



Sandrine's Case

Thomas H. Cook

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Thomas H. Cook offers one of his most compelling novels ever in *Sandrine's Case*, in which a college professor falls in love with his wife all over again...while on trial for her murder.

Samuel Madison always wondered what Sandrine saw in him. He was a meek, stuffy doctorate student, and she a brilliant, beautiful, bohemian with limitless talents and imagination. On the surface their relationship and marriage seemed perfectly tranquil: jobs at the same small, liberal arts college, a precocious young daughter, a home filled with art and literature, and trips to some of the world's most beautiful cities and towns. And then one night Sandrine is found dead in their bed and Samuel is accused of her murder.

As the truth about their often tumultuous relationship comes to light, Samuel must face a town and media convinced of his guilt, a daughter whose faith in her father has been shaken to its core, and astonishing revelations about his wife that make him fall in love with her for a second time. A searing novel about love lost and rediscovered, from one of our greatest chroniclers of the human heart.

Sandrine's Case Details

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From Reader Review Sandrine's Case for online ebook

Bandit says

There is an Ian Fleming story Quantum of Solace (not actually what the Bond film's based on) and in it the title refers to the small degree of comfort that can exist between two people emotionally in a relationship. The Governor character in the Ian Fleming short story of the same name defines it as "... a precise figure defining the comfort, humanity and fellow feeling required between two people for love to survive. If the quantum of solace is nil, then love is dead." What we have in Sandrine's case, in the case of Madison family, actually, is this exact same problem. Sam Madison, a man frustrated by his stagnant small town existence and his academic failures, seems to lose his heart, his kindness, his humanity, the very things that made Sandrine fall in love with him years ago. So is he or is he not responsible for her death? This book is a chronicle of a trial, which intends to find out just that. Cook uses numerous flashbacks to more or less chronologically narrate the disintegration of a marriage and the loss of love and humanity that can occur over time if one doesn't pay attention. This, his most recent book, is my 4th read by Thomas H. Cook and quite possibly the least favorite. Which isn't to say it's no good, it is quite good actually, I'm yet to see any evidence that Cook can do any less than good, but it does seem to lack a certain excellence and sharpness of his other works. It was a quick (3.5 hours) and compelling read, but this story was crafted on a much smaller scale than his other works, smaller narrower plot, fewer characters. It was also (while maintaining traces of suspense) much more of a melodrama at heart, almost like one of those heartfelt morality tales. The main character, Sam, throughout most of the book comes across as such an unpleasant snobbish a*hole, intelligent, but emotionally aloof and arrogant, pretty much a bastard...it's fairly difficult to care about him and his journey of self discovery during the course of the book. Sandrine on the other hand comes across as almost too perfect, too stunning, too moral, too clever to the end, which makes the ending revelation all the more theatrical or staged or too set up for for the purpose of teaching a lesson, basically too melodramatic. Entertaining enough of a book, but certainly not Cook's best, particularly with regards to how good he can be.

Arah-Lynda says

It was at that moment that I'd first begun to experience one of life's deepest lessons: you are the most alive when you feel the most vulnerable, not when the arrow is still in the quiver but when it has been released by the string and is flying toward you.

I want to thank Andrew Smith for his fine review which led me to this book. Having already read Red Leaves by this author I suppose I was an easy, eager mark.

Samuel Madison had always wondered just how he had won the heart and hand of such a beautiful woman, such a free, intelligent spirit as was his wife Sandrine. From the outside theirs must have seemed an ideal life: a beautiful home filled with art and literature, in a small community, where both held jobs at a small liberal arts college and, had been blessed with a lovely and precocious daughter.

Years later Sandrine still in her early forties lay dead of what appears to be a suicidal overdose of pain medication and alcohol. But all may not be as it seems. Did Sandrine really take her own life or is there something far more sinister to be found here?

Suddenly Samuel finds himself accused of her murder and on trial for his life. What really happened the night of Sandrine's death and what events led to this dark ending? As Samuel stands trial for his life the

reader is privy to his memories of their early courtship and the years of marriage that followed.

Oh where are they, I asked myself, recalling what Sandrine had believed the saddest sentiment in all poetry, and which she had first read to me in French. "Mais, oui sant les neiges d'antan? " Oh where are the snows of yesteryear?"

