

PADDINGTON
RACES AHEAD

by the same author

A Bear Called Paddington

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Paddington Here and Now

PADDINGTON
RACES AHEAD

by MICHAEL BOND



illustrated by R.W. ALLEY



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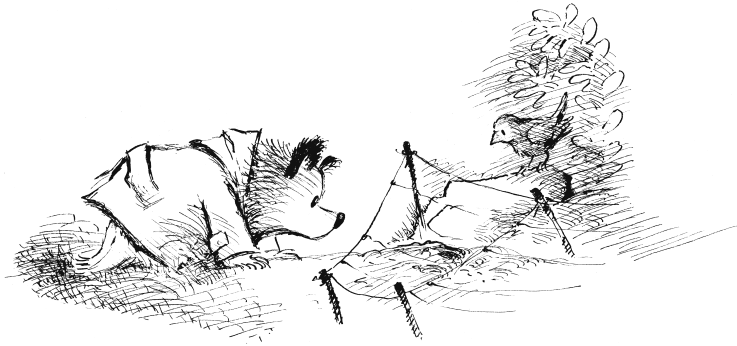
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CONTENTS

1. Mr Curry's Birthday Treat	7
2. A Fishy Business	30
3. Spring-cleaning	55
4. A Chance Encounter	75
5. Paddington in Training	97
6. Paddington Flies a Kite	122
7. Paddington on Track	147





Chapter One

MR CURRY'S BIRTHDAY TREAT

EARLY ONE SPRING morning Paddington hurried into the garden as soon as he had finished breakfast in order to inspect his rockery. He was an optimistic bear at heart, and having planted some seeds the day before, he was looking forward to seeing the results.

The seeds had been a free gift in one of Mrs

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

Brown's magazines, and the picture on the side of the packet was a blaze of bright yellow flowers. Some of them were almost as tall as the magazine's gardening expert, Alf Greenways.

Mr Greenways was known to his many friends in the trade as 'Beanpole Greenways', so it was as good a recommendation for success as anyone could possibly wish for.

He also owned the nursery supplying the sunflower seeds, so it was no wonder he was beaming all over his face as he held a watering can aloft, spurring his blooms to even greater heights.

Paddington got down on all fours and peered at the freshly-raked soil in his patch of garden, but apart from a disconsolate-looking caterpillar, there wasn't so much as the tiniest of green shoots to be seen. Everything was exactly as he had left it the night before when he had gone outside with a torch before going to bed.

Mr Greenway's seeds were rather large and he couldn't help wondering if he had planted them upside down by mistake.

A robin redbreast landed on a nearby rock to

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

take a closer look at what was going on, but having spotted Paddington's network of cotton threads protecting the patch, it flew off in disgust.

Mr Brown was right. Gardens were a good example of life in the raw; a constant battle between good and evil. Slugs, for example, were given very short shrift, often ending up with the contents of a salt cellar upended over them, whereas worms were always welcome – unless of course they happened to come up for air in the middle of the lawn.

All the same, it was disappointing, and for a moment or two Paddington toyed with the idea of going indoors and fetching his binoculars in case the caterpillar had a hearty appetite and he could see traces of green on its lips.

He was in the middle of weighing up the pros and cons when he heard an all-too-familiar voice calling out to him.

His heart sank as he looked up and saw the Browns' neighbour peering at him over the top of the fence. Not that there was anything new in that; Mr Curry was a notorious busybody and he spent his life poking his nose into other people's affairs.

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

Because his patch of garden coincided with some higher ground on Mr Curry's side, Paddington often bore the brunt.

It was most disappointing. Mr Brown had spent half of the weekend raising the fence at that particular point, with the express intention of putting a stop to their neighbour's spying.

At the time Mrs Bird had said 'the chance would be a fine thing' and it looked as though her worst fears were being realised.

"What are you doing, bear?" growled Mr Curry suspiciously. "Up to no good as usual, I suppose."

"Oh, no, Mr Curry," said Paddington. "I was just checking my blooms – except I haven't got any yet. Mrs Bird was right. She said you would be bound to find a box to stand on. I mean..."

"What was that, bear?" barked Mr Curry.

