

# Guilty of Innocence

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## From Chapter 1, "Gone"

The large moving van crept up the mile-long driveway, and though Hector Marquez had been in the moving business for fifteen years, this was no ordinary assignment. Normally, he and his men would work in broad daylight, but this move was taking place at 1 a.m. Normally, he would have one or two men with him and they could take whatever time was needed to move an entire household of furniture and belongings, but tonight he had less than two hours to get the job done. He was also told that he was to be on the Pennsylvania Turnpike heading west by 3:30 a.m., and that he was to follow the black, four-door Lexus, with the New York license plates, to wherever it was going. Hector didn't even know what the final destination was going to be.

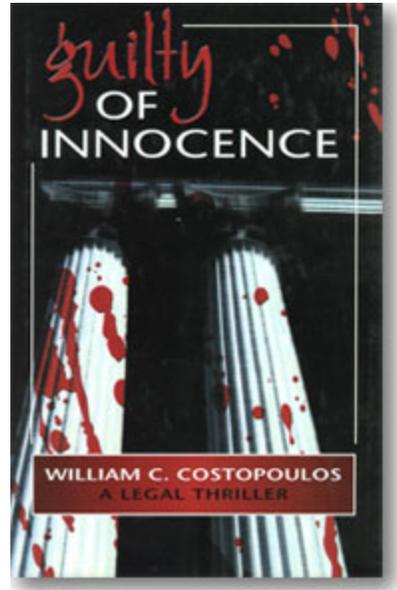
But the attractive brunette who hired him had already paid him \$5,000 in cash, and promised him an additional \$10,000 when they got to where they were going. He could go all the way to Alaska for that kind of money, and he readily accepted her terms, with the understanding that what he was doing was legal, and he wouldn't get shot on the job.

She said, "It's legal."

She said, "You won't get shot."

She said, "Just make sure you have enough men to get it done on time."

She also said, "Don't ask any dumb fucking questions and do what I tell you when you get there."



Hector Marquez was a muscular Hispanic in his mid-thirties, with thick black hair and a black moustache. He had been self-employed all his life, and his veined forearms and massive back were evidence of years of heavy lifting. He had his older brother, Sylvio, with him in the cab of the truck, and four guys in the trailer who were nervous about this job, but the pay was too good to pass up.

A white board fence lined both sides of the driveway as they approached the house. Hector could tell he was in prime horse country, though all the pastures were empty at this hour. The mountain stone stable was on the left, and Hector knew from his explicit directions that the rustic home was straight ahead. He was told to back the rig up to the garage and wait until she came out.

"Hey, Hector," Sylvio said, breaking the silence, as Hector muscled his eighteen-wheeler in reverse toward the garage, "where in the hell are we?"

"I don't have any idea," Hector answered, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. "All I know is what she told me, and here comes that crazy bitch now, so shut up."

Instantly, the electric garage door behind them started going up and Hector jumped out of the truck to get his instructions. She was tall, slender, and looked younger than her thirty-seven years, with shoulder-length, straight brown hair. Her piercing brown eyes flashed in the headlights as she ran toward Hector to get things moving. There was nothing complicated about her instructions.

"Take everything," she said.

Hector quickly ran up to the front porch and measured the huge oak front doors with his measuring tape. The front of the home was an expansive covered porch with plenty of windows overlooking the pastures and stable. The timber columns and wood railing that wrapped around the house and the four mountain stone chimneys above the cedar shake roof created a western look.

Hector then checked the back of the house for other convenient exits and noted sliding glass doors that went into the main bedroom, as well as a large, screened-in porch that accessed the living room. He could see the kitchen from the back of the house, and the adjoining dining room with its fourteen-foot sloped ceiling.

The six burly men moved quickly from room to room moving ornate Victorian couches, brass beds, hand-carved mahogany bureaus, solid oak dining room furniture, Remington bronzes, western oil paintings, oriental rugs, crystal, and silver. The men ripped wires from the televisions, VCRs, stereos, and computers to save valuable time; and everything seemed to be going okay until Hector forced open one bedroom door to continue his mission.

In the corner of the bedroom, sitting on the bed, was a curly-haired girl, crying. She looked like she was ten or eleven years old, and still had on her floor-length cotton nightgown. The stuffed animals strewn on her bed, and perched on shelves in the corner, seemed to be watching her cry. An older, gray-haired woman had her right arm around the child, trying to comfort her. She looked at Hector with pleading eyes as he burst in unannounced, but a tall, silver-haired man dressed in a double-breasted blue suit with a white collarless shirt stood between them and the door. All three occupants of that room, and Hector, froze momentarily in stunned silence.

"Wrong room, buddy," the silver-haired man said to Hector in a threatening voice.

"Call Blair Cody," yelled the old lady, "he's her father!"

"Get out of here!" the silver-haired man shouted, loud enough for every mover in the house to hear. Within seconds, Hector was confronted by the woman who had hired him, screaming in his face, ordering him to finish up, and to get his truck and men off the premises before they all got killed!

Hector wasted no time obeying *that* command, and within minutes the moving van was traveling at a high rate of speed down the driveway toward the American Truck Stop, where he was to wait for the black Lexus. Sylvio

and their four helpers were only too glad to get out of there, and all five of them ran to their cars and pick-up trucks when Hector dropped them off three miles before the truck plaza.

Hector double-checked the time on the dash of his truck with his wristwatch. The Lexus was late, and Hector was sick in his stomach. He had figured when he took the job that this was another domestic dispute, but he'd had no idea a kid was involved. Hector had three young children of his own at home, all sons, a loving wife, and he didn't need this shit. This was much more than he had bargained for, and he had a gnawing feeling that his involvement was far from over.

At 4:50 a.m., the Lexus pulled into the parking terminal, and soon Hector was shifting through all fifteen gears, following the car with the New York plates west on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. He could see the silver-haired man driving, and that the woman who hired him was in the passenger seat; what he could not see was the little girl, sound asleep in the back seat, under a soft blanket, out from a sedative; nor could he see the old lady back at the residence, crying uncontrollably in pain and anger, who could not call out because the phone lines had been cut.