



Acute Misfortune: The Life and Death of Adam Cullen

Erik Jensen

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Winner, 2015 Nib Waverley Library Award for Literature

***Acute Misfortune* is an unflinching portrait of talent and addiction.**

In 2008, the artist Adam Cullen invited journalist Erik Jensen to stay in his spare room and write his biography. A publisher wanted it, Cullen said. He was sick and ready to talk. Everything would be on the record.

What followed were four years of intense honesty and a relationship that became increasingly dangerous. At one point Cullen shot Jensen, to see how committed he was to the book. At another, he threw Jensen from a speeding motorbike.

Eventually, Jensen realised the contract did not exist. Cullen had invented it to get to know the writer. The book became an investigation of Cullen's psychology and the decline of his final years.

In *Acute Misfortune*, we have a riveting account of the life and death of one of Australia's most celebrated artists. The figure famous for his Archibald Prize-winning portrait of David Wenham is followed through drug deals and periods of deep self-reflection, onward into his trial for weapon possession and finally his death in 2012 at the age of 46.

The story is by turns tender and horrifying: a spare tale of art, sex, drugs and childhood, told at close quarters and without judgment.

Shortlisted, 2015 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards

Shortlisted, 2015 Walkley Book Award

'Fierce and spellbinding' —David Marr

'The terrible force of the painter's rush to self-destruction is matched all the way by the writer's calm mastery of his story.' —Helen Garner

'A teasing and complex ode to a man who defied attempts to categorise him or to understand him. Jensen's portrait dares to be both beautiful and ugly - that is, he is both tender and forensic. This is a marvellous, propulsive, intelligent read.' —Christos Tsiolkas

'Jensen has delivered a lucid portrait of a deeply complicated talent; one of the best nonfiction releases of 2014 to date' —*Books+Publishing Online*

'If biography is the art of dismantling your subject, while pretending to be a mere scribe, then Jensen is superb as both beautician and mortician' —Charles Waterstreet

'*Acute Misfortune* is a fascinating, non-judgmental exploration of the forces that shaped Cullen's life ... It's

a pacy, absorbing read. Jensen has a wonderfully light touch that balances the extremities of the story.’
—*Australian*

‘Brave, expressive, funny, pungent, revelatory, and at times very sad’ —*Sydney Review of Books*

‘A sober book about a man who was anything but. A clear-eyed, careful account of a squandered life that is generous and unusual in Jensen’s refusal to condemn or opine about a man who was a stew of wretched characteristics common to an addict.’ —Kate Jennings

‘Like the painter himself, [Jensen] eschews a conventional form and tone for one that is compressed, nonjudgmental, and mostly impressionistic.’ —*the Age*

‘Raw and uncompromising’ —*Herald Sun*

Erik Jensen is the founding editor of the *Saturday Paper*. He has worked as a writer and editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where he won the Walkley Award for Young Print Journalist of the Year and the United Nations Association of Australia’s Media Peace Prize. His work has appeared in various publications, including the *Monthly* and *New Statesman*.

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