As if returned to that bright day, I was on the lawn with her again, her body pressed against mine as we walked to the front porch and sat down in the swing, her voice soft but firm, as if talking back to time. " Nothing will go wrong Sam, if we don't let it."

The writing is not as sparse as *Red Leaves* and delves quite deeply into the mind of our protagonist Samuel. While it may not have had the same impact or resonated as deeply with me, *Sandrine's Case* remains a profound piece of literature, well worth the time invested.

3.5 thought provoking stars.

David Kinchen says

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. -- Leo Tolstoy, opening sentence of "Anna Karenina."

One of the joys of book reviewing is discovering a new -- to the reviewer -- author at the height of his or her powers. It's also a source of frustration when the reviewer discovers the author has been around for a long time! The situation is unavoidable because one person -- even a voracious reader like the present reviewer -- can read only so many books.

I found myself on the horns of this dilemma when I read Thomas H. Cook's wonderful genre-breaking novel, "Sandrine's Case" focusing on the trial of Professor Samuel Madison, indicted for the death of his beautiful wife, Sandrine Allegra Madison.

The case illustrates what Sam Madison's lawyer, Mordecai "Morty" Salberg calls a perfect example of the hoary legal cliché that a clever prosecutor "can indict a ham sandwich" if he has a mind to do so. And Coburn County Prosecuting Attorney Harold Singleton definitely has a mind to see that Sam goes all the way to death row, despite a case that's flimsy at best.

Morty, the self-described "smartest Jew lawyer in Coburn County", is one of many vividly drawn characters in a novel that I see breaking down the artificial walls between "mystery" and "literary" novels. Cook is primarily known for his almost two dozen mystery novels, but he's written literary works, including 1986's "Elena." As long-time readers of my reviews know, I detest the grouping of works of fiction into popular and "literary." Labels -- as a friend of mine has long noted in the context of political matters -- are for wine and medicine bottles.

Sam and Sandrine are both tenured professors at Coburn College, a small liberal arts college 70 miles south of Atlanta. Sandrine teaches history and Sam teaches literature. They have a daughter, Alexandria -- not Alexandra -- a journalist in New York. His daughter wants to believe that Sam isn't a murderer, that Sandrine committed suicide with pills and alcohol after she learned she was afflicted with ALS, better known as Lou

Gehrig's Disease. Alexandria wants to believe in her dad's innocence, but there is a shadow of a doubt. The case has attracted worldwide media coverage because -- as Sam explains to his daughter -- death involving intellectuals, especially when the victim is a beautiful woman, is red meat to newshounds.

Even though it's a college town -- perhaps especially because it's a college town -- many Coburnites are provincial to the core, suspicious of the intellectuals in their midst, people like Sam and Sandrine with messy houses loaded with books, classical and jazz records and other signifiers of culture. The teachers at Coburn College are viewed by the locals as overpaid and underworked, with summers off and observing all the holidays known to man. Morty Salberg brings this point up when questioning witnesses about the often messy suicide sites they encounter. Still, the other suicides were locals, so they aren't relevant, in the eyes of the police, to the special case of Sam Madison. There's a particularly vicious hatred of Sam Madison in Coburn, perhaps magnified by the circumstances of his being the "Great White Defendant" in a jurisdiction where many, if not most, of those indicted are minorities.

When Samuel Joseph Madison met Sandrine he was a meek, lanky graduate student from the Midwest at New York University. They meet cute in Washington Square, with the lovely Sandrine bluntly telling the startled Sam: "You're not very handsome...but you look very intense." That's about as cute as a meeting can be!

Once married, they accept teaching positions at Coburn College because they were able to teach their subjects in the same place, as good a reason as any in a world where college teachers face employment rejection. Cook deftly describes the tensions the two experience in their marriage, with Sam telling Sandrine several times that she could have been working on her book about Cleopatra, to which she replies "I am my book." In turn, Sandrine reminds Sam that when they met he mentioned the novel he was working on, an unrealized dream book.

I know novelists hate to be compared with their peers, but I'll go ahead and do it anyway: "Sandrine's Case" is as good as anything written by Scott Turow and John Grisham. If you like the work of these two lawyers turned novelists, you'll enjoy this novel by a book reviewer turned novelist.

