

Fiction

TRUST

KATE VEITCH, VIKING, \$32.95

LEAVING SUZIE PYE

JOHN DALE, 4TH ESTATE, \$27.99

WELL
READ

REVIEWED BY KATHARINE ENG

Kate Veitch's second novel, like her first, *Listen*, starts in suburban mundanity – a meek visual arts lecturer wife, a confident architect husband snarling at her inadequacies on the doubles court – but soon blossoms into the recognisable complexities of a life made real by characters full of human depth and interest. It is reductive of their richness to categorise them thus, but *Listen* looks at the effects on a family when a mother opts for personal fulfilment over a domesticity that stifles her, while *Trust* explores the opposite: the effects of subjugating creativity to the demands of family.

Susanna's mother, who was herself unfulfilled in the job she did for 40 years, has steered her into the safety of teaching rather than practising art; husband Gerry, a devoted father if not partner, assumes that she will always put the family before her "hobby"; the children – sporty Seb struggling with his sexual orientation, creative Stella-Jean taking her own art to the marketplace with practical flair – have needed a playroom more than she needs a studio.

At the book's centre is a cataclysm that becomes the catalyst for Susanna's return to art, for painful revelations about her marriage and for the resolution of Seb's sexuality. Around the edges are other characters and issues equally memorably and thoughtfully explored. Even the unnamed students who pave the way for Susanna's exciting renaissance as an artist have a distinctive reality that lasts and grows in the mind after the book is finished – a perspective from which the

reader can also admire the elegant architecture and artistic integrity of a novel which has these subjects among its themes.

In contrast, just about the only thing *Leaving Suzie Pye* has going for it is a puff from Helen Garner which makes you wonder whether there are Helen Garners other than the well-known prose stylist. Far from "rip(ping) along with verve and confidence", John Dale's third novel maunders oh-so-slowly and rapidly through the midlife crisis of sex-obsessed Joe who picks up Suzanne Pye, single mother and slumming academic, at a Bunnings sausage sizzle.

Suzie wants a simple sexual relationship, but even so, not much sex comes Joe's way as Suzie is deflected by African refugees, by her migraines, teenage children and academic ambitions.

This book too has a catalyst, although not a cataclysm, dividing it in two, when Joe goes off to Galipoli bearing his grandfather's medals. Here he finds a new object of desire: the voluptuous Athena who, oddly enough given her far superior attributes, still fails to exorcise Suzie Pye. This section is full of hints of double-cross but these dribble away to nothing, along with the significance of Joe's odd susceptibility to attacks by large black cars. The second of these, however, leads to what is easily the best thing in the book: a highly creative Near Death Experience. The novel is supposed, I think, to be satirical and therefore funny. It's not. ■