

# **“Fantastic Dogs And Where to Feed Them”**

**Life Among the Dog People of Paddington Rec,  
Volume XIV**

**By Anthony Linick**

## **Chapter 6—November, 2017**



*Shadows lengthen as dog owners watch their pets  
at play on the green.*

### **Wednesday, November 1:**

Cathy begins the new month with the news of a deadly terrorist attack in New York City – one taking place in lower Manhattan not far, so we later learn on Facebook, from the home of Danielle the vet, whose Bella was once such a presence in our dog society. It is a gray morning in London but not too chilly and Otto is lively enough in his pursuit of company out on the green. Poppy cannot be tempted at all this morning and soon I see that my dog is heading for the heights of Mt. Bannister – so I have to head here too. He races down to the Carlton roadway and back to the café, where Daisy-Mae is waiting patiently outside the café door while Janet fetches her morning coffee.

Georgie will make no appearance today but we do have Ofra, Ellie, Anahita, Dmitri and Linda, who soon sits down with Pepper and Chica in tow. Daisy-Mae gets a final onceover with the currycomb – for she will soon be off for five days in Cornwall. The Shih-Tzu eats only one Shapes biscuit but the other animals are not so reticent. Flora, who can bang the gate open with her nose, is among those seeking sustenance at my knee, and we also have Bailey and Otto joining the feeding frenzy. A great surprise is Teddy – who usually spends the entire session in Ellie’s lap, contenting himself with pellets brought by mommy or the occasional tidbit that I pass across the table for him. Today, however, he takes the chair usually occupied by Georgie, and demands treat after treat – raking away at the tabletop in order to demonstrate his urgency. Then, when I am slow in my delivery of Tasty Bites he begins to moan as well and later he approaches my knee in order to further his chances. Ellie, when she can stop laughing at this impertinence, calls her pet a naughty dog but I suggest that he is just acting, at last, like all the other dogs. Anahita, meanwhile, is videoing all this for our eventual amusement. Her Elvis is up to his old tricks as well – squeezing through the bars and taunting Otto as he races around outside.

Ofra has purchased a very expensive gel-infused wrap for the burn on her hand – why not since it is the same one used by astronauts, or so she tells us? Ellie says she is dreading having to go to a *bar mitzvah* this weekend – much time is spent filling Demi on on the difference between *bar mitzvah* and *bat mitzvah*.

Ofra says that Ellie has nothing to complain of – *her* kids went to Jewish schools and she had to go to dozens of these occasions. Ellie says the real problem is that she will run into an old friend – who once denounced her for socializing with an ex. This is a simplified version of a complex social situation and when Dmitri asks me if I am going to put all this in my book I have to say that it is much too complicated. The phone rings and Ellie answers – it is Georgie. The latter says that she is still not coming to the café today but she will be reporting to the Morshead gate in order to accept custody of the missing Lucky.

### ***Thursday, November 2:***

The sun is again breaking through on a very chilly morning as Otto and I make our way up the Morshead roadway. I can see Dan with Winnie well ahead of us and I unhook the dog so he can cover the intervening distance at great speed. Heading our way we have Ellie and Teddy and while she and Dan make for the café Otto and I cross the green. On the Randolph roadway Otto searches about for someone to play with but, failing in this quest, he joins the rest of us in the café’s dog-friendly compound. Here I wait for just a few minutes – when the door is opened at last.

Soon joining us we have Georgie, here with Seamus, Ellie the Cocker and Lucky this morning, Anahita, here with Elvis, Ofra here with Bailey, and Hanna here with *The Sun*. Otto gets in some spirited play with Elvis, though the latter often squeezes through the bars in order to eat a biscuit in peace or just to wind Otto up. At one point I notice that while I am feeding Shapes biscuits to Elvis Anahita is feeding Otto with some dried fish treat. Anahita produces yesterday’s video of Teddy at table and this is passed around the table to great amusement. There is an empty chair next to me, with Janet in Cornwall, but it is Teddy’s mentor Bailey, resuming his role as chief food scrounger, who occupies this spot. In fact it is none of these dogs who earn our attention today but a little robin, who bravely drops onto the tabletop. Crumbs are produced for the little fellow and placed on a serving tray. The tray is transferred to an empty table and the robin tucks in.

Ofra has brought some chocolate cake and those of us already in our seats enjoy this bounty – though Ofra does object when Teddy

is offered a mere crumb. (Ofra says we will not see her tomorrow – due to another dental appointment.) *The Sun* carries the story of the resignation on Michael Fallon, the Defense Secretary, one of a number of Westminster luminaries under investigation for inappropriate behavior with the opposite sex. This leads to a discussion of changing standards in such matters – with agreement that what was tolerated in earlier times is seen as abuse now. Dan says he remembers when a man in a crowded club pinched *his* bum as he walked by – “I passed by this same chap repeatedly thereafter,” he adds. Outside our fence there is now a brief crisis as the ancient Rebel goes missing, much to the consternation of his owner. A few minutes later, however, I can see these two making their way toward the exit and so, soon thereafter, we join them.

***Friday, November 3:***

We are somewhat ahead of schedule this morning – the dog, distracted by another canine across the street, never got around to his own nighttime business and I assume he must be desperate now. It is a lovely bright morning as we begin a circle of the green (Otto showing no signs of desperation at all). When we have reached the far side I unhook the fellow and he rushes off to the cricket crease, soon mixing it up with some of the other dogs out here. One of these is Buster and the two do seem to enjoy chasing one another – in spite of the size mismatch. I can see that Davide has already taken a seat in our compound so we head over here next.

We are joined by Ellie, Anahita, Hanna, Dmitri and Georgie – with Dan at work, Janet in Cornwall and Ofra having her stitches out at the dentist. The Spanish owner of Lucky also arrives with her pet and spends some time, without sitting down, explaining how it was that, in her haste yesterday, she managed to break a finger in the car door. (The ladies lose no opportunity of reminding her that Lucky could really use a good grooming – especially after she has fussed over how lovely Teddy feels.) For his part, Teddy at last discovers Janet’s empty chair and he is soon undertaking an assault on my blue bag – well, with Bailey absent, someone has to do this. Ellie the human has brought some smoked

salmon crunchies and these are added to my arsenal. Ellie the Cocker spends most of the session with her chin on my knee and I am very popular with Winnie, Lucky and Flora as well. Otto has plenty of opportunities of play with Elvis and we also have a brief visit from Sanchez, the Bulldog puppy.

Demi risks censure from the food police when he purchases a chocolate muffin. He is impressed with this treat – “Baked five months ago and it has so many chemicals in it that it is still moist.” Both Davide (toasted ham and cheese) and Georgie (poached egg on toast) have to wait some time for their food to arrive. Ellie reports that she and Robert were recently invited to join a bird shooting junket in Spain (you eat what you shoot) with Yara and her latest boyfriend but as neither she nor Robert could ever shoot any animal they declined. Hanna has brought some food with her today – but this is for the little robin, who is a no-show today. While we are discussing these matters I notice that the ladies are removing layer after layer of clothing – it really is a very pleasant morning as we make our way to the exit gates.

### ***Sunday, November 5:***

Well, it would appear that I have missed a day in the park – but this is only true in part. Saturday didn’t begin at all well. At about 5:30 am the dog began to vomit onto the bed’s bottom sheet and I had to get up to clean the mess up. As I was making my morning preparations in the bathroom I managed to towel off so vigorously that I opened a blood blister on my cheek. And when we got outside I needed to strap Otto’s raincoat into position – as a light rain was here to stay and the green was entirely empty as we made our crossing. I was anxious to see if tummy troubles were also reflected at the other end of my dog but by the time we had reached the summit of Mt. Bannister I had concluded that he didn’t have the runs. His poo was just fine and after I had plucked this specimen from the grass we descended to the Carlton roadway. Here I could see Ofra, heading toward me with Bailey. She said, “Not a nice day to sit in our coffee” – but I knew what she meant; she was heading for the parking lot and an early exit. I waited ten minutes or so to see if anyone else was coming this morning but, in the end, we just had to make our way home and turn the heat on.

