

# **GULL IN LONDON**

# 1

Well might you wonder  
How these words reach you  
And indeed who wrote them.

My name is Gull.  
Overnight I appear to sleep,  
One-legged,  
On or around the Embankment.  
But in reality I have the power  
To roost in other minds - naturally  
My hosts are a.m. shocked  
To find strange words by their bedsides.  
Still what am I to do?

By day I soar and fly and  
Perch over the streets of London.  
By night I ghost-write what I see.  
You will be amazed what the observant Gull can see.  
I certainly am.

## 2

Why, you may ask,  
Does a Gull choose to hop and perch  
Round London streets  
And not swoop and soar  
Over the great seas of the world?  
Well consider.  
Here I can fly round buildings,  
Look in windows.  
I can investigate roads  
Parks avenues gardens  
Sit on Nelson or the Monument.  
The world is full of flying words  
And birds:  
Life is a tapestry and on it  
I weave my own existence.

My first memories are of the sea.  
I remember it was full of water  
Usually grey and wet and cold and  
That is all I ever thought about the sea.

One winter there was such a storm  
I was seasick  
And airsick:  
I drifted North, uncaring  
Until I saw these oblong city lights.  
Sometimes I think back to the sea.  
Sometimes I wonder is it still there? -  
But no  
I am a sophisticated Gull.  
I know that, statistically,  
Seas will likely remain long after  
My spirit has flown away.

### 3

I expect you know  
In London  
There are a lot of pigeons.  
But did you know  
Every one of them is communist?  
Yes they are all red  
Great strutting crowds  
Mass meetings  
- Crumbs for all! - (after all  
Without equality what is a pigeon?)

I did not realise at first because  
I could not follow pigeon-English.  
Now I do.  
If one tries to recruit me I say  
Fly off I'm bigger than you.  
Anyway I can always catch fish.

## 4

Today was autumn  
And I watched a roadsweeper  
Methodically clearing tree detritus  
(Leaves).

A well-dressed man in  
Not too much of a hurry  
Stopped instead of passing by.  
- Good morning, my man -  
Said he.

I cocked my head alertly for  
Casual conversation can provide  
Good food for thought.

- I have often wondered -  
He continued  
- Whether the man in the street  
Can purchase a well-made broom  
Such as that,  
For his own private use, doncher know? -  
He indicated the broom but not  
Intentional irony.  
- Push off -  
Snarled the roadsweeper  
- You sound too damn condescending.  
The well-dressed man protested  
He always spoke that way.  
- Push off -  
Snarled the roadsweeper again  
- So do I.

And so they parted, both unaware  
That their lack of communication  
Would produce these informal words.

# 5

Most mornings I watch  
Scurrying commuter crowds  
Defying traffic.

Why do they look down  
On a Gull? After all  
Mostly I look down on them.

Pigeons use them for target practice  
- Come the revolution - (they squawk)  
- Every shot must count.

Still, all those people all  
Going the same way.....  
.... they can hardly miss.

# 7

Sorry about number six.

Last night I roosted with a factory worker:  
My first thought  
Was that he was not Gullible.....  
(not everyone is some sleep too deeply others  
unconsciously resist)  
.....but I found out later  
He had no money for a stamp.

Taking no chances  
Tonight I roost with a postman.  
Number six would have  
Shaken you:

A chance conversation in the East End  
Cleared up a puzzle for me -  
You must have seen  
A one-legged pigeon, sparrow,  
Tit or other bird but  
Have you ever seen  
A one-legged Gull?

No, guvnor.  
Its your eritage you see  
You like the ights and skies and ate  
The underground.  
We sparrers ave such tiny wings  
Sometimes we ride the Circle Line  
And sometimes  
Forget the escalators end.

## 8

I saw another Gull today  
Winging around like any tourist  
.....Trafalgar Square,  
Over the Tate,  
Closer to Buckingham Palace than most.....  
When I asked  
What was he doing he replied  
- Swanning it -

This made me wonder  
If swans like being typecast I imagined  
Swans in London  
Towering above red pigeons and us Gulls,  
Walking the pavements,  
Scrabbling for crumbs,  
Hopping from rooftop to rooftop I think  
I must have startled my companion.  
He flew off when I started to laugh.



# 9

Today was summer.

Tourists flocked and  
Pigeons thronged and  
Traffic snarled.

