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Diary Day 7 - A Royal Park

These Diary Day articles are not about vocabulary or revising rules, they are just normal conversational descriptions that you would get if you asked someone what they did yesterday. There is a significant shorthand benefit to be gained from anything that is mainly common words. The more common and uninteresting the word, the more it is your shorthand gold, as they occur all the time in every single utterance that you are likely to write. Knowing them perfectly increases your speed more than any amount of so-called short cuts or advanced phrases, and not having to think about the outlines frees you to deal with the other ones that are less common. I find it best to write about yesterday before it becomes last week or last month, as the memory is still fresh and it doesn't become a polished report ages after the event. Yesterday it was a simple park visit, to enjoy a rare bit of sunshine, that turned out very different from the plan for the day.

We took a bus to the train station, and a fast train to Charing Cross Station in Central London, which we can confidently do in the current situation as they are mostly empty of passengers during the main part of the day. Although the City is now much less busy than in normal times, there is still a lot of traffic, and there is no such thing as dashing over the road in the longer gaps between cars, it is still essential to use the proper crossings and wait for the pedestrian signal. A slight shower started but it remained bright and mild. A minute's walk led to Trafalgar Square, and we were not surprised to see it empty of people. I had thought there might have been a few wandering around but the steps were taped off, and big barriers had been put round both fountain pools, whilst cleansing and renovation work was in progress. The usual Christmas crib scene, in its big perspex cabinet, was there in full view of the higher parapet, but could only be enjoyed through zooming in the camera for a close-up photo.

We decided to go to St James's Park, a ten-minute walk away. More crossing of busy roads and junctions, and then we headed down The Mall, with a sharp turn left into Horse Guards Road to get to the park entrance. By now it was time for the umbrellas to come out. Where had our sunshine gone? St James's is a long thin park with a long lake, so we started down the north side of the water. On some of the bench backs were lone pigeons, fluffed up to keep warm in the rain and resting, and some walking around looking for their natural food in the grass. Despite the absence of attractive summer planting, it is clear that the shrubs and trees have been skilfully chosen and designed, presenting colourful groups in every shade of green, orange and yellow, both in leaves and stems.

After five minutes walking, we saw ahead a family with children feeding a large crowd of birds, one large juvenile swan with its neck stretched towards someone's hand, a very large gaggle of black coots gathered for the feast as it was thrown in, and various ducks and Egyptian geese. Pigeons were helping to clear up whatever was dropped, and lots of seagulls were scouting around, who are always the quickest to dive in and get bits before anyone else. The gull that gets something cannot fly away without being chased by others, who are hoping he will drop it. Adding to the melee were the squirrels looking for their chance to get a share. You only have to stop walking and they come up to you, stand up on hind legs and "ask". They were all chubby and fat, having lived and eaten well over the summer, but they seemed to be of the opinion that just another snack would not go amiss.

Diary Day 7 - A Royal Park

Further on we noticed another group of people interacting with the birds and heard the shrill shrieks of the Ring Necked Parakeets that are becoming more common in our parks. People were standing around with their arm outstretched, and the parakeets were landing on them, eating either a handful of seeds or pieces of apple. It was fascinating to see the dainty way the parrots ate the apples, taking little bites and chewing on the juicy pulp. There was some squabbling over position, some landing on people's heads and one or two sitting comfortably on shoulders, as it is a firm and easily gripped perch from which they cannot be toppled. We watched all this in fascination for quite a while, despite the rain having become rather heavy. No amount of rain, colourful umbrellas or people walking by was going to put the birds off getting the food. It was like a bird version of playtime at an infants school, with the shrieking, squawking and jostling, as well as the constant flutter of wings. Amongst the pigeons on the ground, wings are the defence weapons, spread out like shields to make sure no-one else can get in, with no qualms about standing on top of each other to get at the offerings.

We moved on, making our way to the west end of the lake, with the roof of Buckingham Palace visible just ahead, as well as the gilded statue on top of the Victoria Memorial. We saw a group of runners come down the sloping side path, obviously army personnel on a training exercise, running through the now even heavier rain. I felt like a delicate hothouse plant, protected from the weather, as I was wrapped in multiple layers of clothing, hat, gloves and legwarmers, while they only had tops, shorts and trainers on. They did not join up merely to stay comfortable and dry, and lounging about in the warm.

We rounded the end of the lake and continued back along the other side. The rain was so heavy now that the few people about were standing under any shelter they could find. We pressed on through the downpour, dodging the rivers of rainwater streaming off the muddy grass towards the lake. Our hopeful plan from this morning, of sitting with our sandwiches in the park, was now well and truly washed away. We left the park and cut through to Whitehall, past all the government buildings and the two guards on horseback in Horse Guards Parade, past Trafalgar Square again, and finally back to the station. Although the rain had let up slightly, it was a relief to get in the dry of the concourse, and onto our train. It was quite a challenge to have our sandwiches wearing masks, but we managed it with some careful positioning of the bread under the lower edge! Back home it had not rained much at all, and once indoors the coats went straight onto the radiator. We had enjoyed our time out, despite the downpours, and fortunately it was fairly mild for the time of year. Other than seeing the antics of the parrots, the best part of the day was the warming meal, which really put the day's dramatic change of weather out of our minds for the rest of the evening. (1223 words)
