

---

## AUTUMN MUSE THROUGH MELBOURNE'S ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS

*Kendry Hinton*

*Published writer and arts publicist, Kendry Hinton lives in Melbourne just across from her beloved Botanic Gardens, with her elderly mother.*

*Having studied Classical Literature at Monash University, Kendry has always loved to write. Her articles have been published in The Australian and regional newspapers. Kendry has recently been appointed guest lecturer at RMIT University's Professional Writing and Editing Post Graduate Degree.*

---

Late afternoon, with the sun dappling the leaves in the trees, I take a stroll on my own through the Botanic Gardens, stopping to photograph the autumn shower of colour . . .

There are people of all description, generation, and ethnicity: a shy fidgeting exquisitely groomed Asian bridegroom about to declare life-changing promises; an older couple linked in arms and memories. He, now, leaning on her for his slow, walking-stick-assisted steps. I watch small children, like confetti, dancing through the fresh mown lawns or out of parents reach, hiding in the upper branches of a small rough-barked tree and a learning-to-take-her-first-steps infant, over-padded with nappy, tottering, to her parents delight - with the discovery of a dry golden autumn leaf . . .

Musing as I walk along with the soft more-like-spring afternoon light creating a surreal glow across the lake, I look up to the two distinct towers that demand attention and contrast from the Gardens - the white familiar symmetry of Government House and juxtaposed with that, the bold modernist slices and angles of Eureka Tower.

Von Mueller could never have imagined that view, I think to myself. Von Mueller, the founder who laid out our Royal Botanic Gardens with such precision and vision - the Oak Lawns, the Lakes gardens, the Camelia gardens, the Rose Arbor, the rockeries, the walks, the

paths, the tracks – did not live to see his Botanic Gardens fully realized. But like some dreaming place of his imagination, realized it was; and some years later we are an intrinsic part of that creative vision.

The Gardens has always been a meeting place for me. Yes, in a way it sort of had its own song lines. I remember when I was studying for my Bachelor of Arts at Monash University, I would take a blanket and basket and hide myself somewhere near the magnificent fathering branches of the oak trees of the Oak Lawn, and pour over classical texts with only the sky for a roof...and curious birds for company.

Or years later, I would meet with an old friend around the Yarra river side of the Lake. We would sit arm-in-arm on one of those uncomfortable-after-a-while steel benches watching quietly as the Garden's resident feathered police would clamber out of the Lake, all wet with feathers and curiosity, paddling through the grass to take a closer look.

When I took up very amateur photography having been given a digital camera for my 50<sup>th</sup>, I would come to the Gardens for inspiration and canvas . . . the delicate Asian garden with its Sumi E-like flowers and bridal veils of tissue, white Chinese Kolkwitzia or beauty bush in blossom became favorite subjects for macro-lens gazing in spring. I would also sit on the bench at the bottom of the Lake's gate, under the exquisite greening umbrella of the elm. There in its quiet sanctuary, I would watch the black dots and dashes with tiny splashes of red beaks that were emerging clumsily from the Lake's edge with over-sized feet – the newest of new moorhen chicks.

When I lived in Walsh Street after having been woken from sound sleep by the sound of gunshot that fateful early morning when two policemen were gunned down, it was to the Gardens I retreated when I couldn't sit still at work without overplaying the tragic events in my mind. And it was as if the Gardens knew, as I walked along through the tangle of trees with their cacophony of fruit bats hanging like pathetic Christmas decorations.

I stop at the sweet Victorian gazebo where once I imagined, there was the rustling of crinoline, to watch out of sight in my Victorian hide, a pair of swans going through their mating dance. Like professional ballet dancers with their exquisite long necks.

Now the Gardens has grown up. I walk past The Volcano coming into the Gardens – with its red earth and prickly cactus walk and floating islands of micro- biology and water saving irrigation.

Stopping to have a coffee outside, under the pergola of the Tea Rooms, I notice for the first time since I've been back, gondola-like wooden punts gliding along the Lake. Like Venice, they are led through the Lake waters with a long pole held by a Venetian-dressed gondolier – an obvious attraction for tourists, young families, and romantics.

The boat on the Lake brings to mind a childhood classic – *The Wind in the Willows* (now, a frequent highlight of summer performances in the Gardens). It is Ratty's ubiquitous declaration to Mole about the wonder of boats: "Nice? It's the only thing," said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leaned forward for his stroke. "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

I turn around to take the familiar path back along the Lake to the front Gates. Royal Gardens indeed. The gates are like the entrance to Buckingham Palace! I pass families packing up picnic baskets and leashing in errant toddlers. The sunlight has a rich warm now very autumnal glow. From the top of one of the sprawling freshly mown lawns, there is a distant clink – a group of teenage boys are playing French boules.

I take a last look back towards the Lake. Silhouetted against the light is a beautiful young Indian woman, ebony hair, in long peach silk sari taking a photo of her elegant father and mother. I smile. Her very pregnant swelling is emphasized through the gossamer fabric against the amber light.

Perhaps this mother-to-be, will, in months to come, take her new born, wrapped tightly in swaddling blanket, to these Gardens. She might sit up the top of the Lake on one of those slightly uncomfortable benches, perhaps pausing to look at the inscription by a loved one . . . finally she would look out across the glimmering Lake, baby at her breast, and for a moment . . . just be a part of the Gardens.