Tony says

SANDRINE'S CASE. (2013). Thomas H. Cook. ****.

Cook is a marvelous writer, and this one displays his talent to the best advantage. Although the story is mostly set in a courtroom, this is not a legal thriller. It is a sensitive exploration of a marriage, and what went wrong with it. We meet Sam and Sandrine Madison. They have been married for many years, and have a lovely house in a small college town in Georgia. They both teach at the college. Sandrine learns that she has Lou Gehrig's Disease, and slowly breaks the news to her husband. Needless to say, their mental states both begin to deteriorate. One day Sam, after coming home from one of his classes, finds Sandrine in their bedroom. She is dead. From all appearances, it looks like suicide. Little quirks in the circumstances in which the body is found, however, makes the local sheriff suspicious. He learns that Sandrine's death was caused by an overdose of Demerol, but they also found the presence of antihistamines in her stomach. Based on this finding and lots of offhand comments by Sam, he becomes a "person of interest" to the police. When it is also learned that Sam has had an affair with one of the wives of one of his co-workers, and that he and

Sandrine had had an argument just the night before she was discovered, he is finally accused of her murder. The story is then told through a day-by-day analysis of his trial, where Sam is forced to examine his actions and himself in a new light. This is a well-crafted story well told. Recommended.

Diane S ? says

Thomas Cook is an author that I think never quite garners the attention he deserves for his writing. I have read all or most of all his novels and while there are some I liked more than others, they were all well written in his own particular style.

This book is amazing, brilliantly structured about a man on trial, for the murder of his wife. What we learn about their marriage, their relationships with others, their work and family life, their hopes and dreams, we learn throughout the trial. It is the story about a marriage in crisis, a man in crisis and a horrible medical diagnosis. But what is the truth, in the trial, in life, in a marriage? There is a slow unraveling and then a time of enlightenment, and the final question, can love survive death? My only wish was that the end wasn't quite so tidy. This is, however, an amazing psychological study, one that kept me reading. Well done.

LindaW says

4.5 stars. An excellent read! We are in the courtroom with Professor Sam Madison who is on trial for the murder of his wife Sandrine. He listens as the prosecution presents the case against him and comes to the shocking realization that he could actually be convicted of murdering his wife. His world has crumbled and he is crumbling also. Bit by bit as he ponders his current situation and reflects on his recent and early relationship with Sandrine he sees how he lost the person he once was and morphed into the aloof, soulless, and unkind man he is now. Before her death Sandrine worried about him and knew he wouldn't really appreciate what he had until he lost it. A quiet, but well laid out psychological study of a man on the brink of disaster.

Gatorman says

After reading this latest from Cook, I've come to realize that I just don't enjoy his books the way I used to. While it is generally entertaining, there are several issues which kept it from being up to the old standard to which Cook used to meet. The characters are annoying and just don't ring true. Cook has developed a bad habit of having them talk in ultra-sophisticated and intellectual ways that makes them seem unreal. Too many convenient flashbacks to odd memories that seem totally out of place. This book, like his last one, is full of irritating quirks like these. Also, the usual Cook strong point, the stunningly powerful ending, just doesn't develop here. The climax is not surprising, rather underwhelming, and ultimately false, when you stop and think about it. Also, the ultimate conclusion regarding the future of Sam and his daughter is so schmaltzy and sappy, not something I expect from Cook. I'm giving it three stars because it does hold your interest for the most part and keeps you caring about how it will all turn out, despite the annoying characters and sometimes false dialogue. Plus, I can't give it 2.5 stars on the GR rating scale. It's hard to recommend this one when there are too many other Cook books much more worthwhile. Think I may have to take a break from Cook for a while.

Nancy Oakes says

Perhaps I shouldn't just automatically go lumping Sandrine's Case into the category of crime fiction. I suppose it could be labeled as "courtroom drama," as noted on a back-cover blurb, but in my head that brings to mind something à la John Grisham, which this book is most definitely not. No, this one is tough to pigeonhole, so I won't even try. In this novel, by one of my favorite writers, the reader doesn't even know if there has even been a crime, although the majority of the action takes place in a courtroom where the central character is on trial for his wife's murder. It's a bit of a teaser -- throughout the story, it's impossible to come to any sort of conclusion about whether or not the main character is guilty; if you think, "yes, he did it," then there's something to lead you in the other direction; the same is true if you make up your mind that he's not guilty. While this is a very clever strategy to keep the reader turning pages, it's really all about what the defendant in this case learns about himself along the way that is the big payoff -- and it's not pretty. Not at all.