Today, life is much brighter. The dog’s tummy seems to be just fine, he survived the first night of Double Bonfire Night without too much difficulty and, though it is very cold, the sun is shining brightly. He has had no exercise in some time and so I am therefore happy that we soon find Oscar the Beagle – who actually leaps over my pet once he is freed from his lead. There are a lot of fast dogs on the green this morning, including a little Whippet in an orange body suit. Best of all, after we have been out here for several minutes, Elvis arrives and this means that there will be plenty of play-time inside our compound. Here we are joined by Nigel and Anahita, Georgie, Ofra, Wendy and Hanna – with Vlad taking his own table behind us. Sparkie, making one of his rare weekend appearances, begins snacking on pink Shapes biscuits. I keep Otto on the softer chews this morning; he seems quite eager for these treats but then Elvis and Bailey are not far behind.

The ongoing saga of all those sex pests among our Members of Parliament emerges as a favorite topic this morning. *The Sun* is present as the reference work of record; Nigel says that this same tabloid is warning us of bitter temperatures to come. In health matters Hanna says she had her flu shot yesterday and has felt fatigued ever since, Georgie is complaining of a headache, and Ofra reports that, in spite of her recent extraction, she can still feel hot and cold in this area. She takes a call from Ellie and tells us that she has attempted to respond with a Jewish accent. “How do you do a Jewish accent?” Georgie wants to know. “In this case,” I reply, “I would have to say badly.” Staying with Jewish themes we then have a detailed discussion on where to go to buy the best *challah* and the best bagel in north London.

### ***Monday, November 6:***

Well, we seem to have survived Bonfire Night (Part II) and with it, hopefully, the worst of the nighttime explosions – at least until New Year’s Eve. I must say that Otto was a star; he clearly disliked the more percussive blasts but there was no trembling or shaking and he ate his evening meal as usual and accomplished his late-night walk, when noise was still a feature, without protest. This morning we have another brilliant sunny day, though it is quite cold and I am longing to get to the green, where the sun can

still make a difference. Otto soon discovers some familiar faces heading our way and, indeed, we decide to follow Ellie and her Teddy on a complete circuit of the green. After a while we are joined by Dmitri and Flora and, still later, by Anahita and Elvis.

At one moment we have Bailey, Elvis and Teddy milling about *inside* the café – Ofra is waiting to remind a censorious Dan, who will just be returning from a weekend in Milan, that, as Ronnie used to say, Cavaliers – since the time of King Charles himself – are allowed entrance to *any* establishment in token of their royal connections. Georgie is waiting for us when we return with our coffees – today she has Lucky and Seamus in tow. These dogs are soon badgering me for treats. I note that, over the years, the greedy canines have created a wonderful patina on the left sleeve of my leather jacket – which looks quite elegant in the bright sun. “Someday, everyone will want a jacket like this,” I propose. Teddy, not a scratcher, nevertheless climbs into an empty chair and continues his impressions of Bailey as he insists on some of the softer chews in my arsenal. Elvis leaves the compound on several occasions, winding Otto up, but today he seems to have learned that he can also squeeze back in – saving Anahita from her usual task of getting up to open the gate repeatedly.

Ellie takes a call from her mother, who usually calls with some imagined crisis at this time every day. Today she has to report that the cleaner has failed to turn up and this sets off a storm of inquiring texts. Eventually it is discovered that the cleaner is just in the front garden, collecting leaves. Next Ellie gives us a report on the *bar mitzvah* she attended on Saturday. The event was held at Harry Potter World in Hertfordshire and Ellie had to do so much walking in her high heels that she needed to be picked up at the exit gate, have an injection on her bum ankle when she got home, and lots of alcohol. Ofra is the next to receive a call. Hers is from daughter Lee, who is doing research for the wellness division of Saatchi and Company and wants to know if she can interview any acne-beset teenager. Dmitri says his Isabella has suffered from this condition in the past and arrangements are made for a chat. We begin our march home, crunching through our own leaves as Otto and Elvis, still at it, contest ownership of an empty plastic drinks bottle.

***Tuesday, November 7:***

After making arrangements for Michigan Janet’s pickup at Heathrow tomorrow morning I accompany Otto as we begin our Tuesday session in the Rec. Ellie is heading our way with her phone in an ear and for a while Teddy chases my dog – but what started out as a circle of the green is soon aborted as Davide with Winnie is just coming in behind us and we decide to head directly for the café. Otto dashes forward in great anticipation for he has spotted the owner of Baba the Jack Russell, who always has a treat for him. “You’re just a walking food station as far as my dog is concerned,” I tell this chap.

We have a very healthy turnout for a weekday morning – Ellie and Davide, of course, but also London Janet, Ofra, Anahita, Georgie, Dmitri and Vlad – with Linda coming by with Pepper and Chica after we have been seated for half an hour or so. Lucky is soon delivered as well and Otto pounces on the little fellow – who will have to serve as an Elvis substitute until the real thing comes along. Otto, in short, is having a great time, one that also includes frequent visits to my knee; indeed he is only leading an insatiable parade of animals who never seem to relent in their insistence on sustenance. Janet says that at home she has been looking after Binky and that the greedy Spaniel has managed to knock a bag of treats off the worktop and, in Janet’s absence, scarf the lot. On a similar theme Georgie says that Dan and Davide left some Italian sausages and cheese when they let themselves in to pick up Winnie – and the dogs managed to get their teeth on this treat as well. (Georgie says she discovered this only when she innocently stepped on some loose cheese.)

Janet has brought some shortbread biscuits back from Cornwall and Davide has brought some biscotti from Milan. He says that the rain was a pain but that he and Dan had a number of memorable meals (and bought some shoes). By the time he is finished Ofra and Ellie are planning an expedition here as well. Ellie is complaining that her daughters have been bringing their boyfriends home and the latter are eating her out of house and home. “They only want to watch football all the time,” she complains, “and I hate football.” There is also some conversation on the ongoing sex pest allegations in Westminster. Ellie says that

some of these charges, like “he touched my knee,” are twenty years old and should long ago have been settled with a slap to the chops – and then forgotten.

***Wednesday, November 8:***

At about 8:15 I receive a call from Michigan Janet, informing me that her cab is just a few blocks from our front door. It has been two years since we have had a visit and I have no idea if Otto, just a puppy then, actually remembers her or if he is just delighted to have a dog-loving visitor. At our usual time we three make our way into the Rec, where Davide has already preceded us with Winnie. After some early rain skies are brightening and the sun is fighting its way through – but it is very cold. (Or so I think – Janet, with her own internal thermostat, is always taking a layer off.) Near the green we meet Lenny with Cleo and he and Janet compare notes on some Democratic gains in yesterday’s elections in the States.

Joining us this morning we also have Janet, Ofra, Ellie, Dmitri and Hanna – even Georgie, half an hour late, at last comes in, mostly to accept delivery on Lucky – who has been handed to Ellie, who has handed his lead to me, so that I can pass him on to London Janet. Lucky serves as Otto’s chief play-pal this morning but all the dogs seem to be interested in my blue biscuit bag – though only Otto gets his teeth on the chips that come with Michigan Janet’s omelet. London Janet has brought Leonard with her and he and Lucky share guard duties, barking in protest whenever an alien animal passes our gate. Hanna scoops up Pepper, just arrived with Linda, and gives him a brief Reiki treatment.

My visitor is trying to keep occupied so that she won’t go to sleep and thus throw her sleep schedule even further off than it is now and so, as we get up to make our homeward journey, I propose an expedition to Sainsbury’s. Linda, with Pepper and Chica in the back seat, agrees to give us a ride to the food palace on Ladbroke Grove, and so she does at 10:30. We undertake a slow and detailed perambulation down the aisles, not neglecting the dog food shelves, and by 12:30 we are home again. Cathy is still here to help us carry all these bags upstairs and, indeed, mostly so that

she can catch up with our visitor, she is more than an hour behind schedule before she finally makes it home herself.

