceful, but he never thought that the precocious young boy would turn into such a manipulative adult. To the public, Jamaal was a passionate and sincere advocate for the poor. Few people saw his seedier side, and Charles was one of those people. Did I sell my soul to the devil? he wondered. A devil who poses as a man of God?

“I can see—” Jamaal stopped as a thought occurred to him. Charles might be a cowardly idiot, but he was a useful cowardly idiot sometimes. Admittedly, Charles had come through many times in the past and supported legislation that was beneficial to Jamaal and his agenda. For now, Jamaal thought, I’ll keep my wagon hitched to Charles. “Perhaps you are right. Now isn’t the time, but if we lay our foundation, a year from now will be perfect. I can start working clandestinely to build support among some of the other ministers and the housing activists. We will slowly build our coalition and create a growing demand for bold measures. Then, you can announce your support. You’ll just be following the will of the people.”

Charles smiled and sighed in relief. “That’s a great idea. So, we’re okay, Jamaal?”

“We’re just fucking wonderful, Chuck.” Jamaal tipped his fedora at the mayor and strode from the office.

Justice Inc is available on [Amazon](#).