

Story for performance #62
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Source: Sandra Jordan and Azmi Keshawi, 'Love in the air, peace within reach', *The Observer* in *The Guardian online*, 21/08/05.

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

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High Summer by the Lake

Every weekend morning in high summer at 7.30 am they are already waiting to enter the gardens, waiting at the Herbarium Gate. They walk carefully, purposefully, across the straight-edged grass to the west side of the Nymphaea Lake, the Lake so formally named for its collection of waterlilies. She wears a straw sunhat, and flat, open-toed sandals. Her ankles are pink and swollen—perhaps her feet are painful. His appearance is more distinguished: he wears long, pale trousers; shoes and white socks. He follows her, lifting his knees higher than the grass requires.

She settles them with their basket on a bench that marks a sometimes-shady, sloping corner of the lawns on the west side of the Lake. She doesn't sigh or remark there at the cloudless morning, although there, for a tranquil moment, it might belong to them both. By now the city grid beyond the Herbarium Gate is again overrun; littered, conforming, unmemorable.

Apparently, she will practise her watercolours: between them she props open a small paintbox, and chooses from a clutch of red sable brushes. He is unoccupied, but sits stiffly, and looks ahead without squinting, as though expecting some resumption.

In high summer the waterlilies bloom. Wait. She could tell you about aquatic plants, water gardens and Japanese irises—about waterlilies, native to the temperate and tropical parts of the globe. Or at least about the hardier, hybrid varieties in the Botanic Gardens collection. She hasn't visited Giverny on the Seine. No, nor has he. They live in a housing commission flat.

The waterlilies of the Nile were sacred to the ancient Egyptians. The Egyptian White lily—the lotus—closes early in the morning, as the temperature rises with the sun. Waterlilies, you understand, are unrelated to lilies,

the family *liliaceae*.

They grow naturally in still water, up from the mud; the notched leaves are characteristic, floating on long, graceful stalks. Any dying flowers recede from view: as the blooms fade, the stems wither and coil, and the closed flower becomes submerged. She knows about water clover, also about the unrooted, invasive mosquito fern and water hyacinth.

If she spoke aloud about the deep pink and gleaming white cupped flowers that sway imperceptibly amidst purple-green leaves, she would speak then as though from a great distance.

Of course high summer by the Nymphaea Lake in the Botanic Gardens is the wedding season. Handsome city couples exchange their vows here, and pose for photographs; champagne is served, and delicate finger food proffered on large trays. The trestle tables and be-ribboned chairs are arranged some distance from the garden benches, but—

If you did not kindly request once more that they leave the area, since all is in order with the registration form, the non-refundable deposit and the booking for today's lakeside wedding, you would learn that they are brother and sister.

They are brother and sister. They simply observe the waterlilies. Oh, they watch the weddings, and the waterlilies.

'Do you know the desert?' he would answer.

She would say quickly, taking his hand, 'We watch for happiness, don't we?'

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