***Thursday, November 9:***

Our visitor did very well in staying awake until it was *my* bedtime and she is only twenty minutes or so behind us as Otto and I head for the park this morning. It is a cold, gray day though there is no threat of moisture as we reach the green, crossing this space and heading for the foothills of Mt. Bannister. Here lots of dogs are congregating and Ellie is just descending with Teddy. The latter rushes down to see Otto (his exercise for November thus completed) and we fall in step as Ellie does another circuit of the green. By the time we have reached the Grantully exit Ofra has come up behind us in her red Michelin Man hooded jacket and now we can continue our stroll back to the café.

Joining us this morning are Anahita, London Janet, Dmitri, Hanna, Georgie and, eventually, Michigan Janet.

Linda also comes in with Pepper and Chica and I am kept busy doling out treats. Bailey climbs onto the tabletop to see if he can snag a digestive biscuit brought by Ellie, and Teddy, not to be outdone, uses an empty chair to see what he might be able to fish out of my blue bag. Seamus outbarks all the other dogs but the mob rushes the bars in collective protest at other passing dogs, including a burly gray Staffie. (I have to tell Otto that he is going to get his nose chomped if he joins in this silliness.) Georgie, who has a bad cold, is expecting delivery of two dogs but neither shows up and she heads for home.

Linda tells us that her Liam, whose MA thesis earned a “distinction” designation at King’s College, is interviewing for jobs with Members of Parliament. We also learn that Guy’s boss wants to send Ofra’s son to Berlin for five months – a move that mommy, suffering from early onset empty nest syndrome, resents. Ofra and Anahita have a discussion based on the Louis Theroux documentary film, shown this week on TV, about Scientology – a movement which earns universal condemnation in spite of its show biz glamour. (Anahita says she’s never watching another Tom Cruise film.) Michigan Janet, who always seems to suffer from the refusal of our local ATMs to accept the validity of

her U.S. credit card, goes off to see if she has any better luck at Barclays. This is a matter of some confusion for poor Otto, who doesn't see why she is heading in one direction while I am encouraging him to head the other way.

***Friday, November 10:***

Some early morning moisture has dampened the streets but the weather is improving as I make my preparations for our morning in the park. Janet and I confer on dinner plans (though she says she won't come to the Rec this morning) and we are off. I unhook the dog when we reach the green, he does his usual poo, but thereafter he loses track of me as I continue on to the Randolph roadway in search of a bin. I can see Otto, near the distant bandstand, but he has some difficulty in determining the direction of my calls and whistles. I have to head in his direction for just a bit and then he at last spots me and comes at great speed in the direction of the café – where members of our group are foregathering.

This morning our assemblage includes London Janet, Georgie, Anahita, Ofra, Ellie and Dmitri. Janet is looking after the black Kramer this weekend; she says the fellow is unsocial in the extreme; he doesn't like to play with any of the other dogs, doesn't like to be stroked, doesn't want treats – a kind of canine autism. The other dogs in our company are their usual greedy and active selves. Teddy (now assuming the role of food pest), Flora and Bailey crave the soft chews; Otto, Elvis and Lucky have the teeth for sterner stuff. Flora now joins Otto in a manic dance in which Elvis, on the outside, winds his pals up into chasing him back and forth on the inside. The dogs are very noisy but both Elvis and Lucky squeeze through the bars in order to barrack a passing Alsatian and this requires some rapid intervention. Anahita says that she has been told by other dog owners not to bring her dog into our compound because the dogs there are so hostile and aggressive.

Georgie receives her usual poached egg on toast as the rest of us get ready to raise our scorecards as we judge its color and consistency. Ofra has had another go at her tahini-infused date balls and she definitely seems to have gotten the right proportions.

Ellie says she is looking forward to breakfast tomorrow since Teddy goes off with Robert (though the dog does get his own croissant) and she can have her boiled eggs and soldiers without any Cockapoo staring up at her. The ladies discuss holiday destinations – Marbella, Tenerife, the Maldives, The Dominican Republic, St. Tropez – I wouldn’t know what to do with myself on the second day of such a holiday. While we have been sitting at our table the sun has broken through, even providing some warmth – but there are some ominous predictions of heavy rain heading our way as we begin our exit march.

***Saturday, November 11:***

The rain did arrive during the night – but it was no longer “tropical” in temperature or intensity. Moisture is still falling as I make my preparations for our morning in the park – with Janet promising to follow shortly; preparations include rainwear for man and dog and so we stolidly begin our march to the empty and sodden green. I urge Otto to get down to business and he eventually does so, just as we near the café. Ofra is walking past with Bailey but after muttering something about what a miserable day it is she continues on toward the parking lot – this seems to be her wet weather pattern these days.

I stand inside our compound waiting to see if anyone else will arrive and finally London Janet shows up with Daisy-Mae and Kramer and Georgie comes with Sparkie only – that’s Sparkie with an “S,” which here stands for Saturdays and Sundays only. Georgie has her usual poached egg on toast and she, Janet and I discuss last night’s TV fare, mostly *Gogglebox* and the soaps. Sitting in front of the café is a chap with a Shih-Tzu puppy named Betty; the latter very much resembles a young Daisy-Mae and so Janet is quite excited. Daisy-Mae sits in wet discomfort on Janet’s lap; she is wearing a plastic Remembrance Day poppy attached to her collar. Well, she can take it off after today, for we have at last reached Armistice Day.

Michigan Janet finally arrives after we have been seated for half an hour and I warn her that we are not likely to remain for long. She does want a cup of coffee but not if it means that she has to wait in a queue with ten hockey players in front of her. So

we begin our homeward journey, not an entirely happy process. First there is the annoyance of a boom box in the vestibule of the clubhouse, then my houseguest has to sit down on every bench as her back is troubling her this morning, then the dog, his bum already befouled, leads me on a merry chase over the sodden grass – on which I am soon slipping and sliding, then a jogger, coming up from behind, crashes into me as I am using the red poo-poo box – and this with the expensively restored running track only yards away. We use the Essendine exit and across the street I point out the upper floor flat of the corner building – a restoration project that has taken two years – and which is now for sale for a mere £2,000,000!

***Sunday, November 12:***

Janet says she is giving the park a miss this morning – having seen the expected temperatures and the attendant wind chill factor. Indeed it is very cold outside, though bright enough, as Otto and I undertake our own chilly mission. We begin a circuit of the green but there don't seem to be any play-pals out here and even though I am soon able to release my pet there isn't much to provide any amusement. I would have been willing to continue on over the top of Mt. Bannister but Otto turns left and heads directly for the café – which is already open. In our compound I can see Georgie, here with Sparkie and Winnie's pushchair – with Winnie actually in it this morning.

The coffee queue goes on forever, with lots of first timers puzzling over the menu, changing their minds and dithering over the bill. (And how is it that Ofra, who comes in five minutes after I do, leaves the café with two coffees five minutes before I do?) Her Bailey is soon clawing away at my knee and Otto himself is not far behind. Sparkie also joins the biscuit queue and even Daisy-Mae seeks sustenance – refusing everything on offer, however. Dan, here to retrieve his pet, notices that Winnie has another lump beneath her jaw; this doesn't seem to slow down her biscuit consumption and, indeed, when she is wheeled over to receive some Reiki treatment from Hanna, she is in perfect position to claw away at my sleeve whenever she wants another treat. Nigel now comes in with Elvis and soon Otto is taken out to the green for some spirited exercise.

