

That Deadman Dance: A Novel - Kim Scott

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Set in Western Australia in the first decades of the nineteenth century, *That Deadman Dance* is a vast, gorgeous novel about the first contact between the Aboriginal Noongar people and the new European settlers. Bobby Wabalanginy is a young Noongar man, smart, resourceful, and eager to please. He befriends the European arrivals, joining them as they hunt whales, till the land, and establish their new colony. He is welcomed into a prosperous white family, and eventually finds himself falling in love with the daughter, Christine. But slowly-by design and by hazard-things begin to change. Not everyone is happy with how the colony is progressing. Livestock mysteriously start to disappear, crops are destroyed, there are "accidents" and injuries on both sides. As the Europeans impose ever-stricter rules and regulations in order to keep the peace, Bobby's Elders decide they must respond in kind, and Bobby is forced to take sides, inexorably drawn into a series of events that will forever change the future of his country. *That Deadman Dance* is inevitably tragic, as most stories of European and native contact are. But through Bobby's life, Kim Scott exuberantly explores a moment in time when things could have been different, when black and white lived together in amazement rather than fear of the other, and when the world seemed suddenly twice as large and twice as promising. At once celebratory and heartbreaking, this novel is a unique and important contribution to the literature of native experience.

Author: Scott, Kim
Publisher: Bloomsbury USA Illustration: N Language: ENG Title: That Deadman Dance Pages: 00000
(Encrypted EPUB) On Sale: 2012-03-07 SKU-13/ISBN: 9781608197798 Category: Fiction : General

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