

Story for performance #151
webcast from Sydney at 07:39PM, 18 Nov 05



Source: AFP, AP, 'Sharon agrees to 'instant' election',
The Australian online, 18/11/05.

Tags: [home](#), [intimacy](#), [plants](#)

Writer/s: [Cynthia Troup](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

At the Botanic Gardens she sits by the Nymphaea Lake, watching the weddings there; watching the waterlilies open fully to the sun. While the air above the lake sighs and ticks with its insect life, the water is mostly still, waveless, clean. Before the Gardens open, gardeners fish out the litter from the day before: the hamburger wrappers, plastic bottles, and crushed drink-cans. Some of the garbage sinks to the mud, but a lot of it floats, gathering at the lake's reedy edge.

She would like to visit Giverny on the Seine, the garden made by Claude Monet there. She lives with her invalid older brother in a housing commission flat. For years she and her brother moved about their flat in tight, regular figures of eight, tracing the sign for infinity on the linoleum around two old armchairs, their beds, the bathroom sink, the refrigerator.

'It helps that your name is Rose', she had remarked on Rose's first visit. She added that she had been rather worried about who the Council would send. Rose was reflecting that things hadn't begun very well; she had used the word 'stuff', which straightaway sounded indifferent and coarse. So she was glad that her name could be considered a help.

Rose had arranged to return for two hours once a week, to sort through the swaying, undusted piles that made the tiny flat so dim, obscuring nearly all the space and window-light from thin wall to thin wall. At first she had chatted. Usually in these cases, by way of some gentle discussion, a decision was arrived at—about how to shift or discard whatever was being hoarded, piece by piece. But here, as each pile had been noticed, and gauged, and then so very gradually dismantled, so had Rose's own ability to make conversation.

Pressing a cushion into the small of her back, the woman would settle herself straight in her armchair, fold her hands in her lap, and observe lightly as Rose picked up wherever she had left off from the week before; another half-undone stack of curling newspapers, another turret of plastic bags that may or may not contain flattened, forgotten shopping, or unopened mail. They resorted to pointing, nodding, and shaking of the head, or, for emphasis, a clearing of the throat. This particular hoard seemed to recede as though borne away on some slow

tide.

And really, Rose was able to remove almost all of it—nearly all of three rooms-ful—as rubbish, or for recycling, or for the opportunity shop, with hardly a direct comment intervening. Sometimes, though, they overheard the AM radio from the brother's room, and some news item would elicit a comment, for example, on the manners of politicians, or the vagaries of the law. Once she remarked suddenly, 'Rose! We're all refugees from something you know.'

Actually, apart from the newspapers, there was hardly any rubbish, and no real junk, but much that was new; brand-new seasons and seasons ago, now fly-specked and slightly outlandish. Myriad special sale-items from the city department stores, accompanied by their receipts: a wooden flower-press; English porcelain dishes with gold rims; coloured nylon scarves, costume brooches and clip-on earrings dangling plastic beads. Rose called these 'belongings', but no array or single item seemed invested with any sense of ownership.

There were countless illustrated books that had been remainered: mildewing volumes on garden history and botanic themes; also blank sketchpads, and letter-writing stationery, especially rectangular boxes of decorated notelets. Underneath it all—after several months of two hours, once a week—they came upon the wedding presents, still gift-wrapped; tied with moth-eaten bows.

And when they came upon the wedding presents one afternoon, she discussed with Rose the stationery, briefly. She said that she had never written the thank you cards after her wedding because of a lost year. Then she had wanted to write what had happened afterwards, hadn't she, but she had found that she couldn't explain about the meanness and wretched noise of some people's love. She couldn't be succinct. 'Whereas flowers, Rose; all of nature is somehow wonderfully *succinct*. Think of it; the Egyptian White lily—the lotus—blooms at night!'

Rose hadn't anticipated that a housing commission flat could have such a wide, uninterrupted view of the blue bay.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Cynthia Troup.