London Janet is collecting lottery money on behalf of our syndicate – but she doesn’t have change for any large notes. (She is also about to start collecting for our Christmas lunch at the Bridge House; we have all received our menu choices.) Dan brings us up to date on the ongoing saga of his parents’ house sale and, closer to home, he says he is delighted with the functioning of his new Nest – which regulates, even by remote control, the temperatures in his flat. Georgie reports that a groomer arrived in her flat yesterday in order to do battle with the matted fur of little Lucky – who should really be shaved, according to the visitor. Ofra reports that she walked all the way from her house to Yara’s last night – not wanting to drink and drive – and that she actually enjoyed the exercise. The sun is able to break through the cloud cover every now and then and we enjoy a brief moment of warmth but, in fact, it remains on the frigid side throughout our session. As we head for home I can see that Otto has another rendezvous with destiny. We are having dinner with Linda and Rob tonight but first that filthy bum needs to go into the bathtub.

***Monday, November 13:***

After a lovely evening with Linda and Rob – perhaps the last in their current premises – we get ready for a new week in the park. It is extremely cold, though bright enough, as Otto and I work our way up to the green. There are quite a few dogs out here, including some really big fellows, so my dog continues on to the foothills of Mt. Bannister, where he checks out several other potential chase-partners before heading back down to me. Demi has arrived with Flora and by the time we get our dogs into the compound at the café, the latter has opened its doors.

Today we have Demi, Georgie, Anahita, Ofra, and Ellie with us – though the owner of Lola takes a little table behind us and the owner of Winter asks if he can leave the young Schnauzer pup with us while he goes in to get his coffee. Winter makes herself at home immediately, if home is my lap. “You’ve made a friend there,” her owner concludes when he returns – but I don’t know which of us, me or Winter, is being spoken to. Anahita takes Elvis and Otto out onto the green on several occasions this morning and there is plenty of chasing inside the bars as well. This is the first

time we have seen a shorn Lucky – Ofra thinks he has a mustache now. Teddy assumes a position at the end of our table and demands his share of the treats; others, like Bailey, Flora, Lucky, Winnie, Otto and Elvis, at least show up at my knee in order to begin their begging.

There is a lot of human food on offer as well since Ofra and Ellie are sharing a toasted bacon and tomato sandwich and chips, Davide has a toastie himself and Dmitri has a cheese omelet, a bowl of beans and chips as well. Travel plans again dominate conversation and I am made dizzy with all the chatter about websites, discounts, dates and accommodation possibilities. Dmitri seems interested in booking into the same Dominican Republic site that both Ellie and Yara are heading for between Christmas and New Year and Davide, who can also get hotel discounts, begins to check out possibilities, using Ofra’s phone. It is not easy to make our escape this morning since there are a lot of dogs, including Beanie, who want to play with our animals as we make our way down the roadways.

### ***Tuesday, November 14:***

It is a gray day in Maida Vale but at least temperatures have moderated a bit as Otto and I head for the park. We cross the leaf-littered green and, not finding any worthy play partner for the dog, we continue on to the Randolph roadway. Here Millie the Miniature Pinscher comes dancing up, hoping for an early appearance of the blue biscuit bag; in fact she gets three treats, dropping the first two (which Otto devours) before making off with one of her own. In front of our compound gate at the café Davide and Dmitri are in solemn conference on the subject of holiday bookings – each tapping away at their various electronic devices. Tied to a low bit of fencing in the courtyard we find the Bulldog puppy, Sanchez, and he and Otto do get in a little good-natured sparring before I can get my pet behind bars. In the café itself Ofra, a phone in her ear, is behind the counter fingering all the cups as she searches for the one she will accept as a suitable for her morning coffee.

In addition to those already mentioned we also have London Janet, Georgie, Vlad, Dan and eventually Anahita. Otto is of

course delighted to welcome Elvis but the mischievous Maltese manages to remain outside the bars for most of the session so there will not be much genuine exercise this morning. I feel sorry for my fellow for I can see him try it on with each new entrant – Lola, Bailey, Lucky – all to no avail. I have other chores to perform, with all those blue bag customers scraping away at my sleeves. Daisy-Mae barks at me but won’t accept anything I have to offer but Bailey and Winnie are not so fussy. Dan says that Winnie has had another bad night, with blood streaming from her nose, but she seems just fine this morning.

Anahita is asked if any of her relatives in Iran have been affected by the devastating earthquake on the border with Iraq but she says they have not. Dan and Janet compare notes on some Bluetooth earphones they are manipulating and Janet announces that for our personal investment of £1 a week in the lottery racket we have won a magnificent £6 apiece this year! (Don’t spend it all at once.) More efforts are expended on holiday bookings; Dan and Davide have learned that you should never use the same website two days in a row because it has been programmed to offer the same accommodation you were looking at yesterday at an inflated price today and therefore you have to pretend you are new to the site. There are gasps of approval from the assembled coffee drinkers over the ingenuity of this approach and Dan says that when it comes to booking, “We’re geniuses.” I can’t help adding, “and when you have found the best deal on some luxury booking in the Dominican Republic perhaps you can turn your talents to world peace, famine or global warming.”

### ***Wednesday, November 15:***

Another gray morning greets us as Otto and I make our way into the park for a midweek classic. The dog spots Teddy and some other dogs making a clockwise circuit of the green and he rushes forward to join them. I trail along, catching up with Ellie at about the time we reach the café. The doors of this establishment are already open and I am soon joined in the coffee queue by other tablemates. Today we have the participation of Ellie, Georgie, the latter’s sister Jean, who is visiting from Glasgow, Davide, London Janet and Ofra. The latter is bearing a Victoria sponge made

with jam and dollops of cream and she does so because today is Bailey’s fourteenth birthday.

Someone notes that a Facebook item has revealed the unhappy news that someone has stolen Dmitri’s bicycle but the owner of this vehicle is not present to give us an update. Janet says that she couldn’t understand why Jean’s dog looked so unlike himself in another recent posting – but it turns out that Ziggy is wearing the antlers of a reindeer in the photo. While we are on the subject of unusual apparel Ofra admits that she often undertakes Bailey’s late night walk wearing only a shorty dressing gown and Ellie admits that she often drives her daughter to school wearing only her fluffy pajamas. “It does make me a better driver,” she admits, “since I would never want to have a crash under under such circumstances.”

A single candle is ignited on the birthday boy’s cake and we sing a chorus of the famous song. He has had plenty of soft chews from me – joined in his snacking by Otto, Lucky, Teddy, Winnie and Leonard, here today with Janet. But now someone suggests he ought to have a piece of the cake itself. His daddy has tied a celebratory red shoelace to his collar and, fearing that he will get his ears smeared with jam and cream as he licks out the empty plastic container, Ofra uses the ribbon to tie his ears back. It doesn’t help much and the shoelace ends up in the plastic dish all by itself. Now some of the other dogs, led by Otto, want to have a go at licking the container and before long we look up to see that he and Lucky are having an epic tug of war over this prize. Ofra says that it is a measure of Otto’s good nature that he lets Lucky hang on as the two circle our table amid our hearty chuckles. Finally I realize that I had better head for home – Michigan Janet and I have half a dozen stops along the Marylebone High Street beckoning us.

#### ***Thursday, November 16:***

We did have a fairly successful sojourn on Marylebone High Street but today our visitor has a chest cold and so once again Otto and I are on our own as we head for the park on a mild but gray Thursday morning. Coming in just behind us is Shane with Bullet and little Rocky. Otto would like Rocky to be his larger cousin,

Elvis, but this is not going to happen. Still, it is most amusing to see the tiniest Maltese launch a dozen seagulls from their resting spots in the center of the green with a speedy charge into their midst. Otto eventually disappears over the crest of the hill at the east end of this space, having recognized the voice of *his* cousin, Leonard. The latter, still with London Janet, has been barking at a squirrel. I can see just a tiny touch of blue in the western skies and there are soon signs of sunshine emerging from the clouds.

Our morning group includes the aforementioned Janet, Georgie, Jean, Davide, Ofra, Ellie and, after a while, Clare and the latter’s daughter. Clare’s Pug, Harley, in his camouflage harness, is soon seeking treats at my knee but the daughter’s dog, the year-old French Bulldog named Pingu, is even more direct in her entreaties – leaping into my lap and, in her shocking pink coat, settling in comfortably for most of the session. Teddy is using an empty chair at the end of the table to demand his treats but the other dogs are milling around at my feet. Bailey acts as though he hasn’t been fed in months, clawing at my jacket sleeve in manic protest. Winnie is barking at me and in other ways showing no signs of any discomfort but Davide says that nights are often spoiled by her restlessness, her heavy breathing and her nasal discharges (and Dan’s Nest has kept the temperature at the boiling point).

