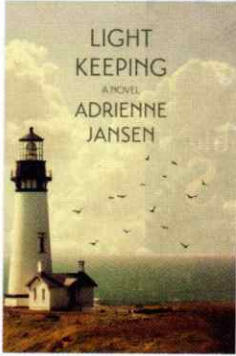


BY CHRIS BASKETT

**LIGHT KEEPING:  
A NOVEL**

by **Adrienne Jansen**  
(Quentin Wilson,  
\$37.50)



“  
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# Dark becomes light

Kiwi author's sweeping, emotional tale puts life around the sea at its very centre.

**L**ighthouses have a special place in New Zealand's psyche. Lighthouse keepers are now part of our past, icons of nostalgia, but lighthouse stories are still stories of the sea, historically important for our coastal nation. Put a lighthouse on the front of your novel and witness the attention it receives in the bookshop.

The lighthouse of this novel by Adrienne Jansen is at fictional Faulkner Point, staffed by Bill and Annie McBride, long-time keepers. Unlike the remote lighthouses they have previously staffed, this one is near a small town that includes a school. In the late 1970s when their son and daughter-in-law die in a car accident, young Jess and Robert, the orphaned children, move to a new life with their grandparents. The emotional life of all four is woven through with deep grief, ebbing and flowing like the sea. Slowly, the children are absorbed into lighthouse life, enticed by Bill's stories of historic shipwrecks and Annie's loving care. Jess is the

easier of the two children. Robert is the older, finding change more difficult as he remembers more of his parents, architect David and the colourful Hana.

Jansen is an expert scene-setter, using language that is tactile and sensual. In the beginning, Jess cries into "the rough knit and purl" of Annie's shoulder. At school, the new schoolmaster has hair that smells of salt and the teacher's skirt of chalk. Out on the point, the frequent wild weather around the keepers' house sends the clothesline "spinning and stuttering", and "the boom of the sea ... is like listening to your own heart beating".

As the children adjust to their new life, Bill struggles with the potential loss of his job and his way of life, one that has dominated his adulthood. Automation of the lighthouse's beams has been a threat to keepers for many years. Bill is only too aware that financial economies are the driver of the change. Local knowledge, and potentially lives, will be lost if the lights are unmanned. In the



**Adrienne Jansen: Shining a light on a way of life that was central to our coastal nation.**

after but he resists Jess's attempts to help and often sinks into alcoholic oblivion.

The importance of their disrupted childhood cannot be underestimated and reverberates as the years go by. But light-keeping is also light keeping, projecting light into the darkness of life and providing a beam of hope for the future. The siblings' past and future is tinged with the confrontation of change. The loss of what might have been is strong but ultimately there is gratitude for what life is now, the anchor of which is home and family.

Jansen, founder of the Whitireia Creative Writing Programme and an experienced author – this is her sixth novel – has written a touching piece of fiction combining her two great loves, storytelling and the sea. It stands, too, as a testament to the lives of New Zealand's lighthouse keepers. As Bill would say, "Imagine how many ships have steamed past out there, how many fishing boats, how many whales, how many storms ... every day something happens." ■

interim, maintenance costs have been neglected and daily life is an ongoing struggle of upkeep and raging against government bureaucracy.

In a concurrently running timeline

more than 40 years later, Jess and Robert are middle-aged and somewhat adrift. Jess is a mender of clocks and sometime carer of Robert, who struggles with life's practicalities. Robert may need looking