Standoff Short Guide

Standoff by Sandra Brown

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Contents

Characters

Tiel McCoy is the quintessential Sandra Brown protagonist and is likely based on the flamboyant, clever, irrepressible novelist herself. While Tiel acts courageously and altruistically in an extremely demanding and precarious situation, she is simultaneously aware of the impact her actions will have on her career and, she hopes, her love life. In other words, she is not presented as some model citizen fit for statuary. When she and Doc later get together but seem destined to live without each other, she is deeply hurt; she is experienced and wise but not above having her heart broken again and again. Tiel does not fall into the trap of steeling herself to the world because of pain or failure. She accepts them as parts of life, then she goes on living. As she says to Doc, "Not being loved hurts worse" than loving and losing.

What does Tiel look like, though? Brown gives only hints: Tiel is thirty-three, wellbuilt, and of average female height (her face is level with Doc's chest, and he is "tall for his age," as he says jokingly), but readers are never given a good look at her. None of the other characters are described in detail either, which is part of Brown's strategy.

She wants to focus relentlessly on the story and the action, and she does so by skimping on descriptions of characters and settings.

She sketches them rather than drawing them.

For example, Brown tells us that Doc resembles "the Marlboro Man," the toughlooking, slender cowboy in the cigarette ads, but he is smart enough not to smoke.

Moreover, before he began running his cattle ranch, he was the head of a prestigious cancer center. Doc's full name is Dr. Bradley Stanwick, and he left his former profession after allegations surfaced that he had participated in the euthanasia of his cancerravaged wife. What made the situation worse was the fact that his wife had been unfaithful to him and that he stood to gain a great deal of money from insurance and his wife's family fortune after her death. Doc was innocent of any wrongdoing, though, and no charges were brought. Even so, the publicity could have ruined the viability of the clinic if he had not disassociated himself from it. Because of the rabid, profit-motivated news media that had descended on him during his ordeal, Doc bears a grudge against all media and is immediately put off when he discovers that Tiel is a reporter.

However, her cool professionalism, warm humanity, and natural buoyancy eventually win him over.

Tiel and Doc have a lot in common, even aside from the fact that they cooperate in the delivery of Sabra's baby in the midst of a potentially deadly crisis. They have both lost spouses in tragic situations, Tiel's husband having died while reporting on the hostilities in Bosnia; they have both become overly cautious in matters of love. Nevertheless, they are both attractive, vibrant human beings who cannot keep their natural feelings and desires at bay forever, and they are both brave enough to try a new relationship, even

though several warning signs are inherently there. They are both strong-willed individuals who find it hard to trust other people, and they are both carrying burdens of guilt based on how their spouses died, Doc being the cancer specialist who could not save his own wife and Tiel having opposed her husband's involvement in a dangerous assignment.

Rather than supporting his ambitions, she had derided his involvement by saying, "All right . . . fine. Go. Get yourself killed."

And that is exactly what happened, leaving an emotional burden on Tiel that has caused her to lose herself in her career,a profession toward which Doc has a powerful, understandable animosity. The developing, though difficult, relationship between him and Tiel becomes the romantic center of the novel.

Standoff is a relatively short text, so Tiel and Doc are the only two characters that Brown takes time to develop fully. In literary terms, they are the most "rounded" characters, although readers do get to know a lot about Ronnie and Sabra, based mostly on their words and actions. Physically Ronnie is only described as "a clean-cut, allAmerican boy" who is a "straight-B student," a high-school senior who has never been in trouble before. His courage under fire and his absolute love for Sabra and their child make him mostly a "sympathetic" character in terms of reader response, even though he is brash and unwise in his decisions, especially his idea to rob a convenience store as a means to provide financial support for the couple to escape to Mexico. His desperation is born out of his love for Sabra, his defiance of her domineering father, and his knowledge that she is about to give birth.