I pass around a catalogue I have just received, with many dog products on offer and a Daisy-Mae lookalike posing in a dog bed. Janet is taking orders for our three-course lunch at The Bridge on December 3 – always a problem for the fussy Ofra. It is not easy explaining to the latter what kind of fish she will get if she orders the trout and, indeed, what “cress” means. Jean says that between an analysis of Teddy’s anal problems and all these culinary matters that our conversation has certainly deteriorated since she was last here – but I assure her that only last week we were debating the Hegelian Dialectic. Anahita now arrives with Elvis and a bad cold but there isn’t much time for further play for Otto since we are in the process of heading for home or, in Davide’s case, to the vet’s.

**Friday, November 17:**

It is quite cold outside, though sunny enough, as Otto and I begin our Friday in the park. Just as we approach the green we encounter London Janet, heading our way from the bandstand with Leonard, Ellie the Cocker and Daisy-Mae, and Otto is soon involved in an early morning chase. A black dog named Winston and a Dachshund wearing a sequin-embossed coat are also part of this melee – a very satisfying overture. I summon my dog from his position near the cricket crease and we head for the café, where the doors are already open and a queue is forming.

The queue buster, Ofra, manages to slip behind the counter in order to suggest that some toast could be started while she is waiting – Ellie and I are watching this scene with fascination and merriment but I don’t think our drinks arrive any earlier than those in front of us this morning. Outside we also have Georgie, Jean, Davide and Anahita. Otto is soon enjoying his usual extended bout with Elvis; this always includes several sessions in which Otto must dash back and forth, squealing all the time, as Elvis circles the compound on the outside. A little boy joins in this game a well – but he is kicking at the dogs and making threatening gestures and we are not entirely happy that mom lets him persist in this behavior. According to Jean, Teddy has become a real dog since her last visit, and he proves this today by climbing *onto* the tabletop and in other ways demonstrating his insistence on sustenance now. As well, I am kept busy doling out the treats to Bailey, Lucky, Winnie, Leonard and Ellie the Cocker – the latter keeps my right knee warm with her chin but, in fact, with the sun at such a low angle, we do have some warmth reaching us from the south.

I make some progress on the guest list for a Thanksgiving feast that Michigan Janet is planning to cook for us on Thursday next. Georgie reports that she has taken delivery on a new wall-mounted flat screen TV, though it has not been mounted as yet. Jean introduces the topic of booze costs in Scotland where, it was announced yesterday, minimum prices can now be set by the government – in an attempt to curb special offers that undermine the health of a population suffering from too much alcohol. There are obvious benefits from such a measure but she thinks

it punishes the poor and that it will just encourage forays into England – where cheaper liquor will still be available. While we are on the subject Ofra and Ellie quiz me about my Thanksgiving needs (or their own). The conclusion is that, for them, Thursday night will be B.Y.O.P. – bring your own *Prosecco*.

**Saturday, November 18:**

A gray and frigid day beckons as Otto and I head for the Rec on a dour Saturday morning. I wouldn't exactly say that Otto is in disgrace but his copybook and has been well and truly blotted. The incident I refer to occurred last night, as Janet as I headed for the American School – where my friend Buck Herron had mounted a production of *Cabaret*. This turned out to be a very gratifying experience and, as often happens, I was able to make contact with a number of former colleagues. (And the play featured one sailor named Fritz and another named Otto.) At a reception in the library after the show I also met a former student, actor Adam Bond – who reminded me that he used to write movie reviews for me during my tenure as sponsor of the school newspaper. When we got home, however, we discovered that Otto, as a punishment for our betrayal in abandoning him, had pushed into Janet's room and chewed up her new copy of the successor novel in the Stig Larsson saga. Janet painstakingly pasted all the paper shards into place, hopefully proving that the dog had not swallowed any of the book but he did have an attack of hiccups in the middle of the night.

I was particularly proud of Janet, who didn't cough once during the play, in spite of her cold, though this morning, in spite of her good intentions, she again remains behind when Otto and I take off. There are a lot of larger dogs out on the green this morning, including a wonderful fuzzy beast and two young hounds and Otto seems to enjoy sparring and chasing with these fellows. Once we have settled into our seats at the café there is further excitement when Elvis shows up; the latter is such a wind-up merchant, taunting Otto repeatedly from the other side of our bars. Another new waitress is obviously dog-phobic and she doesn't exactly appreciate the frenzy at her feet as she delivers Georgie's egg and Dan's toasted sandwich. (London Janet, Ofra, Hanna, Nigel

and Anahita are also present today.) Dan has brought me another package of Tasty Bites for the toothless ones – but I always have a goodly supply of such treats for these fellows. Bailey, not satisfied with this, however, tries to gobble up the last of Georgie’s egg but he has stretched too far from his supporting chair and falls off with a thud.

Dan has brought with him more financial papers for Nigel and these are accepted by the accountant for further action at work. Hanna distributes more of the coffee-flavored candies from Iran but when Georgie asks where she bought them Hanna offers the cryptic reply, “I’m entitled to some secrets.” Georgie says that she has seen no evidence of modernization work at the old Truscott Arms and says she doubts the property will ever re-open as a pub. (This loss of local amenity brings to mind the closure of our much-missed post office.) With all of his morning play on the green Otto has still not squatted for his poo – but soon after we have begun our return journey this chore is accomplished at last.

***Sunday, November 19:***

Again we face a frigid morning in the Rec; there is some sun but today it provides little warmth as Otto and I overtake Georgie, here with Sparkie and Seamus. We pass two Oscars, first the unrestrained Schnauzer and then the playful Beagle. The latter is just leaving and so, with little opportunity for play, we report to the café – which is just opening its doors. Our compound is crowded with visitors this morning. First we have Frankie and daughter Valentina, here with rescue dog Rosie. They are waiting for an Italian friend, who arrives with her daughter and a chocolate Lab named Jack. At a second little table are two women, a hockey-stick wielding little girl and a half Schnauzer-half Poodle (a Schnoodle?) named Blas. At our table we have London Janet, Georgie, Ofra, Dan, Hanna and, yes, Michigan Janet.

Valentina loves all the dogs and goes from one to another in order to give each a cuddle. She says Sparkie is her favorite – London Janet covers Daisy-Mae’s ears at this point. Seamus is on a tear this morning – barking at everything moving on the other side of the bars, following Sparkie in case the latter drops a crumb and attacking poor Jack. Dan suggests that the interaction

between Jack and the others dogs would be improved if the Lab were not on lead. Unfortunately Jack’s owner doesn’t speak English so Dan attempts to repeat this conversation in Italian and Valentina, who is fluent in both tongues, also translates. Bailey, Winnie and Sparkie are my chief customers this morning – but why does Sparkie accept each biscuit as though he were being asked to swallow medicine. Otto also gets lots of treats but play opportunities remain limited – though Blas provides a little competition.

London Janet has brought with her seven scratch cards and some time is spent in discovering whether the syndicate has won anything for their investment. Ofra insists that a spoon is the best instrument for scratching but in fact only Dan has a winner this morning – on a card that cost £2 we have won £2! Michigan Janet spends some time quizzing Dan on the theater line-up as she decides whether to book a ticket or two before she departs. TV fare comes under discussion – with emphasis on *Strictly* and anticipation on the first episode of *I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* coming up tonight. Michigan Janet and I discuss our schedule for the rest of the day and, leaving her in conversation with Dan, I head for home. I’m cold.

