



ADRIENNE JANSEN

THE SCORE

This is a chapter from Adrienne Jansen's
upcoming novel *The Score*. For more
information and to watch the book trailer,
head to the website —

www.adriennejansen.co.nz

The Score is available in October 2013, at
all good bookstores. RRP \$28.

1

THE BRIGHT GREEN tarpaulin wrapped around the grand piano bags and billows in the wind. Something's not right – Stefan's seen hundreds of pianos moved, but never one wrapped like this. So much is riding on all this, and what if these guys don't know what they're doing?

But then, different country, different ways of doing things. Maybe.

Two men have manoeuvred the piano out of the van – stripped of the legs and the lyre it's a great shuddering wing,

standing narrow and upright on its wooden shoe. The trolley beneath it shimmies a little on the asphalt, and one man shoots out a hand to steady it. Stefan goes over to them. He touches one man on the elbow. ‘Hey.’

‘What’s up?’

‘Where’s the older man who came to my place to measure up?’

‘Andy. He’s the boss. But he’s hurt his back.’ The man grins. ‘We’re it for today.’

As he says it there’s a great crack of wind, and the tarpaulin rips loose, exposing the piano’s skeleton of heavy bracing. Stefan can’t help himself – he lunges for it, but the man shouts, ‘Leave it, we’ve got it,’ and the two movers haul the canvas back in then yank the straps tight. A third man is on the balcony, four floors up. The French doors are open, and from down below the

single light bulb behind him swings wildly in the draught like a ship's lantern.

The crane is backed up to the building, a seven-story block of council flats with rows of shoebox balconies and blank windows, and fifteen or twenty people from the flats have shuffled into a rangy circle, watching. Stefan recognises one or two faces but not many – in the month he's been here he's mostly kept to himself. There's some talk – 'Whose piano is it anyway?' 'That foreign guy over there in the blue T-shirt.' That foreign guy. 'Remember the fire in the basement last year?' The fire in the basement – this is like a fire in the basement? 'Come over here, you get a better view.' It might as well be the ringside seats at a circus. Stefan moves away where he can't hear.

The long jointed arm of the crane unfolds and the hook swings out over the

piano. One of the men bundles the straps together and pushes them into the hook, but the loose edges of the green tarpaulin are still flapping wildly in the wind. The man signals to the crane driver standing at the controls, and the driver walks across. The men huddle together, then they call Stefan over. ‘We can’t do it. Too windy. Problem is, your mate Greg –’

‘He’s not my mate.’

‘– he’s going to turn up and –’

The crane driver glances over Stefan’s shoulder. ‘Speak of the devil ...’

‘What the hell are you waiting for?’ Greg’s come up behind them and he’s shouting though he’s only a couple of metres away. He’s not much taller than Stefan but he’s stocky, bulging out of his striped shirt and jeans. And he’s angry, they can see it in the bullish set of his shoulders.

The crane driver says, ‘We can’t do it. Wind’s come up too much.’

‘What! Sniff of wind and you’re whining, “It’s come up too much.” Bunch of old women. Get on with it.’

‘Look, you put that piano up, it’ll catch every last bit of wind there is. You get one big gust like we’ve had a few of in the last ten minutes, and anything can happen – it could swing against the building, start to spin, you can’t hold it. I’m telling you, we can’t do it.’

‘And I’m telling you, you damned well can.’ Greg folds his arms. He’s spoiling for a fight.

Stefan says, ‘They know about this. They do it all the time. If it was my piano I wouldn’t move it today.’

‘It is your piano! But I’m paying for the moving, and it’s not going back where it

came from. It's going up there into your flat.'

The crane driver sets himself solidly between Greg and the piano. 'It's not going anywhere.'

The crowd has grown, it's thirty-five or forty, they can see there's a fight brewing and there's a lot of talk, but now Stefan can't hear it over the violent flapping of the edges of the tarpaulin.

Greg eyeballs the crane driver, there's only an arm's length between them, and he looks like he might smash the man's face. He says, 'You put that piano up there right now or I'll sue you for wasting my time.'

The crane driver stares back at him – with his hard hat and his big hands he's more than a match for the man – but then he shrugs. 'Okay. But we've told you it's too windy, and if anything happens it's on your

head. Got that?’ He turns his back on Greg and says, ‘Okay, guys, let’s do it.’

Not a single person in the crowd moves. The men bundle the straps into the hook again, the crane picks up the slack on the chain, the straps tauten and the piano lifts off the ground. It drifts a little but the two men have a rope to each end of the shoe and hold it steady. The piano slowly inches upwards, the men tweaking the ropes this way then that, but just as it’s level with the top of the first-floor windows, it begins to swing. The men steady it again. But then a rogue gust of wind slams into the car park. The piano swings wildly, the men can’t hold it, the wind slams again and the piano tosses like a leaf. It slews sideways and begins to slip out of the straps. The men fight to pull it back and the crane driver tries desperately to let it down but it’s too late,

the men shout but there's nothing they can do. The piano falls, hard onto one corner. There is a sickening bang, an explosion of shots, then it tips and crashes onto itself.

Every fibre in Stefan's body is thrumming, everything is going to snap. A great wrenching groan shudders up out of him. He closes his eyes. He can't look at the broken mess that the piano has become.

No one moves. Then Greg puts his hands on his head. The moving men drop the ropes trailing from their hands, and the crane driver slumps over the tray of the truck with his head on his arms.

The wind bangs around the car park. A little kid comes around the side of the piano. He has dreads and a bright red hoodie, and he crouches down and runs

his hands lightly over the smashed carcass of the piano. He picks up one small sliver of wood and slips it into his pocket.

ABOUT THE BOOK

A GRAND PIANO crashes off the crane that's lifting it into a block of council flats.

Rebuilding it is impossible. But for Stefan, piano restorer and illegal immigrant, it's the only way out of a heap of trouble. And for better or worse, a misfit bunch of tenants weighs in to help him. Everything depends on the wrecked piano and whether they can pull off its restoration.

The Score is about messy lives, shaky pasts and even shakier futures. Adrienne Jansen's ninth book is a warm and poignant novel that keeps a sharp observer's eye on this colourful, ramshackle community.

PRAISE FOR ADRIENNE JANSEN

‘[*Floating the Fish on Bamboo* is] compellingly written . . . an effortless read with convincing dialogue . . . a page-turner with real class.’ *Evening Post*

‘[Adrienne Jansen] writes like a charm, and has a confident, distinctive voice.’
Rachel McAlpine



ADRIENNE JANSEN is an author of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. She has lived and worked among immigrants in New Zealand for many years, and her writing draws strongly on that experience. She has written two novels, *Spirit*

Writing and *Floating the Fish on Bamboo*. She has also written a collection of poetry, *a stone seat and a shadow tree*, and most recently wrote the text for *The Crescent Moon: The Asian Face of Islam in New Zealand* with photography by Ans Westra.



ESCALATOR PRESS IS a bold new publishing initiative from the Whitireia Creative Writing Programme. As a wave of change sweeps through the publishing industry, Escalator Press rides that wave, positioning itself between self- and small-press publishing, and the major publishing houses. With production and marketing support from the Whitireia Publishing Programme and built on traditional publishing values, it offers a new model of author participation. It strongly supports existing publishers by identifying outstanding new talent, while at the same time developing its own list of quality new and established writers associated with Whitireia.