



Listen
Kate Veitch
Viking, \$32.95

KATE Veitch's first novel is exceptionally good. She writes smoothly, cleanly and with care and feeling for her characters. I winced when things went wrong for them, cheered when life was bountiful, and worried how they were going to cope with their problems. Which makes it sound like a soap opera and it certainly isn't that: it's a compassionate, engrossing story of a family.

Rosemarie ran away with Alex, an older man, when she was 17. She was pregnant and left her own family in England to live in Australia. We first meet her on Christmas Eve in 1967, the promise of glorious sunshine and excitement and fulfilment having worn off a long time ago. With the realisation that her husband is getting old, the frustration that life is passing her by and the sounds of her four children fighting among themselves in the background, Rosemarie does something that has profound consequences for everyone.

Forty years on, we meet the adult family in extended form, with spouses and grandchildren. Veitch draws their characters with skill and keen psychological insight. She shows us how each member has coped, or not, with what happened. There are some very moving scenes. There is potential for sentimental excess but I think the author manages to steer away from that and give us something much more satisfying. Veitch writes as if she listens carefully and observes closely.