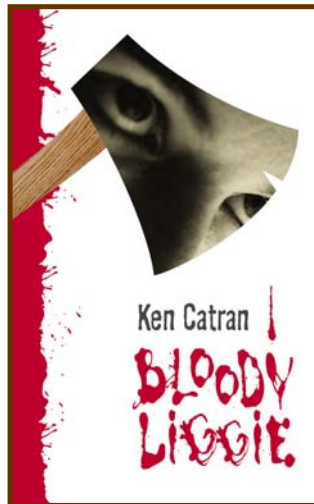


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BLOODY LIGGIE

Ken Catran



Teachers' Notes

Written by Ken Catran

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In the middle of the night fourteen-year old Ligia Tanner left her bed, went outside, picked up an axe, returned to the house and brutally murdered her father and stepmother.

The author, Catran wants his readers to associate his fictional character, Liggie, with the late 19^h Century American woman Lizzie Borden who was tried for the murder of her father and step-mother in a similar gruesome manner. Her case caught a nation's interest, resulting in a popular rhyme of the time:

Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her father forty whacks.
When she saw what she had done
She gave her mother forty-one.

This rhyme, changed to fit the new circumstances, is printed as a prologue to *Bloody Liggie* and reference to it is made in the first chapter. Thus Catran has underlined the sensational nature of the case, as well as the bloodiness of the execution of the murders. There are no other similarities between the two.

SYNOPSIS

Danny Bourne, sixteen-years-old, is rescued from a beating by the school bully by a new girl at the school. A few days later his journalist father shows him a photocopy photograph of Liggie Tanner, murderess, believed dead after an escape from the institution in which she was held and, a few days later, the discovery of her shoes and a note by a bridge. Danny thinks that, maybe, Liggie and his rescuer, Sigourney Marharg, are one and the same. *Bloody Liggie* is Danny's search to find out if his suspicion is true. In the process he becomes fascinated and infatuated with the self-possessed, solitary Sigourney; ignoring his few friends, even finding himself detached from his parent's marriage break-up. At the same time Danny is trying to avoid Russell Brock and his cronies who are intent on making his life as miserable as possible.

STYLE

Danny's delivery in first person past tense is in the style of old detective stories; short staccato sentences, scene setting by a practised eye. For example a telephone conversation on Liggie finishes as: *He disconnected* (p.51), and just before his account of his public humiliation, *I should mention that the class whiteboard had folding sections; also that Brock had prepared his thing over break* (p.37) In fact Danny tells us that he begins the whole exercise as

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detective work, often referring to himself as PI Bourne. As he becomes more involved with Sigourney the person, as distinct from Sigourney the murderer, Danny's delivery becomes more considered.

CHARACTERS

Liggie/Sigourney is a complex character and the author makes sure that the reader is left with ambiguous feelings about her. During the course of the novel she moves from silent enigma to almost 'normal' girl.

Danny grows too, but not in the same depth as Liggie: his character development is dependent on her.

The other characters verge on being stock characters, as is common in the detective genre, given a modicum of individuality by Catran's ability to take them one step further: Brock is the rich, spoilt bully, his dad, a rich, grasping developer. Danny's parents could be any couple working their way toward a divorce. The detective is every smart cop we have seen on the screen.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- **Murder:** Are there any justifications for murder? Consider the effect of abuse, denigration of self. Does the way in which a murder is committed affect how a murderer is viewed in the community? Should it have? Would the media have treated Liggie more kindly if she had killed her parents in a different method?
- **Friendship:** Should friendship extend to helping criminals? Consider not only Danny's part in Liggie's escape but that of the young couple who helped her after her supposed suicide. (p.88)
- **Justice:** Liggie is not brought to trial. She is assumed guilty and locked away, sedated. Lizzie Borden was brought to trial, mainly on circumstantial evidence and although acquitted was socially ostracized for the rest of her life. Is this justice? Also consider Danny's father's simile of the *Squashed Possums*.
- **Rehabilitation:** Is justice involved in punishment only, or is a chance of rehabilitation the right of every member of society?
- **Self-perception:** Does how one sees oneself influence personal behaviour?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Catran has published some 20 young adult novels, has been a finalist five times in the New Zealand 'Best Teenage Fiction' awards, and his books have been published in the US and the UK.

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He began as a professional writer 20 years ago in the genre of television scriptwriter and won two Best Drama Script awards. Ken believes that the recent trend to formulaise television led him to write children's literature as 'the last bastion of free imagination'.

He writes science fiction, contemporary fiction and historical fiction. Ken is married to writer and lives in New Zealand.