

## Author & Narrator Q&A: *Unreasonable Doubts* by Reyna Gentin, read by Tavia Gilbert

### – Tell us a bit about yourselves!

**Reyna:** I grew up in Great Neck, New York, and attended college and law school at Yale. For many years, I practiced as an appellate attorney representing criminal defendants who could not afford private counsel. I study at the Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College, and my fiction and personal essays have been published in *The Westchester Review* and online.

**Tavia:** I'm the voice of the upcoming *Unreasonable Doubts*, an acclaimed, soon to be released legal thriller by attorney Reyna Gentin. After more than 600 audiobook narrations, I still get excited about my work. And a character-driven legal procedural like Reyna's is the kind of book I absolutely love to perform. I've been narrating full-time for 12 years, and have performed countless titles in every genre imaginable, from work for children to adults, fiction and non-fiction. I was the 2018 Booklist Magazine Audiobook Narrator of the Year, and won the 2017 Best Female Narrator Audie Award. I'm also the creator of *The Abels*, a scripted fiction podcast in collaboration with the BBC.

### – What is your new book about?

**Reyna:** Liana Cohen has it all – a meaningful job as a public interest lawyer, an adoring boyfriend, and an apartment on Manhattan's trendy Upper West Side. But as her 30<sup>th</sup> birthday approaches, she feels lost. Working in the New York City Public Defender's office has chipped away at her faith in herself and the system, and she would give anything to have one client in whom she can believe.

Enter imprisoned felon Danny Shea, whose unforgivable crime and astonishing combination of good looks, intelligence and vulnerability intrigues Liana. Could he be the client Liana has longed for – the wrongly accused in need of a second chance? Liana is forced to confront fundamental questions of truth, faith, and love – and to decide who she wants to be.

### – What inspires you to write?

**Reyna:** I practiced as a public defender for many years before turning to writing. Everyone is interested in that world – with regard to the defendants and how they come to make the choices they make to harm others or to act in a self-destructive way, in how society determines guilt or innocence and how it chooses to punish those who violate the rules, and in the attorneys who put their passions and intellect into the practice of criminal law. I was inspired by my work to write a novel that grappled with these all these issues in the context of very human and relatable characters.

### – What is your writing process?

**Reyna:** For me, the best way to write is to combine the solitary concentration with the community experience. I write at home, in my kitchen. I try to write each day, whenever time permits, but I don't have a definite hour or number of words. When I think a piece is in good shape, or a chapter of something I am working on, I share it in whatever workshop I am in at

the time, or I exchange with a friend. I always feel that the feedback makes my writing stronger, and I enjoy the interaction and the accountability of other readers.

**– When you aren't writing, what are you reading?**

**Reyna:** I try to read a wide range so that I am exposed to all different sorts of writing. That being said, I read pretty much only fiction, and I'm not into very defined genre fiction (no sci fi or fantasy, paranormal, heavy romance etc.). I just read and enjoyed *An American Marriage* by Tayari Jones and *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

**– How did you prepare to narrate this audiobook?**

**Tavia:** I start by thoroughly reading the manuscript and getting to know the characters, the plot, the energies and tensions, and the pace of the story. I lightly mark my manuscript in preparation for performance, especially noting any unfamiliar words, names, or terms that I'll need to look up in advance, any vocal specifics the author has given the characters (dialects or tones), and any attributions to dialogue that follow the line, so that I can infuse the speech with the appropriate quality (i.e. "he hissed," "she snapped," etc.). Prep time varies depending on the complexity of the writing, the amount of research required, the dialect requirements, and the length of the book. When I am fully prepped, I get in the booth and go, self-engineering and self-directing!

**– Tell us about your interaction with each other?**

**Reyna:** *Booklist* recommended my novel to fans of Allison Leotta. I found that Tavia Gilbert had narrated for Allison, and when I heard her read, I knew she was the one for *Unreasonable Doubts*! Tavia has been extremely professional and pleasant. She has been receptive to my providing insights into the characters so that her reading will be true to the story.

**Tavia:** Reyna reached out to me after she learned of my work through our common circles and contacts. I knew immediately that hers was a book I wanted to perform. I was a litigation paralegal for more than a decade, so I have a particularly fondness for legal thrillers. Reyna was also confident, warm, and professional, which indicated to me she was a pro – just the kind of artist entrepreneur with whom I love to collaborate. We discussed rates and our schedules, I performed a brief series of scenes for her to consider, and then I just hoped – hoped hard! – she'd choose me. And she did! And I can't wait to get started!

**– What was one challenge in writing/narrating this book?**

**Reyna:** Everything was challenging about writing this book as this was the first time I had ever written a novel! I found getting the tone exactly correct was difficult, and learning how to pace the novel so that it really moves was a challenge. I also wanted to weave in some faith aspects in a compelling way that was not heavy handed at all, and that would be universally appealing and interesting to readers, and that was a big challenge.

**Tavia:** I wanted the characters to feel fully realized — that they were real people that the listeners could connect to, root for, feel deeply about. It is always important to me that dialogue sound realistic and authentic, and especially with the variety of tones required during dialogue within criminal trial proceedings, workplace machinations, exercise regimen, hospital and hospice, and more, it was key that the character sound believable and true.

**– *What was one fun thing about writing/narrating this audiobook?***

**Reyna:** I love interacting with the readers. It has been so meaningful to me to hear from readers who have been touched by the journey that the protagonist is on to figure out her professional and personal passions.

**Tavia:** I was a litigation paralegal for more than a decade, and I deeply love the law and the culture of the legal world, so it was a great pleasure to immerse myself in Liana's day to day life as a practicing attorney. I also really appreciated the story thread about the importance of Liana's spiritual faith. I like books with heart and whose characters contemplate their purpose in life and the meaning of their work, as that reflects the considerations of my own inner life.

**– *When you aren't narrating what are you listening to?***

**Tavia:** The Archers, Stay Tuned with Preet, CafeInsider, Little Known Facts, On the Media, On Being, The Brian Lehrer Show, Marie Forleo, audiobooks, music, and my kitties purring!