"Mrs Bird saw a fox in our garden the other day," said Paddington hastily. "She thinks it came over here because it couldn't find anything interesting in yours."

Paddington was normally the most truthful of bears and he stayed where he was for a moment or

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

two in case the proverbial thunderbolt landed on his head, but nothing happened, so he breathed a sigh of relief and carried on looking for new plant shoots.

“I don't see any point in having flowers,” growled Mr Curry. “Nasty things. They make the place untidy – dropping their petals everywhere. Just you wait.”

“I was hoping Mr Brown might take a photograph of mine when they are ready,” explained Paddington. “It's my Aunt Lucy's birthday in August and she says flowers always brighten things up. They don't have many in the Home for Retired Bears in Lima and I thought I could send her a picture she can keep by her bed.”

A gleam entered Mr Curry's eyes and he suddenly perked up. “Do you know what day it is today, bear?” he asked casually.

Paddington thought for a moment. “I think it's a Wednesday, Mr Curry,” he said.

“Nothing else about it?” asked Mr Curry.

“Not that I know of,” said Paddington. “I can ask Mrs Bird if you like.”

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” said Mr Curry hastily. Reaching inside his jacket pocket, he removed a folded sheet of paper.

“It’s funny you should mention the word ‘birthday’, bear,” he continued, waving it in the air. “Quite a coincidence, in fact. Don’t tell anyone else, but it happens to be my birthday today.”

“Does it really, Mr Curry?” exclaimed Paddington. “I didn’t know that.”

“Well,” said the Browns’ neighbour, “you do now, but since you have clearly forgotten the fact, it’s...”

He broke off as the paper slipped from his fingers and they both watched it flutter to the ground on Paddington’s side of the fence and land at his feet.

“Now look what you’ve made me do!” he barked. “I’ve dropped my list of presents... I sat up late last night making it out...”

Paddington looked shocked. “You haven’t opened them already have you, Mr Curry?” he exclaimed. “Mrs Bird says that’s supposed to be very unlucky.”

“I don’t have any to open yet, bear,” said Mr Curry. “That paper you made me drop contains a

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat



list of all the things I wouldn't mind having.

"I made it out in case anyone happens to be stuck for ideas," he added casually.



Paddington made haste to retrieve the paper. From a quick glance, it seemed to be rather long.

"Don't bother reading it now, bear," said Mr Curry hastily. "You can keep it to browse over at your leisure. However, there isn't much time left, so I suggest you don't hang about. I wouldn't want you to be disappointed."

"Thank you very much, Mr Curry," said Paddington doubtfully. "Bears are good at browsing, so I don't expect I shall keep it very long."

But the Browns' neighbour had already disappeared. One moment he was there, the next moment, following what sounded remarkably like a chuckle, his kitchen door slammed shut.

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

Paddington stood where he was for a moment or two, wondering what to do with the paper in his paw; then he slowly made his way back to the kitchen.

Mrs Bird, the Browns' housekeeper, was busy making marmalade, but she gave one of her snorts when he told her what had happened. "I'll give that Mr Curry a birthday present," she said.

Withdrawing a wooden spoon from one of the saucepans, she licked it with evident relish. "One he won't forget in a hurry."

Catching sight of an anxious look on Paddington's face, she softened. "I daresay he can't help being the way he is. He must have been born that way. It's our bad luck we have the misfortune to live next door to him.

"It isn't like me to forget anyone's birthday," she continued, her mind clearly on other things. "Even Mr Curry's. I thought it was much later in the year..."

"Could you read out some of the things he wants – I daren't leave my saucepans for a moment in case they boil over."

Paddington was only too pleased to oblige.

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

“A new ballcock for the cistern...” he announced, “...a mouse trap... breakfast cereal (see two packets for price of one offer at cut-price grocers)... a three-for-one offer on tubes of shaving cream from new stall in market...”

“I take it all back,” said Mrs Bird, over another quick stir. “He must have turned over a new leaf. It doesn't sound like him at all. It's much too modest.”

She thought for a moment. “It just so happens I have a fruit cake in the oven. It was meant for our tea, but it won't take long to cover it with marzipan... he likes lots of candles and his name written in the icing...”

