About three years ago

I was walking through the Botanic Gardens in Sydney with my young daughter - looking for fairies (as you do with a five-year-old). When we reached the Rose Garden – one of my favourite parts of the gardens – I noticed a large, cast-bronze sundial. As I ran my hands over the raised engravings of herbs and flowers, it was honestly as though there was a bolt from above. I just knew there was a story that involved a sundial, and I had a very clear picture of a similar object in an English garden, a long time ago.

That idea stayed with me and over the coming months I began to wonder what the story might be. I imagined a young woman, chafing against the strictures of her time, and then I began to picture a woman living in the present day, one who would have been more at home in an earlier age. I liked the idea of their two natures being at odds with the time they lived in, and also that they had a connection to each other. I also wanted to contrast their two relationships – the contemporary one being more gentle and understated, and the historical one as more impulsive and passionate – the opposite of what you might expect for each time.

One day, I found myself reading a newspaper story of a rare, highly poisonous plant that suddenly sprang up in an English suburban garden. The owners were mystified as to how it could have grown there until they realised that they had been leaving out seed for the birds. The plant was from South America, colloquially known as The Devil's Trumpet and I couldn't resist such a name! I also knew that the setting would be Cornish (where I spent many childhood holidays and a county that is known for its wonderful gardens), and Sydney, where I have lived for many years. I loved the idea of a story that spanned the world, a personal story with huge consequences for future generations of a family.
I also adore botanical illustration, and am fascinated by the fact that an illustration can often record a plant in clearer detail than a photograph. I went to several exhibitions of botanical art in Sydney and London as part of my research for the book.

I had previously written two contemporary novels, however, the idea of writing historical fiction with a contemporary thread, so that the history – by means of an object or a building – is made present hundreds of years later, was immensely appealing to me.

The Botanist's Daughter is the story that tapped me on the shoulder on that sultry summer's day, and I only hope I have been able to do it justice.

Kayte Nunn,
author of *The Botanist's Daughter*