Sabra Dendy is a healthy, petite seventeen-year-old blonde who shares Ronnie's determination and courage. She knows that her father "always does what he says he's going to do," and that he has said he will take the baby away and put it up for adoption so that she and Ronnie will never see it again. Russell Dendy is enraged that Sabra, his only child, has ignored his edicts and he hates Ronnie Davison. For her part, Sabra is willing to risk her life and the life of the baby in order to live in freedom away from her hateful father. She manages to make it through the pain and fear involved in the delivery of her daughter, and she shows herself capable of the same kind of powerful love and devotion that drives Ronnie.

At one point, the couple is referred to as "a contemporary Romeo and Juliet.", Their nemesis, Russell Dendy, is a monomaniacal real-estate magnate who shoves and bullies his way through life, treating other people, including his wife and daughter, as if they were pawns in his effort to win some sort of cosmic game. His only objectives are to win at all costs, to have everything he wants, and to maintain power over other people. Dendy is constantly at odds with William Calloway, the FBI agent. Although Calloway makes an insensitive tactical blunder by sending into the store an FBI rookie instead of an obstetrician when Sabra is on the verge of having the baby, he is otherwise reasonable and does a good job of maintaining order in the face of mounting chaos. The rookie agent, Scott Cain, is quickly seen for what he is by Doc, who only has to ask a couple of routine medical questions to uncover the ruse. Cain, because of his

false bravado and lack of experience, becomes a human time bomb in the midst of what is already a terrifying situation.

As mentioned earlier, Donna the cashier provides both comic relief and the common human elements of shock, panic, and fear.

Balancing these traits are the bravery and helpfulness of Vern and Gladys, the other everyday Americans in the story. In sketching the physical descriptions of these minor but important characters, Brown mentions that Donna has frizzy orange hair and weighs about ninety pounds and that Vern has spindly, pale legs sticking out of his baggy Bermuda shorts. He and Gladys are very close and loving toward each other, and both are willing to lend a hand whenever called upon. Gladys also provides some comic relief by being outspoken and fearless. When the whiny, quaking Donna says she probably will not survive the night, Gladys says, "The way our luck is running, you probably will."

Another interesting minor character is Gully, Tiel's irrepressible boss. He describes himself as "an ugly, shriveled, pathetic relic" and is a chain-smoker. Nonetheless, he has the experience and wit to take full charge of the important news story that is developing in the convenience store. When Gully enters the FBI van, which is the command post near the store, Calloway says there is no room in there for anyone else —Gully makes it clear that he is staying, at least until he is sure that Tiel is safe and unharmed.

His gruff, no-nonsense attitude is leavened by a large amount of compassion and kindness. In this sense, Gully resembles television's Lou Grant (in the long-running series starring Ed Asner), and in a larger sense, he represents the career-driven person who unerringly pursues success and excellence but also maintains a firm grasp of the human costs involved.

Social Concerns

Having published her first book in 1981, Sandra Brown (a.k.a. Laura Jordan, Rachel Ryan, and Erin St. Claire) is a prolific, popular writer who has written close to seventy novels, over forty of which have become bestsellers. Although such a large quantity of work written in a relatively short time has caused some of it to suffer in quality, her best fiction compares favorably with that of some of the finest novelists of the past and present, especially in terms of her compassionate worldview and her virtuoso delineation of human relationships.

Her popularity rests on those traits, as well as her expert storytelling ability and her egalitarian approach to social problems, an approach that is tinged with romance and feminism. Having started her literary career as strictly a writer of romances, Brown has evolved into a yeoman novelist who regularly produces mainstream mysteries and thrillers, all of which feature her acute social awareness with her particular stylistic stamp. Most of her novels, including Standoff, center on strong-yet-vulnerable female protagonists who serve as examples of what intelligence and courage, combined with sensitivity, can accomplish. Thus, usually the first and foremost social concern in her work is how women react to and often excel in what can sometimes be a hostile, male-dominated environment.