“It would happen today when I'm up to my eyes. It's way past the marmalade-making season, but I'm experimenting with some Seville oranges I've been keeping in the freezer. I'm not too sure how they will turn out.”

“Your 2009s were very good, Mrs Bird,” said Paddington knowledgeably. “I stuck three of the labels from the jars into my scrapbook to remind me. It was the best I've ever had.”

“All gone, I'm afraid,” said Mrs Bird, hiding her

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

pleasure as best she could over the saucepan. “And there’s not much left of the 2010s either. I don’t know what happens to marmalade in this house,” she added meaningfully. “It just disappears.”

Clearly in two minds about what to do next, she began sorting out her spoons.

“Perhaps I could help, Mrs Bird?” said Paddington. “I wouldn’t want your experiment to go wrong.”

“Would you mind, dear?” said Mrs Bird. “You could get him some of that shaving cream.” Reaching into her handbag she withdrew a five pound note. “That ought to take care of it.”

Paddington needed no second bidding. The steam from the saucepan was making his whiskers droop, and with Mrs Brown at the hairdressers, and both Jonathan and Judy away at school, he was at a bit of a loose end, so he was on his way in no time at all.

Over the years he had become a well-known figure in the Portobello market, and although he had gained a reputation for driving a hard bargain, the resident traders were always pleased to see him.

That said, more often than not, outsiders with

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

their barrows were a case of 'here today and gone tomorrow', so it was some while before Paddington came across the one he was looking for.

Chalked on a large piece of slate were the words: TODAY'S BARGAIN, and underneath a smaller announcement that said: THREE ORDINARY SIZE TUBES OF SHAVING CREAM ALL IN ONE GIANT TUBE!



PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

“As used by some of the crowned ’eads of Europe in the old days,” called the stall keeper, rubbing his hands in anticipation of a sale as he saw Paddington eyeing his display. “It wasn’t my fault it fell off the back of a lorry a couple of days ago just as I ’appened to be setting up me barrow. I ran after it, but it was gone before I could say ’alf a mo.”

He took a closer look at Paddington. “If you don’t mind my saying so,” he said. “You look as though you could do with a good shave...”

“I’m not asking two nicker. I’m not even asking three. Seeing as you’re the first customer of the day, you can ’ave one of them giant tubes for four pounds...”

Paddington gave the man a hard stare. “Aren’t you going the wrong way?” he said, raising his hat politely.

The stall keeper paused and his eyes narrowed. “I can see there are no flies on you, mate,” he said. “If you don’t fancy ’aving a good shave, how about a new titfer tat?” He reached out for a pile of hats. “Yours looks as if it’s seen better days.”

“It belonged to my uncle in Darkest Peru,” said

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

Paddington. "It was handed down. The shaving cream is a birthday present for our next door neighbour."

Wilting under Paddington's gaze, the man hastily changed his tune. "Nothing like starting the day with a bit of friendly banter," he said. "You can 'ave it for two pounds and seeing it's a birthday present I'll throw in some wrapping paper for luck."

"Thank you very much," said Paddington. "I might come here to do some shopping again tomorrow."

"I might not be 'ere tomorrow," said the man with feeling. "Especially if I get too many customers like you," he added under his breath.

But Paddington was already on his way.

Even if the wrapping paper did look as though it had seen better days, he still thought it was the best morning's shopping he had done for a long while, and he hurried back to number thirty-two Windsor Gardens as fast as his legs would carry him in order to break the news to Mrs Bird and give her the change from her five pound note.

The Browns' housekeeper could hardly believe her eyes when she saw what Paddington had bought. "I've never seen such a big tube," she said. "I do hope

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

you haven't been taken for a ride. Even bears don't get something for nothing these days."

"The man said it was the same as some of the crowned heads of Europe used in the old days," said Paddington.

"That's as may be," said Mrs Bird. "But as I recall, most of them had beards, so there can't have been much demand for it."

"Perhaps that's why they had a lot left over," said Paddington.

"Perhaps," said Mrs Bird. It sounded like typical salesman's patter to her, but she didn't want to be a wet blanket.

However, her words weighed heavily on Paddington's mind as he made his way upstairs to his bedroom.

