

The Score

Adrienne Jansen

Notes for book groups

A summary

A grand piano crashes off a crane that's lifting it into a block of council flats. Stefan, piano restorer and illegal immigrant, has the impossible task of trying to rebuild it. His future depends on it. And – for better or worse – a misfit bunch of tenants decides to help him.

This novel is about immigrants, it's about a ramshackle community thrown together, it's about the kindness and violence that co-exist in council flats, it's about music, and it's about a piano, the real heart of it all.

The author

Adrienne Jansen writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry for both adults and children. For many years she taught ESOL and was involved in refugee resettlement and immigration issues, and this long interest in cross-cultural experience is reflected in her writing. She has written several books which record the experience of migrants coming to New Zealand, and has edited a number of publications written by newcomers to this country. In 2009, she teamed up with photographer Ans Westra in *The Crescent Moon: The Asian Face of Islam in New Zealand*, a book intended to present a more accurate 'snapshot' of this largest group of Muslims in New Zealand. *The Crescent Moon* is also a photographic exhibition touring New Zealand and Asia, and has taken Adrienne to Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

In 1993, Adrienne founded the Whitireia Polytechnic Creative Writing Programme. She now teaches fiction and editing on the programme part-time and does some freelance work. She has written several of the Creative Writing Programme's online courses and for 10 years she was part of the writing team at Te Papa, New Zealand's national museum. She lives in Titahi Bay, Porirua.

Her first two novels were also about a multi-cultural community. *Spirit Writing* (1999) and *Floating the Fish on Bamboo* (2001). To find out more about Adrienne's work and her previous novels, go to www.adriennejansen.co.nz.

Q & A with Adrienne Jansen

What research did you need to do for this novel about a grand piano falling off a crane?

I spent a lot of time with an expert piano technician, Serge Grandchamp, working out exactly what would happen. It was far more complex than I ever imagined when I first thought of this story. We had to create a scenario where a grand piano could be dropped, suffer enough damage that it seemed to be a write-off, but where there was just a possibility that it could be restored. The discussions with Serge were around what height the piano could fall from (you can write off a grand piano just by tipping it over!), exactly how it landed, exactly what the damage would be, what the parts/restoration would cost, how much time each step would take. It was a very detailed research project – and extremely interesting.

Is this a Wellington novel?

In one sense it's a Wellington novel. I live in Wellington, and I've been in and out of blocks of flats like this quite a lot. But a friend from England told me that he grew up with people like this bunch of characters in London, and a friend from Melbourne told me something similar! Maybe it could be any inner city. However I did have a comment from a Christchurch reader that 'it's not New Zealand, is it!' so our experiences are all very different.

You've written a lot about multicultural things. What drives this interest?

I live in a very mixed community, and I've spent a great deal of my adult life with people who've come to New Zealand under a range of circumstances, so really I'm just writing about life as I experience it. And that's the reality in New Zealand now, that New Zealand is a very multicultural community. But I've always been interested in the stories of people who change countries, and the way different cultures come up against each other, or influence each other.

Background to the novel

In 2012 there were about 3000 Sudanese living in New Zealand. South Sudan became independent from North Sudan in 2011, but the struggle for independence has rapidly increased the number of South Sudanese outside South Sudan. Almost over half a million South Sudanese have left the country as refugees, either permanently or as temporary workforce. New Zealand has over 1000 Serbs. Serbia was part of the former Yugoslavia. Over 2 million

Serbs have resettled in other parts of the world, for economic or political reasons, and most recently during the 1990s as a result of the Yugoslav wars.

There are fewer than 1000 Portuguese in New Zealand, but a new theory suggests that they were the first Europeans to visit this country, with a small ship arriving here in 1522. There are about 175,000 Indians in New Zealand, and they have been settling in New Zealand since the late 1800s.

Migrants from the United Kingdom are consistently one of New Zealand's largest migrant groups each year.

Questions for discussion

1. Do you think Marko is an ex-KGB spy, or does he simply suffer from agoraphobia?
2. This is Greg's view of migrants: I don't pay my taxes to feed a bunch of parasites who weasel into this country then come grovelling to the government – *our* government – to prop them up.' Why does he say these things? Do many people in New Zealand hold this view?
3. Nada, who is indomitably optimistic, also says, 'That's what leaving your country does, it empties out the old life. Like tipping the bottle down the drain. Sometimes the new life fills the bottle again, sometimes not. You can't just make it happen.' 'If you're not careful, this country will strip you, leave you with no self-respect.' Why does she say these things?
4. Stefan has left Portugal to escape the consequences of having possibly killed someone. Given those circumstances, should he be given permanent residence in New Zealand?
5. Do you believe a group of tenants would rally around Stefan in this way, or do you think it unlikely?
6. Do you think it could have been any big project that brought the tenants together or is there a particular quality about music that helped make that happen?
7. Who was your favourite character, and why?
8. What is your experience of being a migrant and/or interacting with people from a country other than your own?



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