### ***Monday, November 20:***

There seems to have been some moisture overnight but this morning it is merely gray as, depositing the recycling bag on the pavement, we head for the Rec at the beginning of a new week. Otto makes slow work of his progress up the Morshead roadway and when we do reach the green he has a lot of problems settling down for his first poo – with a number of dogs convincing him that he’d much rather play than squat. On the Randolph roadway he finds some smaller dogs who enjoy a good romp and by the time we have reported to the café Davide, Georgie and Jean have already taken their seats.

Ofra, Ellie and Lisa, Flora’s owner and Demi’s wife, also join us for our session this morning. Flora thus adds her nose to that of Bailey and Winnie in the biscuit queue – though Teddy prefers jumping into empty chairs in order to demand his treats. Ellie complains that her dog has been sitting in something nasty and

that he will have to have his bum washed as soon as they get home – this was true of Otto last night too. Ellie gets lots of advice on what Teddy might have been sitting on, amid a mounting crescendo of derisive laughter – but I notice that she is not laughing. Lucky is delivered to Georgie and he spends most of the session in Jean’s lap. To our surprise, an animal warden working for the council, Vicky, stops by to ask if we have any problems to report. We don’t.

London Janet is off playing tennis and this is a problem for people who have come to pay for lottery or lunch – an especially puzzling matter of accountancy since friends have advanced money for absent pals and no one remembers how much. Lisa is complaining that daughter Isabella is facing those all-important exams and that all of her efforts in the course work category don’t seem to matter anymore in the British system. (Should have gone to the American School.) Davide is complaining that there is a problem with the water heater in the flat he owns out near Heathrow and the plumber says he can’t get proper access. And Ofra is complaining that Ellie now has to drive her to the beauty salon where, two days ago, she bought some shampoo – and then forgot to take it with her when she left.

### ***Tuesday, November 21:***

It is several degrees warmer today – you can tell this is true because I am able to wear my baseball cap again and not my wool hat. Michigan Janet and I produce a lot of garbage these days and one of my tasks, as we reach the Morshead gate, is to offer up a garbage bag as we pass the black rubbish bin. Out on the muddy green there are a lot of dogs but the one who seems to have the most interest for Otto is a black Lab with a stick. Otto would really like to have a go at this object, perhaps even some tug-of-war, but this fellow is not into sharing. Hanna comes around the corner and, addressing my pet as “Monster,” accompanies us on our final walk to the café.

This morning we have Hanna, Georgie, Jean, Davide, London Janet, Ellie and Wendy with us – but Ofra, we soon learn, is feeling poorly and will not be coming to the park this morning. This means that only Winnie, who spends much of the session

in Hanna’s lap, requires soft chews – Schmackos today. Teddy continues his impersonation of mentor Bailey, jumping into empty chairs and raking away at the tabletop. He’s been into the mud again, but cleanup will be much easier than yesterday. (For that matter, we learn that Flora has rolled into fox poo and even puppy shampoo has not defeated the odor; someone suggests that it can be countered by smothering the dog in ketchup.) Otto has a little play with Lucky but there isn’t enough exercise on offer for him today – and prospects don’t improve with the arrival of Linda with Pepper and Chica.

Conversation this morning is devoted to a catalogue of disasters. The plumbing in the flat that Davide owns near Heathrow is failing and cannot be reached easily by the plumbers. Wendy says that a leak from the flat above has done in her boiler and caused considerable displacement. Ellie reports that daughter Georgia has fallen off a ladder and broken an arm – this will require additional investigations at the Wellington today. Linda is very upset that one of the builders assisting in the move to St. John’s Wood has broken a treasured chandelier. And finally, as we head for the exits, Michigan Janet arrives at last. She is late because her faithful curling brush has at last crashed and some form of replacement must be sought at John Lewis later today.

***Wednesday, November 22:***

The house is in turmoil – with the sitting room full of furniture needed to seat tomorrow’s Thanksgiving guests and Cathy, John the Window Cleaner and Michigan Janet all talking at the same time. Outside it is on the mild side, with occasional outbreaks of sun, though there is a strong wind ripping across the green. Otto heads across this large space, finding some fun with a very young chocolate Lab puppy named Harley. Soon London Janet and Anahita are descending Mt. Bannister and this means that Leonard and Elvis are added to the mix. By the time we can get our lot moving toward the blue umbrella the café is already open.

Ellie, standing behind me in the queue, is calling her pal Ofra, who was feeling poorly yesterday and who is still at home in bed. This means that once again I need soft chews for one animal only – in this case Winnie, here with Davide. Jean and eventually

Georgie are also here and Hanna has her tabloid spread on the tabletop. Lucky has taken a real liking to Jean and spends most of the session in her lap – when he is not barking at me for treats. (It’s too bad that Jean returns to Glasgow today on the 1:30 train.) Anahita announces that Elvis must be poorly because he slept most of the day yesterday – we assure her that this isn’t necessarily the case and, indeed, he seems just fine as he and Otto have their usual wresting match.

Some of yesterday’s crises have been addressed. Davide reports that the boiler on his Heathrow flat has been fixed – though this did involve breaking open part of the wall. Ellie says that an MRI has confirmed a break in Georgia’s left arm. She is worried that this may interfere with water sports during the December holiday in the Dominican Republic but the new splint is waterproof. (Georgia was offered this apparatus in a variety of colors; Ellie opted for black since this will show less wear and tear and, besides, everything goes with black.) There is no discussion of the resignation of Robert Mugabe but much is made of the latest TV fare. I am the first to leave this morning – Linda has promised us a ride to Sainsbury’s Ladbroke Grove, where the last of the Thanksgiving supplies must be purchased. As I am out walking with the dog later that night my former student Marty drives by, stopping to invite me, yes, to a Thanksgiving dinner at *his* house.

***Thursday, November 23:***

After a day of frantic pre-Thanksgiving struggles in the kitchen I notice that even Classic FM is full of references to this most American of holidays. Otto and I head for the park on the day itself – there has been overnight rain but it is dry and sunny now, though quite cold. The dog works his way across the green, chasing and being chased, and we end up on the Randolph roadway where London Janet is just arriving with Leonard, Lucky and, and wait a minute .... there is no sign of Daisy-Mae! This is a matter of some consternation for the Shih-Tzu’s dotting mommy and we spend some time calling Daisy-Mae’s name before the little madam, having taken her own route to the café, appears around a corner. Thereafter we walk together to the tennis courts and to Leonard’s favorite tree – the one that always has one or two

resident squirrels to bark at. As we return to the café a second time there is more spirited play, this time involving the Boxer puppy, Sanchez.

There is only a small turnout this morning, just London Janet, Georgie, Dan and Davide. Georgie says that Ellie has told her that Ofra is still stick and will have to miss tonight’s feast. (Ellie has to head for home early in order to rendezvous with a builder.) This means that once again I have only Winnie in the soft treats category, though I notice that Lucky often drops his Shapes biscuit (which Otto then gobbles up) and I would do better feeding him smaller treats as well. Dan and Davide are still waiting for news of the tests that Winnie underwent a few days ago and Dan uses his mobile phone to remind the vet’s receptionist that they need to pull their finger out over there.

I have to give a detailed analysis of the foods on offer tonight – with great interest in the marshmallow bedecked sweet potatoes and an anticipatory smack of the lips when I mention that the pumpkin pie will have a lemon meringue sibling. (Poor Davide, who heads for a flight to Sao Paulo this afternoon, is being tortured by this recital.) Food topics remind Georgie that the notion that the haggis is a wild animal is an ancient joke in Scotland and Dan says that his own father perpetrated this myth when the family went visiting in the far north. Asked by the young Dan why the path through the heather was circular dad responded that the haggis has shorter legs on one side of its body and therefore it can’t run in a straight line. I remind the others that Thanksgiving was a prominent theme on this morning’s radio breakfast and there is speculation that, like Halloween before it, the holiday may eventually be embraced by the English as well. This would be an irony, I note, since the Pilgrim Fathers were fed up with England and glad to make their escape. “I think you’ll find,” Dan concludes, “that, in fact, they were kicked out.”

