

# THE PAPER LAWYER



“Cisneros continues to impress with his sharp characterizations and thoughtful, many-layered stories.”

—Booklist on *The Land Grant*

Carlos Cisneros

## PRAISE FOR THE WORK OF CARLOS CISNEROS

“There is a slightly subversive element here that gives the novel zip; it has all the same elements as a traditional legal thriller, but it’s less predictable, more ethically ambiguous . . . keep your eye on Cisneros.”  
—*Booklist on The Case Runner*

“Cisneros has written a fast-paced novel exposing wrongdoings and political pay-offs. The various subplots blend seamlessly, causing the book to be a real page-turner. This legal thriller is sure to please and is recommended for both public and private libraries.”  
—*Review of Texas Books on The Case Runner*

“This thriller lands firmly in John Grisham territory. But Cisneros, a practicing attorney in Texas, makes the material his own. The novel isn’t merely a fast-paced legal thriller; it’s also a thoughtful rumination on the conflict between ambition and morality.”  
—*Booklist on The Name Partner*

“Readers who enjoy mystery and suspense storylines with a rapid pace will absolutely find *The Name Partner* to be a true page-turner.”  
—*Review of Texas Books on The Name Partner*

“Cisneros continues to impress with his sharp characterizations and thoughtful, many-layered stories.”  
—*Booklist on The Land Grant*

“In the troubled, dusty border region of South Texas, corruption and violence aren’t isolated forces to be wrestled with and conquered by our hero but a pervasive condition. Alex is no white knight, but he’s sympathetic enough that the harsh denouement will leave readers shaken.”  
—*Publishers Weekly on The Land Grant*

“Cisneros hits his stride when the legal machinations and dark conspiracies start to emerge. [He] deals with important and timely topics, and you can tell he has a fundamentally optimistic view of the justice system and people’s capacity for change.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews on The Paper Lawyer*

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*Recovering the past, creating the future*

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*This book is dedicated to Lisa García, a beautiful friend and colleague, and to all the other angels that left us too soon.*

*This is a work of fiction. All similarities to people, places, events, situations, institutions, organizations, businesses and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.*

# ONE

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At only thirty-two years of age, Camila Harrison was known around legal circles as a talented and dedicated advocate who never backed away from a challenge. No exceptions. No matter the circumstance.

Everyone in Austin knew of Harrison, both the tough-as-nails reputation and the captivating woman who carried it; she lived in the affluent West Lake Hills, was considered a legal rock star by many—the new face of the legal profession; she sat on boards, was politically active and ran the Austin Chapter of the Young Republican Lawyers.

Harrison had made a small fortune for her white-collar law firm by representing commercial developers and landlords all throughout the Southwest. Recently, her engagement to Texas Supreme Court Justice Paxton “Pax” Thomas, III, had blown up all over the local papers, and with good reason. Harrison and Thomas weren’t just a power couple, but a Texas-sized power couple, perhaps the biggest in recent memory. Her wedding promised to be Austin’s “event” of the year.

One by one, all of Camila’s dreams were coming true; attending Rice University for undergrad, where she’d obtained a degree in political science, with honors; thereafter graduating from the University of Houston’s Bauer College of Business and Law Center *summa cum laude*, where she’d received a joint MBA and JD; landing a job at Hulse, Munson & Offerman—one of the oldest and most prestigious law firms in Austin—where she had found her

niche representing commercial land developers and individual investors with real estate holdings.

To top it all off, living in Austin was a reward in itself; it was a happening place, a bustling city that attracted five thousand new residents, every month. This, in turn, translated into *more*: more construction, more apartments, more highrises, more homes, more businesses, more clients, more evictions, more zoning and variance hearings, more legal work and more money. More. An entire life filled with more. Not bad for a *gringa* born and raised in Mexico City. And now, with a high-profile wedding in the planning stages, things looked to be getting *even better* if that was even possible.

“Camila?”

James Levinson, the firm’s managing partner, appeared in the entryway to her corner office. His face was serious, a cell phone in his right hand.

Camila looked up from the computer monitor.

“That was Tim Zuckerman, one of your clients, I believe? I don’t know why his call went to my voice mail, but it sounded important.”

“Did he say he needed to speak with me?”

“Sounds like it . . . something about some emails? He sounded worried. He mentioned the T. G. Mod litigation.”

“Emails? I’m not even handling the T. G. Mod case.” Camila frowned, not really understanding her client’s message. “He’s got outside counsel for that.”

“I’m only the messenger, Cam.” He raised his hands in mock surrender. “Call him when you get a chance.”

Camila smiled. “I will.”

“Thanks,” answered Levinson as he disappeared down the hallway. A few minutes later, the managing partner poked his head in again.

“Yes?”

“Hey, remember how I was a hero a few minutes ago and passed along a client’s message? I have a favor to ask. Can you cover for me this evening?”

Camila rolled her eyes dramatically and smirked. “What’s going on?”

“I had promised the Austin Young Lawyers Association that I would do the CLE this evening at Joel’s, but my daughter and the grandkids are in town from New York. Maddie and I want to take them to dinner.”

“Sure,” replied Camila, “what should I talk about? What’s the topic?”

“Anything, whatever. Just recycle one of your old presentations. It’s informal.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

“Thanks,” replied Levinson. “I owe you one.”