Samuel Madison is a professor at Coburn, a small college in a town by the same name. He is a most odious person, filled with contempt for his job, the town, the "eternally mediocre students," and the people who live there. He feels like he's in a vise, "tightening every day." He's been writing the same book for years. When he is arrested for the murder of his wife Sandrine, it becomes pretty obvious to him that the people of Coburn don't much like him either. While sitting in court surveying his jury, it also seems that these twelve people had a sense of hostility toward him, and that they despised him, because after all, wasn't it

"... windy professors as myself who'd poisoned their children with atheism or socialism or worse, who'd infused their previously unsullied minds with dreamy fantasies of changing the world or writing a great novel, while at the same time teaching them not one skill by which they might later find employment and thus avoid returning to their parents' homes to sit sullenly in front of the television, boiling with unrealizable hopes?"

He'd noticed "hostility" toward him by the people of Coburn before Sandrine's death, but after the media frenzy surrounding the case and most especially Sandrine herself, he felt even more resented, to the point where he saw in the jurors' faces that along with the murder charge, the real reason he was on trial was for being "me." He'd had an affair. He'd picked up Sandrine's prescriptions for the Demerol that had caused her death. He'd been callous to the neighbors. He'd argued with his wife. His attitude doesn't help -- his attorney has to remind him to keep his snide comments to himself ("that's just the kind of smart-ass remark that can put a rope around your neck...") and to try to work on his cold-fish demeanor in front of the jury. On their last night together, Sandrine had called him a sociopath; even his daughter has her doubts and is often surprised at the things he says over the course of the trial. Slowly the testimony begins to reveal more about Sam than anyone knew -- except for Sandrine.

Sandrine's Case is very well written; as it turns out (why, I won't say), even the title was well chosen. The author does a number of really good things here. The continuous "he's guilty"/"he's not guilty" dialogue running through my head kept the reading lively; when Mr. Cook throws in a new angle that causes Sam to be paranoid, it's so plausible that it adds another level to the ongoing question of his guilt or innocence, and another level of reader interest. The novel is very much character driven, and the author has created a believable main character in Sam, a very unlikeable and "hollow" man who sneers at everyone and everything he feels worthy of his contempt. Structurally, the story is revealed day-by-day in court, through witness testimony and Sam's own thoughts while he is in his own head. The most viable person, however, is actually the deceased Sandrine -- the author reveals her personality most clearly throughout the novel, and the reader can't help but to be drawn to her. There's very little not to like about this book, with the exception

of the sort of sappy-toned page of an ending that I never expected. I can see why Mr. Cook put this in, but my personal feeling is that it didn't belong and that the book might have been better without it.

I loved the author's *The Crime of Julian Wells*, and while *Sandrine's Case* didn't have the same level of edginess as that one, *Sandrine's Case* is also a very good, intense read -- maybe a bit light for fans of noir, a bit slow for readers who like a lot of action, and a bit on the heavy side for cozy readers. However, if you are at all into the literary side of crime writing, or if you're a reader who cares more for good writing than plot, *Sandrine's Case* will most definitely not let you down.

Pattie says

Brilliant! Thomas Cook has done it again. He is an incredibly talented writer and a joy to read. *Sandrine's Case* is the story of college professor Sam Madison who is on trial for the murder of his wife, Sandrine. The book is set up as a courtroom drama (for use of a better word) with flashbacks throughout of Sam and Sandrine's life together. Cook's prose is masterful and the book is littered with fantastic literary images and comparisons. The book shows how marriage is entered into with love and hope and how we change over time. It demonstrates how we can lose aspects of ourselves over time without realizing it and questions whether we are able to recapture those essential elements of self. It is a powerful and beautiful read from start to finish.

KarenC says

My first book by Cook. I was not encouraged. Some of the traits that I disliked most in the character of Samuel Madison and in the book provided an accurate reflection of Madison's character: pedantic, verbose, aloof, self-centered.