***Friday, November 24:***

Bright skies illuminate our pathway to the green as Otto and I enter the Rec on a sunny but chilly November morning. Almost immediately Teddy rushes forward to touch noses with my dog and so we fall in step with Ellie as we make a slow circuit of the

green itself. Along the way we encounter London Janet, walking this morning with Daisy-Mae and Ellie the Cocker. The latter becomes an immediate object of my dog’s form of bullying play and the two are soon wrestling in the leaves. On the walkway itself a personal trainer is putting his charge through a series of crunches – Ellie is hoping that none of our dogs piss on this poor chap, though, given the totally inappropriate site for this exercise session, I am of two minds. Atop Mt. Bannister we also note a shirtless chap doing his exercises – how is he not freezing to death?

This morning, in addition to Janet and Ellie we also have the participation of Hanna, Georgie, Anahita, and Davide. The latter, here with Winnie, is a bit of a surprise since we had expected him to be in Sao Paulo by this time – but he says that he was unwell and begged off his assignment, missing not only it but last night’s Thanksgiving extravaganza as well. So did Ofra, whom Ellie has spoken to on the phone; our Israeli friend, still suffering from high temperatures, is calling on the doctor today. Davide reports that Winnie has a number of infections, for which more antibiotics have been issued; he also wants to know if she is perhaps infecting him. Nothing wrong with her appetite nor that of the other usual suspects. These include Lucky, Ellie the Cocker, Teddy, Otto and Elvis. The latter usually takes his biscuit through the bars in order to enjoy it in peace – a strategy that also succeeds in winding Otto up every time.

With the exception of bed-bound Davide all of those present were also guests at the Thanksgiving meal, a marvelous feast provided by Michigan Janet, and much of our conversation this morning is devoted to a thorough digestion of this topic. I was able to use the occasion of this meal to produce the first proof copy of the novel written by my Dorothy, *Sight / Bites*, a work that can also be downloaded now from my website. Ironically many chapters of this work are devoted to the preparation and consumption of a Thanksgiving meal and even more eerie is the fact that, long before he had appeared on the scene, Dorothy called the Miniature Schnauzer belonging to the heroine “Otto.” Well, there is still a lot of clean-up needed to bring last night’s version of the famous meal to a final conclusion so I had better get home and empty the dishwasher.

**Saturday, November 25:**

After a day of recovery and restitution in my house Otto and I get ready for our morning in the park. In Otto’s case this means running up and down the hall with Foxy, the new squeaky toy brought by Michigan Janet. In my case this means, for the first time this year, donning my heavy winter coat, my gloves and my long-johns. Yes, observing a coating of frost on the car roofs during our late night walk I am determined to meet winter head-on this morning. It isn’t quite as bad as I might have expected; there is frost everywhere but it is also sunny and there isn’t much wind. We crunch our way across the green as Otto, looking for someone to play with, manages to steal the ball of a little dog and run off with it – no doubt hoping that this provocation will be followed by some spirited chasing. This doesn’t happen and it takes me a while to retrieve the ball and by this time they are just opening the doors of the café.

Just opening the doors and yet there is already a queue with twelve people lined up ahead of me. Outside I join a meager Saturday turnout – just Davide, London Janet, Georgie and Hanna. Daisy-Mae is sitting in Janet’s lap and she is not best pleased. She has already giving the visiting Oscar the Schnauzer a severe telling off and now she launches an attack on the head of the noisy Seamus. Sparkie, making one of his weekend appearances, exhausts the dividends coming from the toasted cheese sandwiches and then deigns to accept some pink Shapes from me. My most frequent petitioner is Winnie. Davide says that she follows him around the house – as though he were some sort of mobile refrigerator – barking for treats all day long.

Conversation is devoted to a number of TV-generated topics. First we have reactions to a mysterious incident (with some claiming they heard shots fired) at Oxford Circus station – covered in detail during the evening news last night. (No one seems to know what happened but it was definitely not a terrorist incident.) Also under consideration is this year’s line-up on *I’m A Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* The others feel that the format is becoming tired and predictable but I can add that Michigan Janet has been watching with great interest. London Janet denounces Graham Norton’s show and here too she sees the talk show format as threadbare by

now – I have given up on such shows years ago, although perhaps *The Last Leg*, which I do watch, is still in this category. Given the depressed temperatures it is not too surprising that there is no interest in lingering this morning. Poor Otto has not found any worthy play-pals this morning but perhaps there will be better luck tomorrow.

***Sunday, November 26:***

There is less evidence of frost on all the park surfaces but it is still very cold as Otto and I head for the park on a sunny Sunday morning. There are no dogs out on the green and so we begin a slow walk on the outer perimeter, gradually working our way out of the shadows and into the more congenial sunshine. As we reach the Randolph roadway we meet a lively Shih-Tzu in a Christmas sweater. This is Maya and she and Otto chase around a bit as we slowly approach the café. Heading our way are a number of park pals and their dogs. I pause long enough to insert Otto into our compound before entering the café itself. The queue is much more manageable this morning and I am soon sitting in the sun with my cappuccino.

Joining us we have Dan, Davide, London Janet, Georgie, Lisa, Nigel, Hanna and, making perhaps her last morning appearance for this visit, Michigan Janet. Indeed, after a while, Maya’s owner, Cathleen, sits down as well and Vlad comes to take up a little table behind us. In all, this is a very respectable Sunday turnout. Lisa has arrived to deliver Flora to Georgie, who also has Sparkie and Seamus with her. The presence of Nigel means that, at last, Otto has Elvis to play with; the latter is wearing a coat today and this means that there is no escape through the bars for the little Maltese today. Elvis also joins the food queue and I am kept busy satisfying the needs of Winnie, Flora, Seamus and Sparkie. Daisy-Mae is lying in wait on London Janet’s lap and every now and then she lashes out at one of the aforementioned diners.

Nigel has brought in a Thanksgiving thank you gift for Michigan Janet from L’Occitane and Vlad has brought in a box of Belgrade chocolates for London Janet. We review latest developments on *I’m a Celebrity* and *Strictly* and our visitor plans out the rest of her day’s schedule with advice from everyone else. Nigel has brought

with him the taxes he has completed for Dan and Davide and there is some conversation on whether Elvis, a frequent office visitor, has had a paw in their preparation. Nigel says that, yes, on the line marked “Amount to Pay” Elvis has wiped his bum. Part of today’s schedule for Michigan Janet includes a visit to Hamish II and so, accompanied by Hanna we head here (very slowly), also pausing for a baguette from the nearby deli. It is cold waiting around in the shadows so I am urging some haste in this errand so I can get home and turn the heat on.

***Monday, November 27:***

The light rain that was falling during our late night walk seems to have come to an end shortly before it is time to head for the streets with the dog and a second recycling bag. There are still lots of black clouds lying ominously low on the horizon but the temperatures have moderated a bit. We begin to circle the green but shortly after the bandstand we encounter London Janet, uncertain if tennis is still possible this morning, and we reverse directions. So does Ellie, whom we encounter near the clubhouse, and thus it is with a fine canine parade (Otto, Teddy, Binky, Leonard and Daisy-Mae) that we approach the café. Heading our way, after a week’s absence, is Ofra –and Georgie (dogless until Lucky is delivered) is soon coming in behind us.

“I always love it,” I tell Janet a few minutes later, “when, even though I am fourth in the queue, I get my coffee first.” (They often begin my order when they see me lurking outside.) Bailey seems to think that he is owed all the biscuits he missed while his mommy was ill. Binky, Lucky and Leonard are soon lined up as well – I am trying to keep their wet paws off my knees. Teddy begins the session in Ellie’s lap. (When she drops her teabag on the tiles she tries to retrieve it by using two stirring sticks – “There is someone who has spent a lot of time in Chinese restaurants,” I note.) Teddy settles into her lap again but he is soon demanding treats and after I roll some across the tabletop she puts him down and he uses empty chairs to advance his cause. He has his eye on the last of Georgie’s poached egg but, though he rattles her abandoned silverware, he never quite succeeds in scarfing this prize. We are joined for a brief time by Shane with his Bullet and a fuzzy black dog named Alfie.

