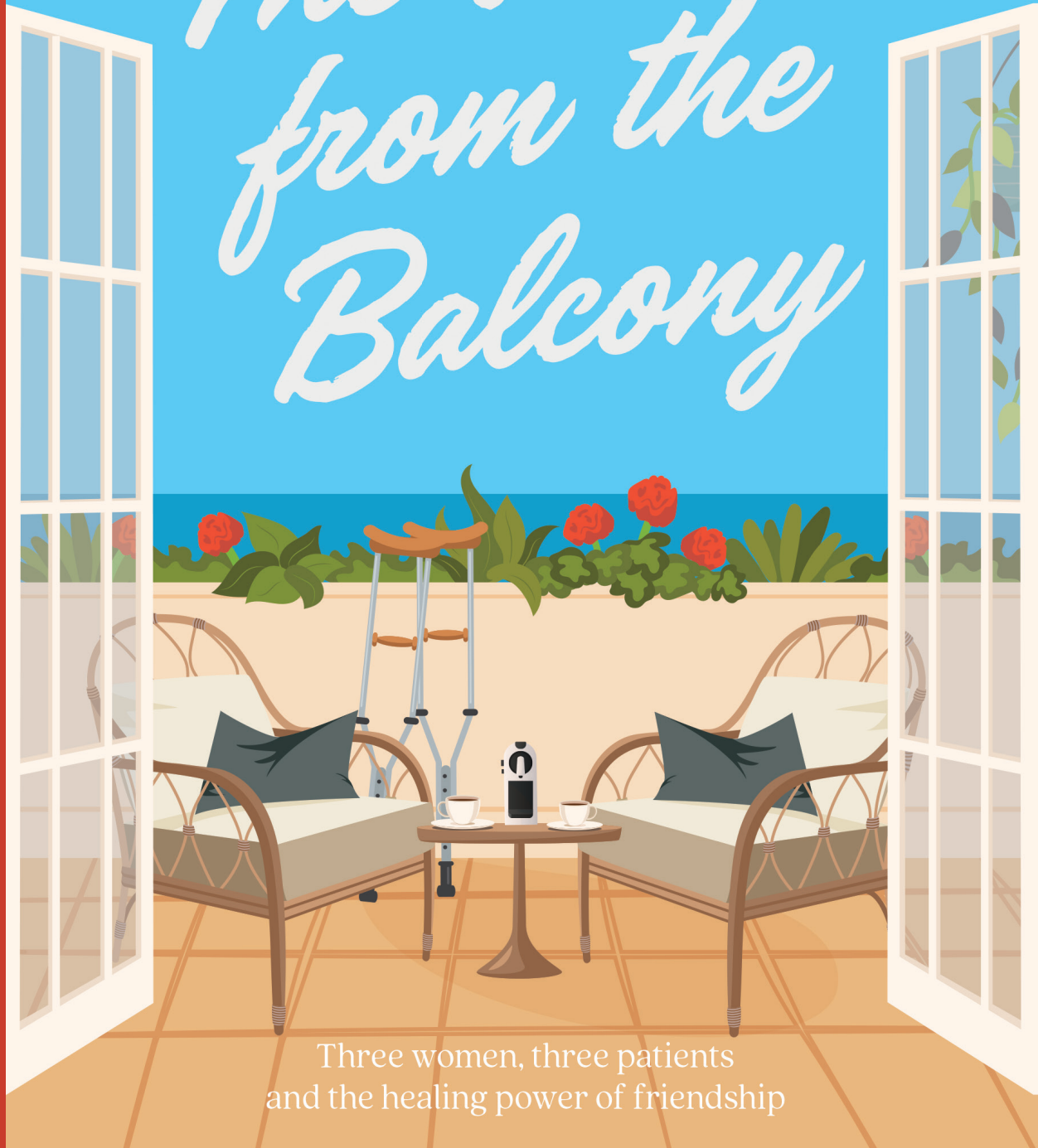


Janette Paul

The View from the Balcony

'A powerful,
nuanced story'

AMANDA
HAMPSON



Three women, three patients
and the healing power of friendship

READING GROUP NOTES

Blurb

A heartwarming and evocative novel of love, friendship and family, where hope overcomes all – even terrible hospital coffee.

Andie has no memory of the man who pushed her out of the way of a speeding car. A week before Coral's biggest career highlight, her mum has a fall. And the last thing Mara wants is to be assigned to work at the hospital bedside of the much-despised senior partner of her law firm.

Andie, Coral and Mara become the daily visitors to the three patients at the end of East Wing at Hepburn House Rehabilitation Hospital. The balcony that connects the three rooms provides an oasis, a healing place, but more than that, too: a place where their lives will interconnect and never be quite the same again...

About JANETTE PAUL

Janette Paul is an internationally published author of contemporary women's fiction and romantic comedy, and is the alter ego of award-winning suspense author Jaye Ford. Her first novel won two Davitt Awards for Australian women crime writers and her books have been translated into nine languages. She is a former news and sport journalist, was the first woman to host a live national sport show on Australian TV and ran her own public relations consultancy before turning to fiction. She now writes from her home in Newcastle, New South Wales.

Discussion Questions

1. Coral is a member of the 'sandwich' generation, in that she has to look after both her own children and her ageing parents. During this novel, she is experiencing a particularly difficult time. How does Coral balance her personal obligations and professional duties? Do you think it is possible to do this successfully? What does this say about Coral's character?
2. How does the relationship between Mara and Estelle evolve throughout the story? What key events influence this evolution? How are they similar, and how are they different?
3. In what ways does the novel explore the theme of career and ambition? How do different characters handle their career aspirations?
4. Is the advice from Andie's friends to 'move on' bad advice? Are there other ways her friends could have helped her deal with her grief and trauma, do you think?
5. Discuss the role of personal relationships as depicted in the novel. Which characters find it easy to form relationships with others, and which find it difficult? Why is this, do you think?
6. How do the settings, such as the shared balcony on which our three stories converge, contribute to the overall atmosphere of the novel? What impact does setting have on the narrative in general, particularly the contrast between indoor spaces and the natural surroundings?
7. What are some examples of humour in the novel, and how do they affect the tone of the story? Examine the role of humour and wit in character interactions. How does it enhance your understanding of their dynamics?
8. Consider the themes of trauma, memory and forgetting in relation to Andie. How do Andie's experiences in this novel allow her to process the tragic circumstances in her past?
9. How is the theme of overcoming adversity portrayed through the three protagonists' stories? What does each woman overcome, and what factors are instrumental in this happening?
10. What role does cultural and geographical setting play in shaping the characters' experiences and viewpoints? Consider their backgrounds, travel and what control each was able to have over their own life.
11. What are some of the ways the characters deal with their personal crises, and what do you think this reveals about their personalities?
12. How does the novel portray the concept of mentorship and learning through Mara and Estelle's interactions?
13. Explore the theme of friendship in the novel. How do Mara, Andie and Coral support one another, and how do their outside friendships help (or hinder) them through the events of the novel?
14. Discuss how the novel addresses the theme of empowerment, particularly in the context of Coral's and Mara's journeys and decisions.
15. How are themes of justice and advocacy represented in Estelle's work and her relationships with clients?