The heroine in Standoff is Tiel McCoy, a Dallas television news reporter. (Prior to her career as a novelist, Brown herself did reports for the syndicated show PM Magazine, so she is able to portray realistically Tiel's professional strengths, weaknesses, and ambitions.) In the process of taking a rare vacation, Tiel hears on her car radio that Fort Worth millionaire Russell Dendy's teenage daughter, Sabra, has been kidnapped. As it turns out, however, Sabra has eloped with her boyfriend, Ronnie Davison.

Soon, Tiel is to meet the two young lovers as they botch the robbery of a convenience store, thereby causing a hostage situation, in which Tiel is both a captive and a reporter. She sees the standoff as an opportunity for the inside scoop of a lifetime—if she can live to file the story. During the course of the novel, Brown includes several social concerns besides the pressures on Tiel, a smart, attractive woman in a profession run mostly by men and one that often focuses on form more than content. Immediately there is also the contrast between the routine, controlled, status-centered life that the wealthy patriarch Dendy wants for Sabra and the romantic, passionate love affair with a working-class boy that she herself prefers. Complicating matters further is the fact that she is eight months pregnant, and she and Ronnie are determined to defy her father and all that he stands for.

Because the setting is "closed," as opposed to the normal open setting of most stories, in which characters can come and go freely, Standoff presents a miniature society, and Brown can use her characters as symbols or types to comment on American society as a whole. Therefore, her approach to social problems in this work is more obvious and more biting than in most of her other novels. First of all, there are the characters already mentioned: Tiel, representing the sensitive but driven businesswoman; Sabra, the

rebellious child of privilege who is seeking independence and happiness away from the constraints of her domineering father; and Ronnie, the wild, romantic idealist who has decided to solve the couple's problems single-handedly with a sixgun and simple bravura. Outside the convenience store are various authority figures, who are also a part of Brown's closed society in the sense that they are fully focused on the events inside the store: Dendy, the outraged, ultra-conservative rich man; William Calloway, the firm but reasonable FBI agent in charge; and Yarborough Gully, Tiel's gruff, no-nonsense boss, who is concerned about Tiel's safety but also aware of the demands and desires of the viewers and his own bosses when it comes to making the situation into a news story.

There is constant interplay among the following: wealth-driven power; the necessary force of the law; the pressure of the media; and all of the human emotions, failings, and qualities one can imagine in such a scenario. Together with another major character, first known simply as Doc, Tiel must try to steer the situation in a compassionate, safe direction, even though it is almost always teetering on the brink of disaster. Brown effectively shows what can happen when several irresistible forces interact with immovable objects inside a cauldron of danger, terror, pain, and unsanctioned love.

A minor but interesting sidelight to the main action is Brown's treatment of the two Mexican immigrants who are caught up in the drama. Though the other characters try to ignore them and, tellingly, cannot speak their language except for a few isolated words, the Mexicans will not be marginalized.

They eventually assert themselves and become integral parts of the plot, surprisingly so, especially near the end of the novel.

Another minor character is the female clerk of the store, Donna, who represents the common person just trying to make a living. While she is at times a source of comic relief, she is also a carefully drawn character who is, in many ways, a stand-in for the average reader. She reacts naturally with one primary focus: self-preservation. Her screams and whines punctuate the drama.

However, sometimes she shows resilience and courage. More often, though, among the minor characters, these qualities are demonstrated by Vern and Gladys, an elderly couple who are also held hostage. They are not simply senior citizens who are sightseeing in their Winnebago. They are newlyweds on their honeymoon, and according to Vern, they are very sexually active. Along with Donna, they serve as a kind of Greek chorus of ordinary citizens who are observing and reacting to extraordinary events. At times, Vern and Gladys appear to be enjoying the excitement, as if they were visiting a thrill-a-minute amusement park. Most readers, also caught up in the tension and drama, will probably find it easy to relate to these characters.

Techniques

Brown has become a virtual writing machine, churning out novel after novel, yet managing to remain deft and skillful enough to gain new fans with each one while not disappointing her growing legion of already-loyal readers. How does she do it?

