

Newsday

CHARGES UPGRADED

Murder in the first, Suspect in killing of ex-wife and her mom faces a life sentence without the possibility of parole if convicted

Newsday - Long Island, N.Y.

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Date: Apr 28, 2004

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Christopher Reynart, the man charged with stabbing his ex-wife and former mother-in-law to death on Easter morning in North Bay Shore, now faces life in prison without parole after a Suffolk grand jury increased the charges against him.

Reynart, 34, of Brooklyn, was arraigned yesterday on an indictment charging him with two counts of first-degree murder and six counts of second-degree murder. All the charges cover alternate theories for the deaths of Karina Reyna, his former wife, and Azucena Villegas, his former mother-in-law.

When he was arrested by Suffolk police April 11, he was charged with two counts of second-degree murder.

He has admitted in a Newsday interview from jail that he kicked in the door of his wife's home, despite an order of protection barring him from there, chased the women through the house and stabbed them inside and on the front lawn while his sons - Christopher, 10, and Kevin, 8 - cowered in their room.

Suffolk County Court Judge James Hudson kept Reynart in jail without bail.

Reynart's attorney, Michael Brown of Central Islip, said he is considering a psychiatric defense. He asked Hudson to appoint medical and other experts to examine his client. Possible defenses could include one of mental disease or defect, which would result in Reynart's being confined in a mental hospital, or extreme emotional disturbance, which could lead to a conviction of first-degree manslaughter.

"Christopher Reynart, obviously, was in an extreme emotional state on the night of the incident," Brown said. "The question is whether he's responsible for his actions."

Brown, echoing what Reynart said in a Newsday interview after his arrest, said his client may not have been in control of himself after a night of drinking.

"I don't think that this is premeditated," Brown said. "It was not planned out, thought out. There was no strategy to this."

But Assistant District Attorney Patricia Brosco suggested that some details of the crime indicate otherwise.

"In the early-morning hours of Easter, a clear-thinking defendant drove to the victims' house," Brosco said.

Reynart parked his car two blocks away and crept to Reyna's back door in the darkness before dawn, Brosco said. And in addition to the knife he used from her kitchen, Brosco said, Reynart also brought one with him.

"Both women fought for their lives" before Reynart overpowered them, Brosco said. "The people have a very strong case. There is a confession and eyewitnesses."

Brosco also noted Reynart's history of abuse toward his wife. At the time of the killings, he was awaiting sentencing on assault charges. They stemmed from a January incident in which he beat Reyna with a computer cord, hospitalizing her.

In that incident, as in the killings, police said Reynart was motivated by the belief that his wife was cheating on him. Members of her family have said that wasn't so.

Police had responded to domestic violence calls at the house several times during the couple's marriage.

About 20 relatives of Reyna and Villegas listened solemnly to the arraignment.