The plot is focused around the trial of Samuel Madison for the murder of his wife, Sandrine. Many chapters begin with the courtroom examination of a witness as the county prosecutor presents his case against Madison. Each witness brings up some situation that causes Madison to think back on the earlier years of his marriage. These flash-backs can best be described as a personal psychological examination of Madison as a person, as well as the deterioration of his marital relationship with Sandrine.

I did not find this to be a compelling or exciting read, nor did I find Samuel Madison to be a particularly interesting character. His assessment of his life became a little more interesting in the final quarter of the book, but I had lost sympathy for him by then.

Had I been reading books by Cook over a number of years I may have seen some development in his writing style that made this book more compelling or interesting. Sadly I had not heard of him until his 2014 Edgar nomination, so saw no such development. Bottom line: I will probably not look for other books by this author.

Alton says

Thomas H. Cook is one of those extraordinary authors who are able to write prose like poetry expressing a keen appreciation of the human condition. A murder trial in a smalltown Georgia courtroom provides the setting for this story which is told by an author who knows how to play the Pied Piper to his readers. For years Cook has been appreciated by the trade magazines, newspapers and his peers in the mystery world, as well as those readers seeking a well thought out, refined, captivating read. His historical references are used in an inimitable way, finding their way into his books in fascinating and creative ways. Popular in Europe this keenly observant writer has reached a new maturity with Sandrine's Case. Taking on the theme of redemption by love he succeeds in proving once again that he is the master of his craft-deserving all the awards and accolades he has received over the years.

Bonnie Brody says

Sandrine's Case by Thomas Cook is an interesting novel about the death of a 46 year-old woman named Sandrine. Was it suicide or was she murdered by her husband Sam? The novel's structure is in the form of a courtroom drama and takes place on each day of the trial with each witness testifying for or against the accused. During the course of the trial, Sam reminisces about Sandrine and their original meeting and love affair, the early days of their marriage and Sandrine's personality. He also considers the last days of her life and the awful fight they had before she died.

Sandrine loved words and was an astute grammarian. She had a tender side and originally had a dream of opening a school for poor children in Africa. During the course of years, her dreams died as she taught at Coburn College, a small liberal arts college in Georgia, the same school where Sam taught.

During the course of the trial, Sam is asked to resign his tenured professorship because of the negative publicity his trial will bring the college. If he doesn't resign, the president is prepared to fire him.

I found the book rather long and it meandered just a bit too much for me to be completely vested in it. I found the characters interesting but not to the point of wanting to pick the book up all the time. I enjoyed the metaphors, quotes from other authors and the characterization of Sandrine. She came alive more than any other character. I have read other books by Thomas Cook and have loved them. This is not one of his strongest novels.

Carol says

Satisfied! That's the feeling I had as I read the last page of Sandrine's Case. Quiet applause to Thomas H. Cook as tears welled in my eyes for this emotional story of a marriage. There have been several books dissecting the state of holy matrimony this past year. In some the characters have been so unreliable you don't know who to believe. Not the case here. Cook's marital partners are all too real and honest though it takes patience and thought to see each for who they are.

The Madison's, Sandrine and Samuel seemingly have a good marriage. Both professors, Sandrine proposed to Samuel on a vacation in a little French town called Albi. They married, took teaching posts at the same college, settled into what is pictured as a Hallmark life at 237 Crescent Rd, Coburn, NY. and soon a daughter, Alexandria joined them. Many years pass and Sandrine is diagnosed with ALS. In itself this is tragic but more than this death sentence you become aware the marriage is or has died too. Why? One evening Samuel enters their bedroom to find Sandrine not breathing, clearly gone. He calls the police to tell

them his wife has committed suicide. After some investigation and facts that don't quite add up Samuel is charged with her murder. He has cause but it must be proven. The trial forms the bulk of the book with chapters laid out in a call of witnesses. As each testifies layers and layers of this marriage are peeled back for our contemplation. As the trial proceeds Samuel thinks about just what brought him to this courtroom, the last days of Sandrine's life, her increasing distance and undeniable fury at him It is like she is shaking him from the grave. Slowly we begin to see how love's loss developed and how Samuel on this realization begins to fall in love with his departed wife once more.