Although Brown has her own distinctive, dialogue-enlivened style, she has learned valuable lessons from such literary giants as Fanny Burney, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Katherine Anne Porter.

And though some critics might refer to Brown's writing as formulaic, predictable, and overly romantic, she nevertheless has shown that she can tell—and sell—a story with the best of them.

The warmth, intelligence, and insouciance of her female protagonists can be traced back to similar qualities in Burney's heroines, and there is always the sense in a Brown novel of the sometimes hidden power behind the fragile veil of femininity. She manages with dexterity a subtle balancing act that allows her heroines to be both strong and vulnerable, and she does so with a seemingly effortless, often invisible style.

This style can be called plot-centered, in that the advancing of the story is the main thrust of every sentence. Brown's novels are so compact and concentrated that they read like extended short stories. There is no wasted effort; she is very efficient. Such a style resembles that of Hemingway, who learned his writing lessons from Stein, and that of Porter, who learned a lot from Hemingway. Sometimes referred to as America's greatest novelist, Hemingway was especially proud of his short stories, and his favorite was "Hills Like White Elephants," which is told almost entirely in dialogue.

The story is the tip of an emotional iceberg and matches well with Hemingway's wellknown "iceberg theory" ("The dignity of movement of an iceberg rests on the fact that only one-eighth of it is visible.").

Brown's refusal to give lengthy, detailed descriptions of people and things is based on the same idea: less is more. As Porter also figured out early in her career, readers are perfectly capable of supplying their own details, so why waste time and delay the action to dwell on how many aisles there are in the store, or exactly what the FBI agent's face looks like when Doc discovers his true identity, or how the sunset looks in Rojo Flats, the town in which the store is located? When Brown does give a few details—as when Tiel notices the thin lines in the skin around Doc's gray-green eyes— they stand out like jewels because they are so rare. Such a sparse style is realistic, too: this is the way most people view life as it passes by. They notice details only when there is a break in the action, and the details are often significant.

Another technique that Brown uses is an integral element of the successful potboiler, and at one point, Tiel, ever the career woman, actually thinks of the story as "a tasty potboiler" that she can later share with her viewers. Of course, Brown's talent manages

to elevate most of her novels beyond being classified simply as potboilers, but she sometimes uses the "cliffhanger" technique of ending a chapter at a climactic point only to have the next chapter "jump cut" to another locale. D. W. Griffith perfected this technique in the early years of Hollywood cinema. It maintains the suspense at a satisfactory level of tension. When Cain and Ronnie have leveled their guns at each other, for example, Brown begins the next chapter with a scene inside the FBI van. Soon shots are heard, and readers only gradually find out what has happened inside the store. Another chapter ends with one of Donna's ear-piercing screams, and Brown takes her time in getting around to the reason for the scream, thus "suspending" the readers.

Standoff was written to order for the Literary Guild division of Doubleday, as Brown reveals on her Web site, and she was asked to write a book that was "shorter in length" than her other books but one that contained "elements normally associated with a Sandra Brown novel. . . . For a while I'd been playing with the idea of a story written in real time. In other words, the action transpires at about the length of time an average reader can read it." In order for Brown to accomplish this task, she would necessarily have to cut back on description, emphasize dialogue, and keep the action moving rapidly. Thus, her normal techniques have been sharpened and brought more to the forefront in this novel.

One Sandra Brown element that readers expect is the graphic, passionate, and eloquently written love scene, and when Doc and Tiel finally get together, it is almost enough to make readers forget about Rhett and Scarlett. This is one area in which no writer can outdo Brown; this is her forte. In her sex scenes, she achieves the difficult balance that makes them blazingly exciting without being grossly obscene. Thus, one can add D. H. Lawrence to the list of writers from whom Brown has learned her craft.