Removing the tube from its box, he examined it carefully. There was no sign of a dent, but if it really had fallen off the back of a lorry it might well have become bent.

To make doubly sure all was well, he fetched Mr Brown's special shaving mirror on a stand from the bathroom. Although one side of the glass was

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

just like an ordinary mirror – the other side made things seem much larger than they really were and that was the one he wanted.

Placing the stand carefully in the centre of his bedside table, he laid his old leather suitcase flat on the floor in front of it and picked up Mr Curry's present.

Having climbed on top of the case, he carefully unscrewed the cap on the end of the tube and held the nozzle up to the mirror before giving the tube itself a gentle squeeze.

A tiny white blob the size of a small pea appeared momentarily, then went back inside again.

Paddington stared at the nozzle. Disappearing shaving cream wouldn't be a good start to anyone's day if they were in a hurry. In his mind's eye he could already hear cries of, "Bear! Where are you, bear?" issuing from Mr Curry's bathroom window.

Knowing the Browns' neighbour of old, he would be demanding his money back even though he hadn't paid for it.

Bracing himself, Paddington gritted his teeth and had another go. This time he used both paws and gave the tube a much harder squeeze.

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

For a moment or two nothing happened and he was about to give up when he felt a minor explosion in his paw and a stream of white foamy liquid shot everywhere. It left Mr Brown's mirror looking as though it had been buried by a major blizzard at the North Pole.

Paddington was so taken by surprise he let go of the tube like a hot cake and hovered to and fro on top of his suitcase before finally losing his balance.

Stepping backwards into space, it could only have been a split second or so before he landed on the floor, but the tube had beaten him to it.



As he lay where he had fallen, his legs and arms waving helplessly in the air, he was aware of a further eruption, and through half-closed eyes he

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

saw what remained of the tube's contents flying in all directions.

The largest lump of all hit the ceiling right above his head, and as it slowly detached itself, Paddington jumped to his feet.

He gazed mournfully round the room. It was a long time since he had seen it in quite such a mess, and it had all come about in the twinkling of an eye; so fast, in fact, there was nothing he could possibly have done to stop it.

Hastily returning Mr Brown's mirror to the bathroom before anything else untoward happened, Paddington held it under the tap for a while before returning it to its rightful place.

It took rather longer than he had bargained for, because the hot water made the cream turn into foam and he was soon enveloped in bubbles. That was another thing about messes; they tended to spread, and the more you tried to put things right the worse they became.

It was while he was drying everything as best he could with the towels that his gaze alighted on a wall cabinet above the basin. He knew from past

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

explorations that it was full of interesting things in bottles and packets, but apart from a small spoon and some nail files, he couldn't remember there being any other likely tools. All the same, he took them back to his bedroom, just in case.

Once there, he consulted the instructions on the side of the tube. There was a great deal on the subject of what a wonderful shaving experience lay in wait for the user, but there was nothing at all about how to get the cream back into the tube if too much had come out.

Removing as much as he could from the walls and the furniture before getting down to work, Paddington soon discovered it wasn't as easy as he had expected.

Holding the tube with one paw and applying shaving cream to the nozzle with the spoon, he couldn't help but grip the tube so tightly to stop it bending that in the end most of the cream landed on the floor.

His friend, Mr Gruber, often said that what comes out doesn't necessarily go back in again, and the wisdom of his words was soon confirmed.

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

In fact, Paddington was concentrating so much on the task in hand he didn't hear Mrs Bird until she was outside his room.

"How are you getting on with wrapping Mr Curry's present?" she called.

"I haven't even started on that, Mrs Bird," said Paddington.

Opening the door as little as possible, he peered through the gap.

"Do you have to do it in your bedroom?" asked Mrs Bird.

"I do now," said Paddington sadly.

"Well, let me know if you need a hand with the knots," said Mrs Bird. "I shan't be long. I've run out of candles for Mr Curry's cake, and I don't doubt he'll be counting them. I'd better make sure I use enough or that'll be wrong. On the other hand, I don't want to use too many and risk him catching the house on fire.

"I haven't even started on the lettering yet. If anyone phones, tell them I shall be back in a quarter of an hour or so."