I saw:  
A dog drop down a manhole,  
A child fall in the Thames.

I watched:  
A pigeon board a bus  
(and get thrown off).

I heard a hundred sirens  
Converge on Clapham,  
Tinder-dry and vulnerable.

Drifting in the cooler heights,  
I thought:  
There are advantages in being a Gull.

# 10

When first in London  
And looking for friends,  
I spied a Gull below.

I approached,  
Spoke politely,  
But he only growled at me.

Later I learned that he was  
Mad Percy of Fleet Street  
Who used to think he was a bat  
But collided with Nelson one night  
And thereafter thought he was a lion.

For many years he could be seen  
Stalking breadcrumbs.

Sad footnote:  
Mad Percy met his death  
At the claws of a deaf cat  
Which thought it was  
Tarzan.

# 11

Fog today;  
London fog lying  
Thick and greasy on the wings.

Far below  
Choked traffic coughs and splutters:  
Pesdestrians, I suspect,  
Are using radar.

I perch on a rooftop where  
Scholar Skua has crawled graffitti:  
- Bats are streakers -  
It is too gloomy to fly.

High above  
Fog thins and whispers.  
From there the city drowns, obscured.....  
And landings are dangerous.

All imperceptibly  
The day thins too,  
But no-one notices.

# 12

There is an unwritten rule  
Not to land in the suburbs  
Where every corner is crammed  
And every space is carpeted  
With cats.

Once I flew over Croydon I  
Could feel hot feline eyes  
Savouring me.

Some of my best friends  
Are missing, presumed eaten  
In the suburbs.  
Central London is safer:  
Too noisy there  
For cats to sleep.

Incidentally,  
All bird law is unwritten,  
For obvious reasons.

# 13

Somewhere, a siren  
Makes its way.

A taxi, without signalling, has turned  
And pressed a pedestrian  
To the road.

A crowd gathers.  
Others hurry by to work.  
Overhead, confused by the excitement,  
A cloud of pigeons  
Whirls and calls I  
Am reminded of vultures.

# 14

Overhead,  
Birds wheel and drift  
In great circles.

In London this means  
They are probably lost.

I was asked: how  
Far to Waterloo?  
- A mile as the crow flies - I replied,  
Poker-beaked.

# 15

My friend the roadsweeper  
Buried Percy  
- with all due reverence -  
In his cart.

It was dawn.  
Gulls lined the buildings  
Filled the trees  
Stood silently around the Square.

The guilty cat has emigrated  
But we Gulls  
Will find him.

# 16

peg Jacobs

(Like me, a resident

On the Embankment)

Today jammed himself in a drain.

The rescuers jammed the Mall:

Police, ambulance,

Fire engine and carpenter.

And the pushing, photographing crowds,

Jostling past long after

peg's extraction.



# 17

Today I saw a sleeping policeman.  
Not - as you might expect -  
A bump in the road,  
But a real live officer  
Near Leicester Square,  
Snoring.

He lay curled on a bench,  
Helmet for a pillow,  
Number nines  
Placed neatly nearby.

He must have had a late night.

As I flew past I observed  
Passers-by move carefully  
Lest he awake and arrest them  
For disturbing his peace.

# 18

Streetwise owls drift silently  
On feathertips  
And stalk  
Small birds and mice.

Even I take care. Though  
I am in no danger they  
Can give a nasty bite.

# 19

Rain today.  
Not light drizzle  
Nor violent cloudburst  
But steady grey dull  
Depressing rain.

All day.

Pedestrians hate it.  
Irritably they clash  
Umbrellas skip  
Across puddles  
Are splashed by traffic.

Me?  
It is not flying weather.  
I have nothing to report today.  
My wings grow heavy and  
I am reminded of the sea.

It is on days like this  
I wish I was a duck.

## 20

You must have noticed  
Some birds fly the English winter.  
Others stay.....

It's the cost, a pigeon told me.  
Only the bourgeoisie have the crumbs  
To fly abroad year  
After year after year.  
Come the revolution -

Thank-you, I replied.

It's our size, a sparrow told me.  
Only larger birds have the strength  
To fly abroad mile  
After mile after mile.

Us Gulls?  
In London we are reckoned strange:  
We should be out at sea.  
Why go abroad where we would be both strange  
*And* foreign?