Themes

Most themes in Standoff are related to power. Brown is writing within a long tradition of female novelists presenting female protagonists who have both a certain innate power because of their indomitable personalities and a social power that is a result of their understanding of how people and society work, including how women are expected to behave and what they can actually do if they try. This tradition goes back at least as far as the eighteenth century, when Fanny Burney described the exploits of such characters as Evelina and Camilla. In Tiel McCoy, readers see a typical Sandra Brown heroine, yet one of Brown's great strengths is her ability to create and develop protagonists that readers recognize but can also accept as individuals. Tiel has experienced personal tragedy and has had bad luck with love; she has tried to compensate by being professionally successful. Her physical attraction to Doc and her knowledge of his own troubled background combine to form a nascent love for him, which she also understands as dangerous and possibly doomed by their guarded, independent personas. Nevertheless, readers can sense not only the growing relationship between the two characters but also the courage within Tiel that will allow her to give in to her heart, even if her mind warns her against any romantic involvement with such a strong, walled-off man.

As usual in Brown's work, love is the ultimate power.

But there is also the force of parental love, which can degenerate into a raw need to control one's children, supposedly in order to protect them. Can parental rights outweigh the desires and needs of teenagers to forge their own paths? How far should parents go to maintain control, especially if they believe their children are in danger?

Russell Dendy becomes far too bullish in his pursuit of his "kidnapped" daughter, and his attempt to maintain his dominance over her reaches the point where he is one of her biggest threats. On the other hand, Cole Davison, Ronnie's father, understands that his son is wild and stubborn, and Cole's love for his son allows him to have compassion for such typically teenage failings.

Unfortunately there is also the reality that guns can often change or end lives, especially in the United States, where handguns are readily available and where the television and film industries have developed a tradition of glamorizing gunplay.

Ronnie has control of the situation in the convenience store simply because he is the one holding the pistol, and his bizarre idea that the best solution for the couple's money problems is to rob a store has been possibly brought about by the many examples of such a scenario that he has witnessed in the movies and on television. Brown shows how the introduction of guns into any situation naturally tends to result in desperation, anxiety, and sometimes tragedy.

When Tiel manages to convince Ronnie to allow a TV cameraman in to broadcast the story, including Ronnie's demands, Brown spends some time on the theme of the

pervasiveness and influence of the media. Keeping in mind that one type of media is popular fiction, Tiel's justification to herself may also represent Brown's own justification for writing such novels: "The most compelling stories were about people whose lives were in peril. The more immediate the danger, the more gripping the story. . . .

Sure, her career would benefit, but still, she was only doing her job." The dilemma for the newsperson and the novelist is that by doing their jobs they may be inspiring copycats to emulate the worst of the newsmakers and the fictional characters. By presenting the situation realistically, by involving Tiel in maintaining sanity and reason, and by showing how foolish both Ronnie and Sabra's father are in forcing an almost certainly tragic ending to the situation, Brown shows that the media can be responsible as well as responsive. Tiel's even-handed, impeccably professional reporting from the scene shows a grace under pressure that demonstrates how much she deserves the success and notoriety that will flow from this nerve-wracking, danger-packed event.

Adaptations

The only adaptation of Standoff so far is the unabridged Simon & Schuster audiobook version (2000), with actress Enid Graham narrating.

Key Questions

Sandra Brown's novels tend to focus on the romantic feelings between men and women, and on the power that women can find within themselves to deal with love, loss, and even more stressful aspects of life.

In her introduction to the 1996 edition of Hawk O'Toole's Hostage, Brown says, "Something in all of us delights in lovers and their uneven pursuit of mutual fulfillment and happiness. Indeed, the pursuit is half the fun!" Since 1968, Brown herself has been happily married to her college sweetheart, who is a video producer. They have two children and divide their time between Arlington, Texas, and Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

1. Is there anything inherently wrong with "romances" (novels that feature passion, excitement, and happy endings)?

Could they inhibit readers' abilities to perceive life in a realistic way?

