



INTERVIEW

The offer that was put in writing

Novelist said no but yes to an unusual chapter in her life, writes Melissa Heagney

Lee Tulloch was in Paris working for *Vogue* magazine when she was intrigued and inspired by a sudden offer. She didn't accept the offer, which came from an older, wealthy man.

Instead, she wrote a book about what might have been.

"I was invited by a strange man to go to Capri with him," Tulloch says. "I said no, but I always imagined what would have happened if I'd said yes."

Tulloch's latest dark and erotic novel, *The Woman in the Lobby*, examines the use of looks and charm to win over wealthy suitors.

The main character, 30-something divorcee Violet Armengard takes the reader on her journey from Melbourne to glamorous hotels and locales across the globe – mostly places Tulloch visited when on assignments for such magazines as *Harper's Bazaar Australia* and *New York Magazine*.

As a fashion editor and journalist in the 1980s and '90s, she lived in Paris and New York and was a keen observer of people.

"I spent time observing a lot of women picking up men and men picking up older women in lobbies."

Visiting luxury hotels, she used the surrounds to set scenes in her book. She stayed in some of the top hotels in Europe, China and Japan.

"It's a bit hard to picture these places at home in Australia, so I did a lot of travelling. It (the novel) took a little longer than usual to write."

Tulloch says much of her inspiration came from the "grand, dusty decadence of old European hotels".

"Parisian hotels have such incredible stories to them, just seeping out of the hallways as you walk past."

One such amazing story is that of a couple who paid to change the colour of the paint in their hotel room every time they visited. They would have it repainted its original colour after they left.

Tulloch says the most difficult part of writing *The Woman in the Lobby* was the love scenes. Despite the gorgeous surrounds, she believes there is a sense of the ugly and empty in them.

She says the same sense is present in the chapter inspired by the offer from the wealthy gentleman in Paris. In the novel, an older man travels to Italy with Armengard and two English models. The story unfolds into something "creepy and rather unpleasant".

"That was me imagining what it would have been like in the worst sense," she says.

"There's been a lot of books written about call girls – a lot of them are by blokes making it up and making it sound titillating, but I wanted to take a different point of view.

"(Sometimes) it took two to three weeks to write some of those scenes because I wanted to get the words right."

But the concept still fascinates the author. For her latest project, Tulloch has been following an Australian woman working as a geisha in Japan.

For more information, visit www.leetulloch.com

