

The Fragments



Toni Jordan

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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PRAISE FOR *THE FRAGMENTS*

'I love Jordan's writing for its pitch-perfect blend of intelligence, compassion and humour.'

CLARE WRIGHT

'I so loved *The Fragments* by the amazing Toni Jordan. A thrilling, atmospheric, unforgettable story. I didn't want it to end.'

LIANE MORIARTY

'Jordan constructs a satisfying mystery, with rival conspiracy theories, plots, betrayal, clues and red herrings enough to confuse readers in their attempts to solve it – perfect for fans of Dominic Smith's *The Last Painting of Sara de Vos* and Heather Rose's *The Museum of Modern Love*.'

KILL YOUR DARLINGS

'It's a treat to step back into 1980s-era Australia with [Jordan].'

BOOKS + PUBLISHING

ABOUT TONI JORDAN

Toni Jordan is the author of five novels. The international bestseller *Addition* was a Richard and Judy Bookclub pick and was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award. *Fall Girl* was published internationally and has been optioned for film, and *Nine Days* was awarded Best Fiction at the Indie Awards, shortlisted for the ABIA Best General Fiction award and named in *Kirkus Review's* top 10 Historical Novels of 2013. *Our Tiny, Useless Hearts* was shortlisted for the Voss Literary Prize 2017 and longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award 2018. Toni lives in Melbourne.

A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO *THE FRAGMENTS*

On Caddie Walker's bedside table are copies of *All Has an End*, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*. Perfect indicators of what this literary mystery novel is all about – a profound and moving masterpiece, a mystery to be solved, a life story to be told. And in the last book a 'true history' of a fictional character – a nod, perhaps, to *The Fragments* being a book about books, a fiction about fiction.

So we have the story of *All Has an End* by the charismatic and enigmatic Inga Karlson, the novel and author Toni Jordan has invented to put at the centre of her own novel. We have Caddie, named after *All Has an End's* main character, trying to solve the mystery of whether someone could know the missing lines that complete the famous fragments left from Inga's second book *The Days, the Minutes*. And we have the life story of Rachel, from her childhood leaving Pennsylvania to her young adulthood in New York, 'the city that called to people around the world' (156).

Both Caddie and Rachel are waking up to the world around them. Caddie has to emerge from mourning her father and leaving university and her relationship with her patronising supervisor. Rachel has to escape from a violent, abusive father and a compliant mother who allows her daughter to be hit because 'one is better than three'.

And both become open to the possibility of unexpected love, Caddie with Jamie and Rachel with Inga herself. So this is a romance novel as well as a mystery novel, and along with that a novel that reminds us of the pleasure and potential power of books. 'Books,' as Jamie says, 'are art that talks to us' (64).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you read a book that affects you as much as *All Has an End* affects its readers? Have you read an author 'who speaks to everyone, yet makes you feel that she is speaking only to you'? (32).
2. What do you imagine *All Has an End* and *The Days, the Minutes* are about? What do you imagine Karlson's character Cadence is like?
3. 'And in the end, all we have are the hours and the days, the minutes and the way we bear them, the seconds spent on this earth and the number of them that truly mattered.' The beginning of this sentence is the line from *The Days, the Minutes* that most resonates with Caddie. Why do you think it does? Does it resonate with you? Why?
4. Is 1980s Brisbane, with its lack of culture, set up as the antithesis of 1930s New York with its jazz clubs and publishing houses? Or are there similarities between the two settings?
5. Caddie recognises herself as a character in a 'chosen-one' story (32). Is Caddie 'chosen' or does she choose her own part in her story?
6. 'Books are time travel and space travel and mood-altering drugs. They are mind-melds and telepathy and past-life regression' (42). Do you agree?
7. When holding the copy of *Don Quixote*, Caddie feels linked to the other people who have held the book. 'She sees that space and time are not always linear but are sometimes folded into pleats' (64). How do books connect people over time? How else are space and time pleated in *The Fragments*, or more generally?
8. 'We are specks in time ... and it's liberating,' Caddie realises as she pores over the microfiche films in the library (111). At the same time, she is still determined to find out what happened in the past. What does *The Fragments* say about the past and its relationship with the present and the future?
9. By talking about the antipathy towards Karlson's work in 1930s America, is Jordan arguing that fascism, or prejudice, is the enemy of art? Is she drawing parallels to today?
10. A woman's life is pain, that's all there is to it,' Rachel's mother tells her after her father beats her (121). Do Caddie, Rachel and Inga defy this proclamation? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. Rachel wonders how many Ingas there are (209). Do you feel that you ever get to know the 'real' Inga? Does Rachel? Does Inga? Does Inga find her 'true self'?
12. If Inga can, at one point, feel 'free now, from everything', what was she trapped by? Who else is trapped in the novel, and how? Who escapes?
13. Caddie wonders 'what life must be like for Philip: to care for no one but yourself, to allow everyone around you to be broken in your service. If that's what it means to be successful' (230). Is that the definition, or the key, to success? If so, is Inga successful? If not, how does Inga's success differ?
14. 'These are the kinds of books she likes the most – of struggle and victory, or even honourable defeat. The tense wondering about what will happen next' (157). Is this the kind of book that you like best? Is *The Fragments* this kind of book?
15. Did you pick the twist at the end? How did Jordan lead you to the right – or wrong – conclusion?