



## GLASS: STORIES

By Adriana Ellis

Mockingbird/Ginninderra,  
110 pp, \$20

These stories are marked by a gentle acceptance of the way life is. There is nothing raucous about Adriana Ellis's protestations in the face of commonplace pain. Her work has a matter-of-fact tone, yet skilfully insinuates that there is a world of emotion beneath the calm surface of her prose.

One or two of them are disappointing. *Shiny Black Shoes* is a chessboard of young characters. When tragedy finally befalls it has not been possible for the reader to make enough emotional investment in the central figure, Rahini, for the story to land a punch.

But other stories have a much tighter focus. Both *A World of Women* and *The Lizard* are fine pieces. In the former, an older woman, Celia, copes with the death of a husband and a life of reduced dimensions. Her New Year's resolution is to get to the beach without crying. *The Lizard* deals with Katie, a teacher in mid life, trying to revitalise her relationship with her partner.

Ellis's acute powers of observation create subtle energy in stories of quiet spirit.



## LISTEN

By Kate Veitch

Viking, 365 pp, \$32.95

This novel covers a wide emotional territory. It deals with many issues that press on the citizens of babyboomalia: parents with dementia, fractured families, teenage children, menopause, sibling rivalry. While a practised storyteller like Kate Veitch never makes you feel she is compiling a compendium of mid-life problems, it would be hard to leave this book without a fresh perspective on the way pressure mounts in the middle years.

On Christmas Eve, 1967, Rosemarie gets into a car and leaves her husband, Alex, and four children: Deborah, James, Robert and Meredith. The siblings have not spent the past 40 years discussing their abandonment but, of course, it is pivotal in all their lives.

Now Alex is fraying mentally and James, an artist, has almost by accident located Rosemarie in England. It is hard to credit the ease with which he warms to her. But the characters of these four siblings are well drawn; Veitch understands their fraught world. **Reviews by Michael McGirr**