Mrs Bird sounded flustered, as well she might

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

with all that was going on, but after a short pause, Paddington heard the sound of the front door closing and as it did, so it triggered off another of his ideas.

Hurrying downstairs, he made his way to the kitchen and there, sure enough, lay the answer to his problem. Mr Curry's freshly-iced cake was sitting in the middle of the table, and alongside it was exactly what he needed: a canvas bag on the end of which there was a tiny metal funnel. It must have been meant.

"I think," said Mr Brown, over tea in the garden the following week, "my handiwork with the fence must have paid off. I haven't seen old Curry looking over it for ages."

"I'm afraid it's a bit more complicated than that, Henry," replied Mrs Brown. "It's all to do with his birthday."

"If I hadn't been in such a rush the morning after Paddington planted his seeds, I wouldn't have stopped him in the middle of what Mr Curry said was a list of the presents he wanted," agreed Mrs Bird.

Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

“When I had the chance to take a proper look it had things on it like a tin of peas...”

“And half a cabbage!” added Paddington indignantly. “It was his shopping list, and we bought him a present too!”

“Hold on a minute,” said Mr Brown. “What has all that got to do with the garden fence?”

“He dropped the list over our side of the fence...” explained Mrs Brown.

“Accidentally on purpose,” broke in Mrs Bird. “It happened to land at Paddington’s feet and Mr Curry said it was his birthday list.”

“In that case he deserves all he got!” said Mr Brown, rising to Paddington’s defence. “Er... what *did* we give him in the end?”

“A tube marked ‘shaving cream’, which was full of icing sugar,” said Mrs Bird, “and a cake with his name written across the top in shaving cream. I can’t think that either of them went down very well, but it serves him right for playing such a mean trick.”

“I had an accident with the tube,” explained Paddington, “so I borrowed Mrs Bird’s cake-making outfit to get the shaving cream back inside it. Only

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

the bag still had some icing sugar inside it so I put that into the tube by mistake.”

“And when I came to use it,” said Mrs Bird, “I didn’t realise Paddington had filled it with shaving cream. I couldn’t think why it wouldn’t set.”

“Which, as things turned out,” said Mrs Brown, “meant that for once Mr Curry couldn’t have his cake and eat it too. Perhaps it’s taught him a lesson. We haven’t had sight nor sound of him since. Let’s hope it lasts.”

“Pigs might fly,” snorted Mrs Bird.



Mr Curry's Birthday Treat

“So that’s how I came to have traces of shaving cream over my bathroom mirror,” said Mr Brown. “I thought something must have been going on...

“Hold on a moment,” he continued, as light suddenly dawned. “Did you say all this happened last Wednesday?”

“I did,” said Mrs Brown. “Why do you ask, Henry?”

“Because,” said Mr Brown, “last Wednesday was April the first. You can play any tricks you like before midday. If you ask me, not only was Mr Curry playing an April fool trick, but whoever sold Paddington the shaving cream was probably doing much the same thing.”

“They didn’t bargain on the fact that there are some bears who happen to have been born under a lucky star,” said Mrs Brown. “Now we are enjoying some peace and quiet for a change, so all’s well that ends well.”

And that was something no one could argue with, especially when they saw that seemingly almost overnight Paddington’s seeds had begun to sprout. It was nice having things to look forward to.



Chapter Two

A FISHY BUSINESS

PADDINGTON'S BEST FRIEND, Mr Gruber, was most sympathetic when he heard about the goings on at number thirty-two Windsor Gardens.

"It's no wonder I didn't see as much of you as usual last week, Mr Brown," he said. "I must say my elevenses didn't feel the same without our having cocoa and buns together.

A Fishy Business

“Playing a simple jape on someone because it’s April Fools’ Day is one thing, but trying to get something for nothing is another matter entirely.

“That Mr Curry deserves all he gets,” he added, echoing Mrs Bird’s words.

“As for the man who sold you the shaving cream, words fail me.”

“He wasn’t there this morning,” said Paddington. “I was hoping I might get Mrs Bird’s money back for her.”

