

The Gifts of Kennington Park

The park gifts space,
To work out body and mind,
Discover self or other,
Breathe in the vast sky
And feel connected
With something greater than I.
Its old earth,
Calms fears,
Drys tears.
Here is a world,
Parallel to the one
Beyond the railings,
Where concrete and green merge,
Dogs gambol in the grass,
I converse with crows
And the rebirth of each season
Delivers daily delights.

The park gifts history;
Aspirations of working men
Seeking suffrage,
And a queen's consort
Wanting model houses for all.
Each planted their dreams
On common ground,
Where once convicts hung,
On the Surrey gallows,
The Tyburn of the South,
Cricket playing cheek by jowl
With this ghastly spectacle.

The park gifts poetry and protest;
'Life is beautiful ~
Enjoy it to the fullest!'
States a small plaque
Nestling in the English Garden,
Where the winged choir congregate.
If only they could teach
The parakeets to sing!
From Maya Angelou,
An angel who will always rise,
Stone carved wisdom

Honours the innocent,
Felled by the Blitz.
Graffiti artists declare;
'It's curtains for democracy!'
'1984 is now.'
While Unity in the Community'
And 'Love is gonna save the day'
Is the message of the mural,
Itself a fine legacy
And lesson in history.

The park gifts mystery;
An old ornate column
Stands beneath a cherry tree,
Its former purpose lost to see.
On the Nature Trail,
What 'can eat their own body weight every day'?
The words are worn away!
Who coined Midnight Path?
And is Stanley Beans now a man?

The park gifts art in many forms;
A fallen branch an exhibition
Of Nature's sculpture,
A wooden toad haunched
In the newly planted orchard,
Half a rusty lamp post,
Re-purposed to advertise
Sourdough pizza,
With vegan options.
Remnants of fountains,
Function gone
Their beauty lives on,
Still drawing the eye
Reflecting the benevolence and skill
Of former local visionaries.

The park gifts trees,
That became friends
When human ones were absent.
Sturdy magnificent planes,
The pearls of the park,
Which have weathered

Many a change
In politics and society.
The gracious triangular trio
That greet me at the gate,
Saggy bottomed ones
Circling the playing field,
Like couch potato joggers.
The brace with pyramid bases
And quirky pimpled faces;
Aliens hiding in plain sight.
Planes with the feet of giants
That garland and guard the park.
Trees who shelter sprites
Hidden in their bark,
You can glimpse them
If you stop, look and see.
Trees to inspire a hundred stories.
Willows weeping over concrete;
Long gone the lido's water deep.
The nine cork oak crescent;
Residents that often pine
For their native clime.
A sprouting stump
Refusing to submit to death.

The park gifts urban bees,
Working in harmony
With flowers and trees.
There is no furlough,
Or social distancing for them,
Queuing at the base of a hive
Working longer than nine to five.

All this is the gift
Of Kennington Park.
The greatest gift?
I leave more curious
And content than when I came.

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**What's been your favourite thing about Kennington park in Lockdown?
Tell us how your poem reflects your favourite thing about Kennington park during
Lockdown.**

I have many favourite things from Kennington Park in Lockdown; it is a place of discovery, and every visit shows you something new and or familiar. I have tried to reflect this in my poem, 'The Gifts of Kennington Park' and I hope my observations and joys resonate with you and others, too. I am so grateful for London's parks and open spaces, and to those who maintain them, without them Lockdown would have been unbearable.