

New beginnings

A five-month break in Bali to get away from it all turned into a successful first novel for Author of the Month **Kate Veitch**.



KATE VEITCH DID SOMETHING

most people only dream about – she packed up and moved to Bali for five months, where she rented a house in the hills overlooking the flashy beauty of emerald rice fields. The former literary journalist and magazine columnist had gone there badly in need of “down time” after a divorce and a family illness.

“While all that awfulness was going on, I held onto the thought of being in Bali,” says Kate. “Like when you’re trudging through sleeting rain, holding onto the image of the warm bath that awaits you at home – that’s how I felt.”

Kate’s time in her tropical eyrie turned out to be “exactly like that, incredibly healing and nurturing”. And much more.

Kate met up with an old friend and they fell madly in love. “And I thought I’d write a book or learn Indonesian properly. The book won. My Indonesian is still really crummy.”

The result, Kate’s fabulous first novel called *Listen*, owes a lot of its plot to an idle thought: What might have happened to her mother, a talented journalist who gave up her career to raise four children, had she not been tied down by family?

Kate, elder sister of Melbourne actor Michael Veitch, is a classic baby boomer who was swept away from home and school at 15 by the wave of change in the late '60s. Unlike her mother, Kate had lots of options. “The 1950s and 1960s was a crushing time for women like my mother, who had a taste of a career during World War II and then had to return to domesticity.”

Kate’s father, also a journalist, was “by no means chauvinistic. But it was a part

of the culture that he thought he should be able to support his wife, which meant she couldn’t support herself.”

Listen is a rich, emotional drama about a young mother of four, who is deeply frustrated by the ties that bind and the trauma this inflicts on her young family. “We all had something happen to us when we were growing up that left us feeling bruised. My book is about how the different members of a family deal with – or not, as the case may be – that defining event in their lives.”

Kate’s life-defining events include the collapse of her 20-year marriage that had produced a “beautiful son”, and the pain of dealing with her elderly widowed father, who has dementia. “He had a terror of being put in a home. Knowing that I was doing something that my father hated was awful. There was a lot of guilt.”

Sometimes endings usher in beginnings. For Kate, it was the moment *Listen* was plucked from a “slush pile” by an Australian literary agent, and the visit to Bali of the man Kate had known in the '70s. “We quickly realised we couldn’t live without one another,” she says happily. ■

– CAROL GEORGE



Listen by
Kate Veitch,
Viking,
\$32.95.

Reading this is like peeking into a family home to eavesdrop on private thoughts and conversations. In other words, it’s irresistible. The story begins with a mother grimly stuffing a chicken on Christmas Eve in 1967. Disaster is circling. Fast-forward to her four now-adult children, who have moved on, to varying degrees, from the shock of that night, when the past returns to unhinge them. A compelling drama with classy erotic scenes and a lot of heart and humanity. Impossible to put down.