“Good riddance to bad rubbish,” said Mr Gruber, busying himself at the stove in the back of his shop. “That kind of person gives the market a bad name. The only good thing is they never stay in one place for very long. It’s like I always say, ‘here today and gone tomorrow’.”

He handed Paddington a steaming mug of cocoa.

“You must have been quite worn out by it all, Mr Brown. I dare say you didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“I was still awake at nine o’clock,” said Paddington.

“Well, there you are,” said Mr Gruber. He settled himself down alongside his friend on the old

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

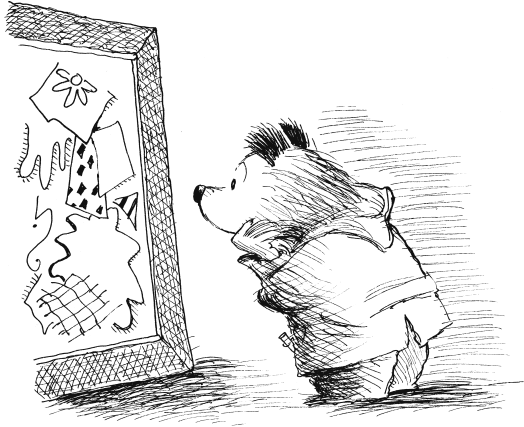
horsehair sofa at the back of the shop. “That kind of thing isn’t good for a young bear.”

Paddington sipped his cocoa thoughtfully. There was something very comforting about Mr Gruber’s antique shop. Although it was full of old things, there was always something new to look at. In fact, it was an ever changing scene. As fast as one item disappeared, something else came along to take its place, so it was never entirely the same two days running.

Today was a good example. An old wind-up gramophone that had enjoyed pride of place on a table in the centre of the shop for several weeks had disappeared. In its place there was a very strange-looking picture which appeared to have been made by someone glueing a mish-mash of different bits and pieces on to a board and then pouring paint all over it.

Paddington was much too polite to say so, but he preferred the old wind-up gramophone with a dog peering into a huge horn to see where the sound was coming from when it was working. The dog had looked so real he’d often been tempted to offer it one of his buns.

A Fishy Business



“That picture is what is known as a *collage*,” said Mr Gruber, reading Paddington’s thoughts. “It’s made of various bits and pieces glued together in a random fashion. The idea itself is as old as the hills. In fact, many famous artists started out that way... Picasso... Salvador Dali...”

“It may look very modern, but I think it is probably older than it seems. In which case it could be very valuable. It’s called *Sunset in Tahiti*.”

Paddington thought it looked more like a rainy day in the Bayswater Road, but he didn’t say anything.

Mr Gruber knew much more about these things than he did, and he listened carefully as his friend

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

explained the ins and outs of the subject while they had their elevenses.

“What makes it particularly interesting,” continued Mr Gruber, “is that someone else has painted over the original picture – which often happened at one time, but they were using a method known as egg *tempera*, which is why it looks so shiny.”

Paddington licked his lips. “I’ve never heard of a painting made with eggs,” he said.

“There are other things besides,” said Mr Gruber. “Vinegar, various pigments to provide the colour – and in this case some graphite too, which you can find in any bicycle puncture repair outfit...”

“I wouldn’t mind having a go at making one of those myself,” said Paddington. “But I expect it’s a bit difficult with paws and I can’t think what I would make a picture of anyway.”

Mr Gruber eyed Paddington over his mug of cocoa. It was unlike his friend to admit defeat before he had even begun something.

“You do yourself an injustice, Mr Brown,” he said. “There is no such word as *can’t*.”

A Fishy Business

“When we are out for a drive Mr Brown sometimes says the road has a nasty *cant*,” said Paddington. “I thought he meant he had just driven over a tin can.”

“That’s the English language for you,” said Mr Gruber. “The word ‘cant’ pronounced one way means a road has a slant to it, but that same word with an apostrophe between the last two letters is short for ‘cannot’, meaning it is not possible.

“I think all things are possible if you really set your mind to it, and you never know what you can do until you try.

