

## Miscalculated Steps

There I stood alongside my attorney in front of a judge, a jury of women, a courtroom full of reporters, and my wife. Beyond my embarrassment, my soul wept for the pain that filled her face. In between breaths, I tried to relive the moments I once made her smile.

How did I, Desmond Gibson, become so careless that everything I worked for ceased to exist. By day, I ran the finest multimillion dollar hotel and restaurant chain the City of Chicago had ever witnessed. I was a good husband, father, and community leader. I gave millions to those less fortunate; but in a few moments, my transgressions would soon overhaul my good deeds.

The slam of the prison doors dragged me back to my fall from grace.

As we approached the conference room for recess, my knees weakened beneath me as a news reporter blared on national television, "that was Desmond Gibson, the man accused of a ten-year human-trafficking operation." Gasping for air, I questioned my attorney "De... De... Delaney, this... this... is all over the news? For the entire world to see and hear?"

Without any hesitation or emotion, the smoothest attorney in Chicago, Phillip Delaney, said: "that's why I told you to stay away from social media and the TV." With desperation on my lips, I responded "but I'll be okay, right? I mean- you did prove there was an illegal search of my home." Crushing all the last bit of hope I held on to, Delaney plainly said "Desmond, remember they were able to secure a proper search warrant. Therefore, not all evidence was thrown out."

Now being fueled by faith and in search of grace, I petitioned my attorney "so, no more than a year or two at most?" Delaney's jeered laughter abandoned my optimism, and his words killed me, he said "Man, do you realize you're being charged with the second worst crime in America. Trafficking has affected over a thousand women, and on top of that, you have an all-female jury. So, what makes you think two years is possible?" Without thinking, I jumped in his face and barked "that ninety grand I handed you gave me that possibility."

He stepped back and said, "Des, I'm flattered you think so highly of me, but you need to realize that although they may not crucify you, they will hang your ass on the cross of justice. More importantly, *I* won't stop them." He walked across the room and pointed to the pictures of the women I held captive for over a decade and continued, "they are why you're not getting off, and her, Aileeza, my wife's cousin, she's why *I'm* not letting you off."

Disappointment and humiliation filled my throat as "your wife's cousin," escaped my mouth. Delaney replied "I arranged a twenty-year plea and you will accept it. Understood?" Rushing to him, "Delaney, I can't do twenty years, five is the most." With all the anger and rage filled in his body, he pushed me into a nearby wall and said, "you owe those women, you owe my family, which means you owe me. You stole ten years; we're taking twenty."

He released his grip, smoothed my suit, and said his final words to me "let's go, time to pay up."