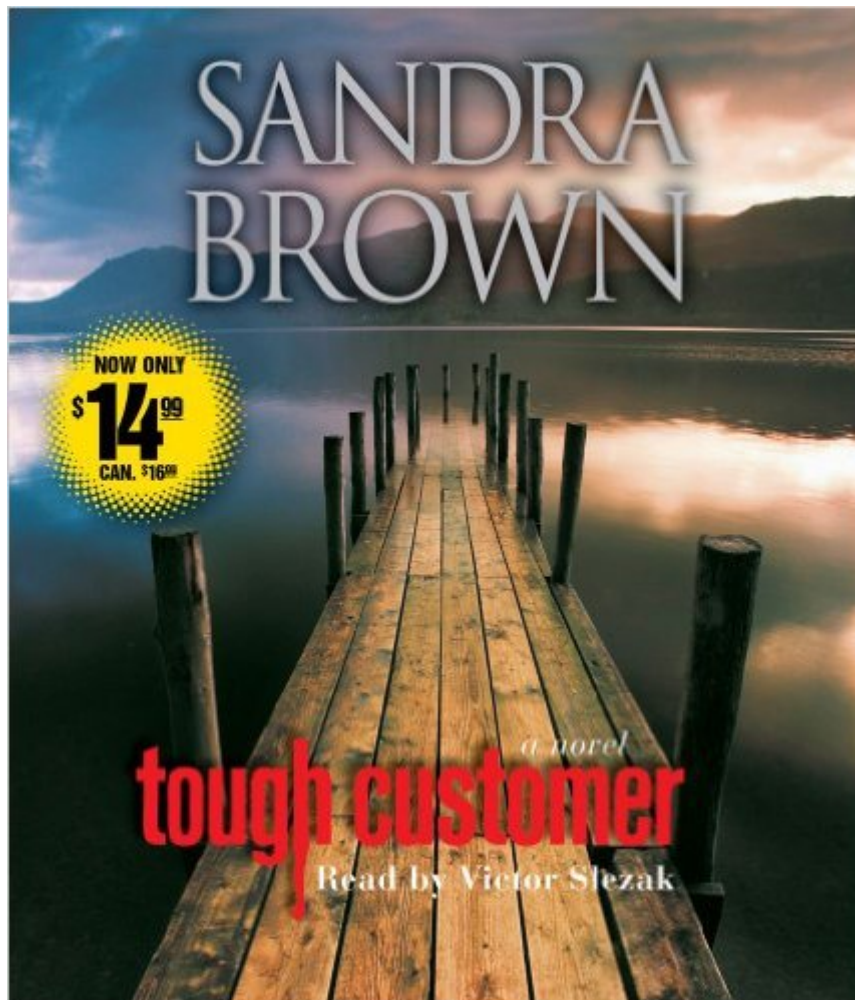


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Tough Customer: A Novel



Synopsis

From acclaimed best-selling author Sandra Brown, *Tough Customer* is a heart-pounding tale about obsession and murder, the fragile nature of relationships, and, possibly, second chances—now only \$14.99. Colleagues, friends, and lovers know Dodge Hanley as a private investigator who doesn't let rules get in his way—in his private life as well as his professional one. If he breaks a heart, or bends the law in order to catch a criminal, he does so without hesitation or apology. That's why he's the first person Caroline King—who after a thirty-year separation continues to haunt his dreams—asks for help when a deranged stalker attempts to murder their daughter—the daughter Dodge has never met. He has a whole bagful of grudging excuses for wishing to ignore Caroline's call, and one compelling reason to drop everything and fly down to Texas: guilt. Dodge's mind may be a haze of disturbing memories and bad decisions, but he arrives in Houston knowing with perfect clarity that his daughter, Berry, is in danger. She has become the object of desire of a co-worker, a madman and genius with a penchant for puzzles and games who has spent the past year making Berry's life hell, and who now has vowed to kill her. Dodge joins forces with local deputy sheriff Ski Nyland, but the alarming situation goes from bad to worse when the stalker begins to claim other victims and leaves an ominous trail of clues as he lethally works his way toward Berry. Sensing the killer drawing nearer, Dodge, who's survived vicious criminals and his own self-destructive impulses, realizes that this time he's in for the fight of his life.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Tough talking, chain smoking Atlanta Investigator Dodge Hanley (from *Smash Cut: A Novel*) receives a late night phone call from the love of his life Caroline King who lives in Texas. Dodge has not seen Caroline in 30 years and now their daughter, Berry, is being stalked by a former co-worker who wants her dead. He immediately returns to Texas. Sheriff Deputy and Afghanistan war veteran Ski Nyland, who is the local investigator on the case, is immediately attracted to Berry. Ski will do anything to keep her safe, but is suspicious of her story. Does she hold secrets that may have provoked her stalker turned killer? I really didn't care. The search for Berry's stalker isn't that exciting and didn't contain any mystery or suspense for me. Thankfully Brown intermittently flashes back to 1978 to tell the love story of young police officer Dodge Hanley and aspiring realtor Caroline King. The flashbacks were the best part of *Tough Customer* -- how dramatically they met, how passionately they fell in love, how tragically they split apart, how remarkably differently their lives turned out, and most importantly of all, how enduring their love was. For me, this was not a story about a murderous stalker, but a story about setting bad decisions right and having hope for second chances.