2. In Standoff, the media is sometimes portrayed as profit-driven and overly intrusive, willing to sacrifice people's privacy and even safety for the sake of getting a good story into the news. Is such a view justified? What is your opinion of the media?

3. Sandra Brown's heroines are usually independent or independent-minded women who risk their independence for the sake of love. Are fulfillment and happiness possible without love? Does Brown overemphasize its importance?

4. What are some of the signs that Sabra Dendy and Ronnie Davison really love each other, as opposed to being merely infatuated? How does their relationship compare to the one shared by Vern and Gladys?

5. Tiel McCoy nicknames the Mexican immigrants "Juan and Two," because she cannot speak Spanish and does not know their names. Are these nicknames derogatory? How realistic is it that Tiel is working for a Texas television station but has not learned some rudimentary Spanish? What does this lack say about her personality?

6. Does everyone in this novel get what they deserve? Especially, do you think the authorities are too easy on Ronnie, in light of the fact that he endangered so many lives in order to advance his own cause, however noble that cause may be?

Jack Turner,Ph.D.

Literary Precedents

As mentioned, stylistically Brown's fiction has impressive forebears, but Standoff is a sub-genre of the mainstream thriller in that it has a closed setting and presents a miniature society. In this case it includes star-crossed lovers, their antagonists, their helpers, and some innocent bystanders, all of which are at once individual characters and representatives of types. Several literary precedents spring to mind, foremost among them Ship of Fools (1945), Katherine Anne Porter's masterpiece. The Poseidon Adventure (1969) by Paul Gallico and Airport (1968) by Arthur Hailey also generally fit this mold, in the sense that the characters are stuck within closed settings, are facing stressful situations, and seem to symbolize society as a whole. Of course, there are many other novels written in this vein, but most of them fail to approach the success and artistry of the ones mentioned here.

Unlike Standoff, most of which happens during one frightful night, Ship of Fools presents the twenty-seven-day voyage of the Vera, which sails from Veracruz, Mexico, to Bremerhaven, Germany. Like the characters in Standoff, the passengers experience evil and violence, as well as the best facets of human nature, including love, hope, caring, sharing, and the ability to be happy in the face of despair and tragedy. Because of the wide scope and length of her novel (close to 500 pages), Porter is able to present a large cast of varied characters. The main love relationship is that of the American artists David Scott and Jenny Brown, while Professor and Frau Hutten are an older couple who provide some comic relief and represent the solidity, if not the stagnation, of marriage. The violence that breaks out in Ship of Fools is based not on a clash of personalities but on simple greed and dishonesty, which, Porter implies, are just as natural as their positive counterparts. Her dark, deterministic realism contrasts sharply with Brown's sunny, idealistic romanticism.

The number of main characters in The Poseidon Adventure is about the same as in Standoff, but Gallico's novel is almost twice as long and his style is more descriptive, introspective, and expansive, giving his novel a very different atmosphere, a kind of apocalyptic grandeur that also surpasses the staid, calm artistry of Porter, at least in terms of excitement for readers, if not in symbolic possibilities. For example, the leader of the survivors of the disaster that befalls the ship is the Reverend Frank Scott, a tempestuous and outspoken preacher who tries to direct the group to the highest point of the capsized ship and thereby save their lives. Fighting him for control of the group is Mike Rogo, a hardened police detective who values logic over intuition and emotion. In the end, Scott turns out to be the most courageous as he sacrifices his life to save the others, but Gallico does not take the easy route by making Scott into a Christ figure. Before he dies, the minister curses his God and all the other gods.

Among Gallico's characters, as in the other novels discussed, there is an older married couple, in this case Manny and Belle Rosen, who exemplify, like Vern and Gladys in Standoff, the extraordinary closeness and devotion that can develop over the course of a long marriage. However, the Rosens take a much more active role in the story, ultimately leading to the death of Belle. The Poseidon Adventure is unblinkingly realistic,

and there is a convincing mix of tragedy and hope in the story just as there is in real life. Perhaps the realism, heroism, and symbolism, combined with Gallico's fluid, poetic style, explain the continued popularity of this novel and the 1972 movie adaptation, starring Gene Hackman as Scott.