Cook descriptions of each character, from the main to the minor are perfect. You can truly see each in your mind's eye. Many passages give me pause. It is difficult to quote out of context some that I really loved. This one about Samuel's thoughts on just one fear Sandrine has in the progression of her ALS.

"One thing was certain. Sandrine had loved language the way others love food, and so, understandably, no doubt it had been the loss of that command of language she'd most dreaded in the end, the terrible fact that eventually she begin to slue, not to mention drool and blubber."

The next quote is hidden in case it would spoil though I think not. Samuel and Alexandria are speaking of the last night of Sandrine's life. Alexandria describes how her mother talked about her marriage.

(view spoiler)

Thomas H. Cook is frequently pigeon-holed as a mystery writer. If you're a mystery fan in the truest sense I think you'd be disappointed. Thriller, no. His stories, including [Sandrine's Case](#) are just too slow to capture fans of that genre. Perhaps in the end it does not matter what you call [Sandrine's Case](#) but just know that you are getting the finest of fiction by a master story-teller, an oft underrated author.

Andrew Smith says

Ever since I read (actually, devoured in a single day) Red Leaves I've been hoping I'd find another book from Thomas H Cook that would have the same emotional impact, a similar 'cant put you down' quality. This one doesn't quite pull it off but it comes closer than any of his other books I've read.

It's the story of Sam Madison, an English Professor at a Deep South college, who stands accused of the murder of his wife – also an English Professor at the same college – who died as a result of an overdose of painkillers. Was it, as Sam claims, an act of suicide (she had what could be described as due cause) or is it the result of cynical deed executed by her husband, as the local law enforcement officer asserts? As the trial progresses and more facts are disclosed I found myself swaying first one way then the other.

This isn't an edge of the seat thriller in the style of Grisham: it unfolds at a slower pace and the whole thing is 'softer' in feel. For much of the time we are placed inside Sam's head as he re-treads the relationship with his wife from the time they first met. We learn that the relationship had, over time, gone bad and we get glimpses of why this happened. We are forced to monitor the effects of trial revelations and more importantly the accused's own insights and recollections on his mental health. In its own way it's every bit as gripping as the best courtroom dramas I've read.

There are plenty of literary reference peppering this book – well what would you expect from a story featuring two English Professors! I didn't mind this, in fact I found it interesting, but it might not suit every reader. Similarly, the suffocating, claustrophobic nature of a tale set in the courtroom pretty much from start to finish and featuring a spectacularly small cast might be a bit daunting for some. Again, once I'd become

accustomed to the flow of the piece I found I was able to accept these limitations. It's a book about a trial but really it's a story about a relationship, and its told very well indeed.

The ending was well conceived and a surprise to me. But it wasn't one of those 'where did that come from' moments – you'll have to trust me that everything made perfect sense in the end and in a way that was, in my opinion, a cut above the norm for a courtroom based novel. It's classy book written by a very able and intelligent writer.

Thomas Brusio says

Another homerun from one of my favorite authors, "Sandrine's Case" is a must-read for followers of Thomas H Cook.

Professor Samuel Madison is on trial for the death of his wife, Sandrine. Beautifully and evocatively written, the novel is told from the perspective of Samuel, as he ruminates on his disturbing, searing past.

Most of the novel is told in flashbacks, and the reader follows the ups and downs and twisty road of Samuel and Sandrine's life, as Samuel battles for his future, listening to weekly testimony from his friends, coworkers and secret lovers. The plot unfolds in jarring revelations that will keep you flipping pages to see what happens to these well-drawn characters.

The flashbacks are pivotal to the plot, and Cook demonstrates in his usual lyrical prose, the devastation of a man wrestling with his demons and struggling to prove his innocence. Or did he really end his wife's journey with murder?

"Sandrine's Case" seizes you in its disturbing, haunting discovery, surprising you along the way with twists that will keep you reading until the final verdict.

I particularly enjoyed the scenes with Samuel's attorney, Morty. I really wish we had seen more of Morty, the robust, no-nonsense attorney. Entertaining character.

Heartbreaking and taut courtroom drama, "Sandrine's Case" is one of Cook's strongest novels to date and should not be missed by fans of Cook. Highly recommended.

I am eagerly awaiting Cook's next novel, "A Dancer in the Dust," coming in September 2014.