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“In conclusion, the courts continue to grapple with the question of whether an attorney may reveal privileged attorney-client communications . . . even years after the client has died or the illegality has come to light. Ask yourselves . . . when, in fact, does attorney-client privilege end? At the end of the case? At death? When judgment is pronounced? Never? Should there be an exception? Should confidentiality give way to national security issues? If the alternative is grave harm? Why? Or *why not?*”

The complimentary “Bats, Burgers & Beers CLE” was held every Thursday during the month of August. They reserved tables at Joel’s La Parranda, a funky bar with a huge roof deck and amazing views of the Austin skyline. To the young male attorneys in the crowd that evening, Camila looked polished and beautiful. With her hair now pulled into a ponytail, she sported a pair of pressed khakis, a white polo and penny loafers. She paused to see if she was still holding the crowd’s attention. She was.

“I leave you to ponder the following hypothetical: Think of your days back in law school . . . the final exam from hell.”

The crowd laughed.

“What if your client confessed to you, his lawyer, to having committed a white-collar crime? Let’s say your client was a fat cat from Wall Street, responsible for the global meltdown of 2008. He confessed to you in no uncertain terms that the mortgage-backed bonds his bank was selling back then were shit. Worthless. He



knew full-well investors were being defrauded left and right. He also tells you that he was the one that paid money to the bond-rating agencies in New York in exchange for favorable ratings for the junk bonds his bank was selling. He's now remorseful because somebody else got thrown under the bus by the bank and was recently convicted for it. That somebody else is just a few months away from being sent to prison for twenty years. Should you, his lawyer, come forward and reveal what you know? Or would you be fiercely loyal to your client and take his secrets to your grave? Knowing without a doubt that an innocent person is going to prison for a crime he or she did not commit."

Camila paused and sipped from her margarita. She smiled as she studied the crowd. The twenty or so participants appeared stumped.

"Now, change the facts around a bit. What if it was a homicide? Your client confesses to you that it was he who committed the murder, but somebody else was convicted for it. That other person is thirty days away from being sent to the death chamber. Does that change anything? Is one case more compelling than the other? Why? Or *why not*?"

Silence.

"I invite all of you," continued Camila, "to email me your thoughts on the subject. I'm interested in hearing what you have to say. You can find my email address on my firm's website."

She winked at those in attendance and flashed a wide grin. Her green eyes sparkled under the neon lights.

The crowd broke into applause.

Camila finished her margarita, threw on her cotton blazer and prepared to leave Joel's. She was to meet Pax for dinner.

A female organizer with the state bar's CLE Planning Committee took the microphone and pointed to Camila.

"Let's give a great big thanks to attorney and volunteer Camila Harrison from the Austin-bred Hulse, Munson & Offerman Law Firm. Thank you, Ms. Harrison, for that very informative and thought-provoking presentation."

Camila finished gathering her purse and keys and mouthed a great big *thank you* back to the young organizer. As the applause

died down, Camila quickly checked her iPhone and saw that she had two missed calls, one from Tim Zuckerman and the other from Pax. Pax had also texted that he was stuck at work, postponing dinner. She put her phone away.

“Don’t forget,” followed the presenter while addressing those still milling about the rooftop, “if you want to get credit for this CLE, you have to fill out a Scantron and provide us with your Bar card number. You may drop the Scantrons over in those boxes by that table near the jukebox. You’ll receive your one hour of CLE credit in a week or two.”

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“Ms. Harrison, wait!” yelled the man near the bar exit. It was *Austin Chronicle* reporter Andy McCormick rushing toward Camila, anxious to put a question to her as she waited for the valet to bring her Audi around.

“I have some questions about the proposal being circulated by the city council members to have Austin adopt ordinances on rent control and eviction protections.”

“I would not know anything about that,” said Camila flatly, avoiding eye contact with the reporter. McCormick had always rubbed her the wrong way.

“Don’t you represent some of the biggest land developers in Texas? Doesn’t your firm represent the Central Texas Apartment Owners’ Association?”

“We do,” admitted Camila.

“Well, do you care to comment about those new proposals circulating in front of the city council?”

“We shouldn’t interfere with free markets,” volunteered Camila, “and neither you, nor I, nor anybody else should tamper with the laws of supply and demand.”

“So, you’re against rent and eviction controls?”

Camila spotted the valet coming around 5<sup>th</sup> Street, stepped off the curb and signaled for the driver to hurry.

“I’m sorry, I’d love to stay and chat, but I really have to go.”

She didn't want to be rude, but McCormick was known around town as an agitator who loved controversy.

Undaunted, McCormick again tried to push Camila's buttons. "Who are you going to evict next, Camila? How many other poor renters will be out on the street this time next year? How many other Austinites will soon find themselves without a place to call home, huh? Without a roof over their heads?"

The valet drove up to Camila's spot. *Thank God.* She quickly shoved a five-dollar bill in his hand and jumped in her car.

Before hitting the gas pedal, she rolled down the passenger side window and shouted back to the pesky reporter, "Hey, I'm just doing my job, amigo. Why don't you go and find a real story for a real newspaper, huh?"

Her shiny SUV took off like a rocket down 6<sup>th</sup> Street toward the hills of West Austin.