Another closed-setting novel that became a successful film, Arthur Hailey's Airport also shows the bravery and depravity of human nature, just as Gallico, Porter, and Brown do in their novels. In Airport, the desperate situations occur during the seven fateful hours of a snowstorm at the fictional Lincoln International Airport, located somewhere in Illinois, and inside a jetliner where there is a suicidal man with a bomb, so there are two closed settings that are intricately related. Hailey, in his businesslike prose, reports the events expertly and dispassionately, but the admirable, indomitable aspects of the human spirit shine through, as the story is filled with examples of warm sensitivity, wise perception, and selfless heroism. While interesting as individuals, Hailey's characters tend to be agents of the action, existing primarily to advance the plot. Like Brown, Hailey is more interested in storytelling than he is in character development. Unlike Brown, though, Hailey is fascinated by the minutiae of various professions and settings. Therefore, Airport is meticulously correct and full of details.

Hailey almost balances this rarefied atmosphere of facts with his attention to human emotions and thought processes, but compared to Brown's fiction, Hailey's seems bloodless and cold. His passion for details does not leave much room for passion among his characters.

Related Titles

Because Brown's style and social concerns have remained virtually the same throughout her oeuvre, all of her novels could be said to be related. However, there are two novels in particular that strike many of the same chords as Standoff and also use some of the same techniques: Hawk O'Toole's Hostage (1988) and Fat Tuesday (1997). The female protagonist in both cases is connected to a rich, powerful, immoral man—who shares those characteristics with Russell Dendy—and the hero in both novels is darkly handsome and has a troubled, tragic past. Reluctantly both heroines end up falling in love with the heroes and enjoying at least one scene of passionate lovemaking.

Both novels feature tense standoffs involving law-enforcement authorities, and both include cliffhanger endings to certain chapters. The tie that binds these novels closest to Standoff, though, is the romantic idea that breaking the law by taking someone hostage can end up being the best thing for everyone except the really bad guys, who happen to be overly masculine authority figures who abuse their power over others.

Therefore, the "Robin Hood" characters are presented as being almost forced to break the law in order to overcome wealthempowered corruption.

In Hawk O'Toole's Hostage, Miranda (Randy) Price and her young son are kidnapped by the Native American Hawk O'Toole. Her ex-husband, a U.S. Representative, has conspired to defraud Hawk's tribe out of their livelihood, and he abducts Randy and her son to force a remedy to the situation. Randy gradually comes to see that Hawk is not the cold, aloof man he tries to be, and they eventually give in to the inevitable, based on the attraction that they feel for each other. One of the novels that Brown refers to openly as a "romance," this effort is not one of her best, but it is entertaining and does show her talent for presenting the excitement of people from different backgrounds who fall in love with each other.

The names of the characters are unfortunate because they introduce what is apparently an unintentional element of comedy (O'Toole making love to a woman called Randy).

On the other hand, Fat Tuesday is a serious, hard-edged thriller with realistic violence and some truly evil characters, especially the main villain, Pinkie Duvall. The hero, Burke Basile, who is a narcotics officer with the New Orleans Police Department, wants to get revenge on Duvall for the murder of Basile's partner. Kidnapping Duvall's wife, Remy, is a part of Burke's plan, but Remy and Burke fall in love with each other, thus complicating matters much more than Burke had bargained for. Although the novel has a happy ending, it often has an atmosphere of ugly, brutal reality, unlike most of Brown's other novels, including Hawk O'Toole's Hostage and Standoff, although the latter does have brief moments of bloody, terrifying violence.

Brown's reputation as a novelist and storyteller will continue to grow if she continues to explore the dark side of human nature along with the more positive possibilities. Her

novels already show that she will most likely remain a powerful, successful writer for as long as her career continues.

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