

# presumed innocent by scott turow

**Presumed Innocent** is a masterful legal thriller written by Scott Turow, which was published in 1987. This novel not only redefined the genre but also established Turow as a leading voice in legal fiction. The narrative follows Rusty Sabich, a prosecutor who becomes embroiled in a murder investigation when his colleague and former lover, Carolyn Polhemus, is found dead. As Rusty navigates the murky waters of legal and moral dilemmas, the novel explores themes of guilt, justice, and the complexities of human relationships. This article delves into the plot, characters, themes, and the impact of "Presumed Innocent" on the literary landscape.

## Plot Overview

"Presumed Innocent" is set in the fictional town of Kindle County, a place where the intricacies of the legal system are brought to life. The story begins with the shocking murder of Carolyn Polhemus, a fellow prosecutor and Rusty Sabich's former lover. Rusty, who is deeply affected by her death, finds himself thrust into a nightmarish situation when he is assigned to lead the investigation into her murder.

As the investigation unfolds, Rusty becomes a prime suspect. The narrative is richly layered, utilizing flashbacks to explore Rusty's past, including his affair with Carolyn and the complexities of his marriage to Barbara. The story takes readers through courtroom dramas, revealing how the legal system can be manipulated and how personal relationships can complicate the pursuit of justice.

## Key Events in the Plot

1. **Discovery of the Body:** The novel opens with the discovery of Carolyn's body, setting the stage for an intense investigation.
2. **Rusty's Internal Conflict:** Rusty grapples with his feelings for Carolyn, his dedication to his job, and the strains on his marriage.
3. **The Investigation:** As evidence mounts against Rusty, he must navigate the investigation and the legal proceedings while trying to prove his innocence.
4. **Courtroom Drama:** The climax of the novel occurs in the courtroom, where secrets are unveiled, and the truth about Carolyn's murder comes to light.
5. **Resolution:** The story concludes with a twist that forces readers to reconsider the nature of justice and truth.

## Main Characters

The characters in "Presumed Innocent" are intricately developed, each adding depth to the narrative.

## **Rusty Sabich**

Rusty is the protagonist of the novel. As a seasoned prosecutor, he embodies the struggle between personal desires and professional responsibilities. His character is marked by guilt and fear as he faces accusations of murder while grappling with his past.

## **Carolyn Polhemus**

Carolyn is a complex character whose murder serves as the catalyst for the plot. Her relationship with Rusty is central to the story, revealing the personal and professional entanglements that complicate the investigation.

## **Barbara Sabich**

Rusty's wife, Barbara, represents the emotional stakes of the story. Her character adds tension to Rusty's internal conflict, as he must confront the consequences of his past actions on their marriage.

## **Other Key Characters**

- Tommy Molto: Rusty's colleague and a key player in the investigation, representing the pressures of the legal system.
- Judge R. M. "Bob" O'Keefe: The judge overseeing the trial, whose decisions impact the course of justice.
- Nina: A character who provides additional context about Rusty's life and choices.

## **Themes**

"Presumed Innocent" explores several profound themes that resonate throughout the novel.

## **Justice and the Legal System**

The novel scrutinizes the American legal system, highlighting its flaws and the ease with which it can be manipulated. Through Rusty's struggle, Turow questions whether true justice can ever be achieved and how personal biases influence legal outcomes.

## **Guilt and Innocence**

At the heart of the story is the idea of presumed innocence. Rusty's journey reflects the fine line between guilt and innocence, forcing readers to consider the complexities of human behavior. The narrative challenges the reader to think critically about what it means to be innocent and how perceptions can shape reality.

## **Love and Betrayal**

The relationships in the novel, particularly between Rusty, Carolyn, and Barbara, are fraught with tension and betrayal. Turow explores how love can lead to both profound joy and devastating consequences, painting a realistic picture of human relationships.

## **Power and Corruption**

The novel reveals the power dynamics within the legal profession and how ambition can lead to moral compromise. Characters are often faced with ethical dilemmas that test their integrity and commitment to justice.

## **Writing Style and Structure**

Scott Turow's writing style in "Presumed Innocent" is characterized by its clarity and sophistication. The narrative is structured in a way that blends legal jargon with accessible language, making the complexities of the law understandable to a broad audience. Turow employs a third-person limited perspective, primarily focusing on Rusty's thoughts and emotions, which creates an intimate connection with the reader.

The use of flashbacks enriches the storytelling, allowing readers to gain insight into Rusty's character and his tumultuous past. The pacing is meticulous, with tension building gradually, culminating in a gripping courtroom climax that leaves readers on the edge of their seats.

## **Impact and Legacy**

"Presumed Innocent" was a groundbreaking work that not only popularized legal thrillers but also influenced subsequent authors in the genre. Scott Turow's meticulous research into the legal system and his ability to weave intricate plots have set a high standard for legal fiction.

The novel has been adapted into a successful film in 1990, starring Harrison Ford, which further broadened its reach and introduced the story to a new audience. The film adaptation, while taking liberties with the source material, captured the essence of the

novel and showcased Turow's compelling narrative.

Turow's work has inspired a generation of writers, fostering a new appreciation for legal fiction and its capacity to engage with complex moral and ethical dilemmas. "Presumed Innocent" remains a seminal work that continues to be studied and celebrated for its contributions to literature and its exploration of the human condition.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, "Presumed Innocent" by Scott Turow is more than just a legal thriller; it is a profound exploration of the complexities of human relationships, the intricacies of the legal system, and the nature of truth and justice. Rusty Sabich's journey through love, betrayal, and the quest for innocence resonates with readers, making it a timeless piece of literature. As we delve into the moral quandaries presented in the novel, we are left to ponder the true meaning of justice and the human experience, ensuring that Turow's work will endure for generations to come.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the main theme of 'Presumed Innocent' by Scott Turow?**

The main theme of 'Presumed Innocent' revolves around the complexities of the legal system, the nature of truth, and the moral ambiguities faced by individuals within it.

### **Who is the protagonist in 'Presumed Innocent' and what is his role?**

The protagonist is Rusty Sabich, a prosecutor who becomes embroiled in a murder investigation when his colleague and former lover is found dead, putting him in a precarious position.

### **How does 'Presumed Innocent' explore the concept of justice?**

The novel explores justice through the lens of personal and professional conflicts, illustrating how the pursuit of truth can be influenced by bias, ambition, and desire.

### **What is the significance of the title 'Presumed Innocent'?**

The title signifies the legal principle that one is considered innocent until proven guilty, which is critically examined throughout the novel as the protagonist's innocence is called into question.

## **What impact did 'Presumed Innocent' have on legal thrillers as a genre?**

The novel is credited with revitalizing the legal thriller genre, combining intricate plotting with deep character development and moral dilemmas, influencing many subsequent works.

## **What are some major conflicts faced by Rusty Sabich in the book?**

Rusty faces conflicts including his struggle to prove his innocence, the tension in his marriage, his romantic past with the victim, and the ethical dilemmas involved in the legal proceedings.

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