I hate to say it, but this book was terrible. I almost couldn't get through it, and for me that's rare, especially for a Sandra Brown book. It was so difficult to read, that it took me weeks rather than days to work my way through to the last page. The characters were flat and uninteresting. I felt like I didn't know who they were at all. You barely even got a feel for what they looked like, so it was hard to get lost in the story. I felt like I was being forced to study for a test rather than reading a novel for enjoyment. The only saving grace for this story were the few glimpses of Dodge and Caroline's relationship from the 70's. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough of their story to actually make this a good book. Her books haven't been the same since changing publishers, but they still felt like Sandra Brown books. Not so with this one. It felt like a young Literature student wrote this book, not my once favorite author. Save your money, borrow this from the library if you feel like giving it a try.

"*Tough Customer*" is not one of Brown's finest creative productions. Is there a point that every author arrives at where they look to cliché, overused endings as their own? I was bitterly disappointed with her ending. I felt cheated and Brown honestly insulted my intelligence. As part of the reading audience, shouldn't we be given the chance to solve the mystery with hints that the writer drops throughout the book? As far as I can recall, Brown didn't give the reader any such chance to figure out the ending. What kept "*Tough Customer*" from bombing completely was the story behind Dodge and Caroline. It gave the book its only pulse. There was more action going on in

the flashbacks then there were during the entire novel. Throughout the story I became more and more exasperated with Berry, who kept back a plethora of details from the police and made her less credible throughout the novel. I'm very disappointed in this book, as I am an avid Brown fan. This was not one of her best - but personally, it's a slight step up from "Smash Cut", which was absolutely terrible. The Last Saint

Just finished the book and wow, it so could have been cut down to 200 pages instead of almost 400. I was never big on flash backs, but especially in this book, it kept going back and fourth. Anyway Dodge's character was a complete disappointment, but his personality kinda hit home with me, cause I am so like him. Caroline was OK, but Berry, she surprisingly was a vindictive bitch, but she did own up to that, and did change. I loved the deputy. It was slow and a bit boring, but once you get to page 360, it goes really fast and only then does the whole story come together. As for passion, Sandra's losing her touch, between Dodge and Caroline, they were luke warm at best even in the past. Now Berry and the deputy, that was pretty good but could have been better, plus it was only one scene. So I say it so could have been more shorter, more suspenseful, had more action, and for sure more passion. But the four star comes from the ending which was a bittersweet cliff hanger, but still good. If any of her books should be turned into a movie this would be it. Oh and I don't care how good of detective you are, you can not figure out the plot until I'd say page 300, and even then you'd still never guess the outcome.

This book didn't seem to be written by a well-known, favorite author whose reputation and name has always guaranteed a great read. If this was the first book I would have read by Ms. Brown, it also would have been my last. It was slow, slow, slow and the pace never changed. I had no investment in the characters because there was no way to connect with them. I kept waiting for the face-paced, edge-of-your-seat excitement that has always been a part of Sandra Brown, but it never materialized. The relationships between the main characters was too fast and for me, not believable. I found this read too predictable, and the ending was easy to figure out. I own quite a few S. Brown books and have reread them many many times. I guess from now on, I'll be researching reviews on Ms. Brown's new releases before buying a book because it has her name on it.

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