Ofra is regretting that illness caused her to miss the Thanksgiving feast but I can tell the ladies that there is a brief resumé of the event on YouTube – where Dan has deposited a minute-long video he produced during the meal. Ellie produces her phone to view this but this device now has a very unique usage. Ofra has been complaining that after all the recent dentistry she still has a hole in one tooth and Ellie’s phone is used to photograph her mouth so that she can prove this claim. Soon she is using her own phone, as though it were a lollipop, to gather additional evidence. The use of this instrument is not complete – for Ellie now receives the daily call from her mother with news of the latest crisis. Today it turns out that Ellie has failed to turn the dishwasher on – as if this emergency can’t wait until she gets home. Otto and I are on our own as we head homeward ourselves. Near the Essendine exit the black Beanie dashes forward for the obligatory mugging from my pet. A minute later she has her revenge – flattened on a black bench she falls heavily on an unsuspecting Otto from above.

***Tuesday, November 28:***

The day begins far earlier than usual in our household – for Janet awaits a cab that will take her to Heathrow at the start of a return journey to Michigan. By 6:15 she is off and I hope, in spite of the mobility problems, the overheating and the bothersome coughing, that she has had a good time. Certainly Otto will miss her, though he has the distraction of a morning in the park as a temporary recompense. It is very cold this morning, though clouds have departed and we have a bright (if not warming) sunshine. After crossing the green without finding any appropriate play-partner Otto heads to the top of Mt. Bannister and I am forced to climb steeply up the flanks of this eminence, getting to the top just in time to spot where his first poo of the day has fallen. We descend to the Carlton roadway and make our way back to the café – where the troops are just beginning to report for coffee drinking duties.

This morning we have Janet (no need, alas, to differentiate between London Janet and Michigan Janet any longer), Georgie, Ofra (still looking weary after her recent bout with the flu), Ellie, Anahita and Hanna. Lucky has been delivered by his Spanish

owner but Otto’s initial preoccupation is with Leonard, here with Janet. The latter’s Daisy-Mae makes an unusual appearance on my lap and accepts several Tasty Bites before squeezing through the bars in order to pursue two French Bulldogs. A few minutes later she does this again – Janet has a theory that when she has undergone a particularly stressful grooming, as this morning, she takes her anger out on other dogs. The presence of Elvis adds spice to Otto’s menu; this morning the Malteser is wearing a jacket and this prevents *him* from squeezing through the bars, a gesture he often performs in order to eat his biscuits in peace outside.

One topic dominates the morning conversation – yesterday’s announcement of the engagement of Prince Harry and the American actress Meghan Markle. All of the ladies endorse this coupling, an historic choice for a royal since Meghan is of mixed race and a divorcée – not to mention a Yank. There is much speculation on the venue and the date of the spring wedding (before or after Kate’s third baby is born?) and I throw the cat among the pigeons by wondering if this transatlantic union means that Donald Trump will have to be invited. Janet is in the final stages of gathering money for our lunch on Sunday and this reminds me that Debbie gave me her contribution as we were leaving the park yesterday. But Janet has another task now – a friend comes by in tears and has to be comforted after struggling with the logging-in system in the gym and getting unhelpful suggestions from the staff. I follow Janet and Georgie as they make their way to the exits. Once again Otto is broadsided by Beanie as we near our gate and it is not easy making our way back to an empty house.

### ***Wednesday, November 29:***

I will have to add gloves to my cold weather armor this morning; though there is no frost there is a biting wind and, under gray skies, we bravely head for an empty green. Such a scene is always a matter of some disappointment for Otto, who even follows some large dogs as they climb up on the Mt. Bannister walkway. I don’t have to follow him today because he does agree to join me below and by this time there are some pals coming in at the clubhouse

end of the green. These include Poppy and – with Janet – Binky, Leonard and Daisy-Mae. Moreover Ofra is heading our way with Bailey and behind her there is Ellie with Teddy and the pass-the-parcel dog, Lucky.

There are a number of tasks that need to be performed before I can put my gloves back on. I need to squeeze a saccharine into my coffee and I need to make sure that the biscuit bag is untied and, indeed, that quantities of treat material have been decanted onto the tabletop. Binky and Bailey are soon in begging mode, and Otto and Leonard are not far behind. Lucky, freed from his lead, is eyed by that opportunist, Otto, when he goes off to chew his Shapes biscuit – since there might be a stolen crumb going. “Leave him alone, you can have your own biscuit,” I argue. “Otto is definitely the schoolyard bully of this group,” Ellie argues. Perhaps this is true *inside* the bars; for the outside we have Daisy-Mae, who twice squeezes through in order to attack some passing stranger who fails to meet her high canine standards.

Ofra, who is still coughing, says that she has a new form of medicinal syrup – Bailey’s Irish Cream. She is going out tonight but so is Ellie. In the latter case there is cheering news – after several months the Clifton pub, one of those many local hostelries threatened with conversion into flats, has reopened as a pub. And a dog-friendly one, we are told, so there is a chance that Teddy may be going out tonight too. Ellie says this is preferable to leaving him at home where husband and daughters feed him too much junk. Today he is scraping away at the tabletop in pursuit of Tasty Bites. I suggest that he is practicing for his next trip to Las Vegas for his gesture, at any blackjack table, would certainly be interpreted as “Hit me!” Well, no one wants to linger on such a bitter morning and so we can now head for home. In my case it is to begin my Wednesday errands, including the 123 Cleaners; there is so much bedding, plus Thanksgiving tablecloths and a pair of trousers, that I need to carry much of this in a pillowcase and the rest in my backpack. As I pass the porch of my neighbor Lennie he says, “You look like you are on your way to join Shackleton’s expedition to Antarctica.”

**Thursday, November 30:**

For the last day of the month we have bright skies, lots of sunshine, and frigid temperatures again. You can tell it is really cold when I am wearing my sweatshirt hood over my wool hat – the final stage would be to cover this with the hood of my winter coat as well but I have resisted this so far this winter. Otto again finds nothing of interest in our crossing of the green – where some of the clumps of grass still bear the signs of overnight frost. He then spots a number of our pals over on the Randolph walkway and this gives me the opportunity of passing the dog’s lead over to Janet – so that I can undertake a brief expedition to the Vineyard Chemists, where my supply of prescriptions is waiting for me.

There are a number of questions to be endured as I plunk this supply down on the tabletop when I return. No, I am not sick – but, in fact, Vlad’s Biba is still in hospital, Ofra still looks poorly, Dan has a cold and Winnie seems to be on permanent antibiotics for her sinus infection these days. (Also present this morning are Janet, Georgie, Davide, Shane, Anahita and Ellie.) Teddy, in a bright red jumper, remains in mommy’s lap throughout the session today but there is plenty of movement from Otto, Elvis, Lucky, Bailey and Winnie. The toothless ones are getting ersatz bacon strips these days – and all the dogs seem to benefit from the distribution of chunks of the toasted cheese sandwiches that Dan and David are eating.

There is no time to discuss Donald Trump’s latest tweeting folly – the posting of anti-Moslem videos derived from a British fascist organization and, after protests from Downing Street, his criticism of Teresa May for not doing more to combat terrorism. No, the really important topic would be the availability of theater tickets, where Dan is our resident expert, during the visit of some of my Swedish relatives in January. I am also interested in Dan and Davide’s own schedule, since they take off for New York (and an appointment with Bette Midler’s *Hello, Dolly!*) next Wednesday – and I may have a letter that they can post for me on arrival. Anahita and Ellie want me to send on to them photos taken by Rob at Thanksgiving and I promise to do this. These days I never seem to be free of online assignments – there’s a proof to look at

from Bookprinting UK, there are corrections to be vetted on my website, there is a search for holiday card news from the printers in Swiss Cottage, and a number of emails to answer. So I had better get home and get on with it.

For Chapter 7, **click here**.