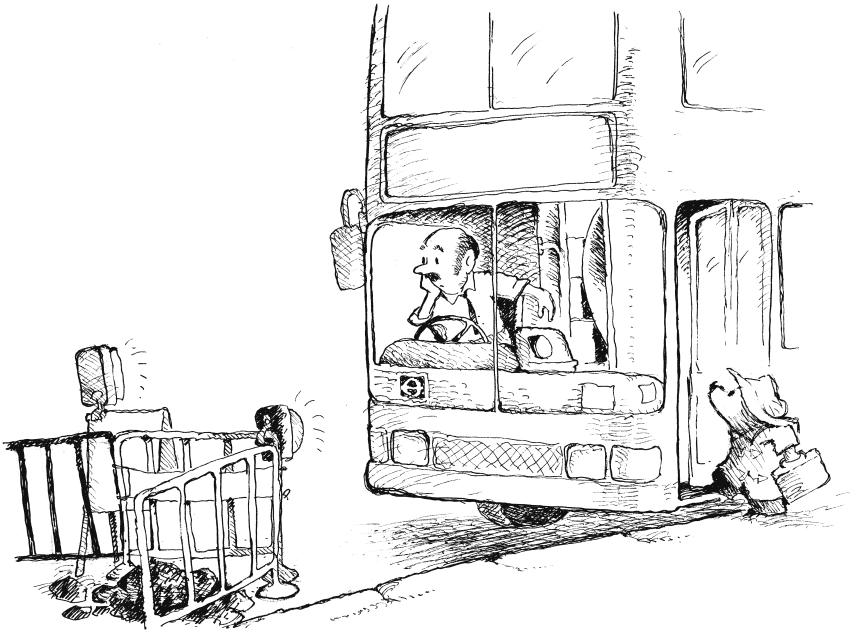
“As for finding a subject for your painting...” Mr Gruber rose to his feet as he saw someone about to enter his shop, “...you only have to take a short ride on the top deck of a London bus and all manner of things cry out to be painted: the world is your oyster.”

Having said goodbye to his friend for the time being, Paddington was about to head back home, when he had second thoughts.

The sun was shining and for once, instead of his shopping basket on wheels, he only had his

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

suitcase, so as soon as he came across a bus stop, he held out a paw and stopped the first one that came into view.



As the doors opened he climbed aboard and headed for the stairs.

“And where do you think you’re going, young-feller-me-bear?” called the driver.

A Fishy Business

“Nowhere in particular, thank you very much,” said Paddington. “I’m looking for ideas.”

“Well you’ve picked the right route for not going anywhere in particular, I’ll say that,” said the driver gloomily. “We’ve been stuck in traffic jams all the morning.” He pointed to a long line of waiting cars ahead of them. “It’s all them roadworks. Never-ending they are, and as fast as they fill one hole in, someone else comes along and digs it up again.”

“I’m looking for something to paint,” said Paddington, raising his hat politely.

“That’s as may be,” said the driver, not unkindly. “And I promise not to tell anyone if they ask. But you’re not doing any of it on my bus – not without a ticket. Rembrandt ’imself wouldn’t be allowed on without one. It’s as much as my job’s worth if an inspector gets on.

“If I might make a suggestion,” he continued, “you’d be better off painting a picture of one of them holes near where you were standing. It’s what they call a still life.”

Paddington was about to explain that he needed some eggs first, but he thought better of it. He wasn’t

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

too sure how to go about it himself without a book of instructions.

“I thought you might give me a ticket,” he said. “I can pay for it.”

Having made sure nobody was looking over his shoulder, he opened his suitcase and felt inside the secret compartment.

“It’s a sixpence,” he explained, holding up a small coin gleaming in the morning sun for the driver to see. “I’ve been keeping it polished for a rainy day.”

“When was the last time you travelled on a bus, mate?” asked the driver. “Even if it was raining cats and dogs, which it isn’t, and even if your coin was valid, which it isn’t – it wouldn’t take you any further than the next stop... if that. Besides, you have to get a ticket from a machine. I don’t carry them.”

He took a closer look at the coin. “It isn’t even a sixpence!” he exclaimed. “It’s a Peruvian centavo.”

“I’ve never been on a bus by myself before,” admitted Paddington. “They don’t have any in Darkest Peru, and whenever I’ve travelled on one in London it’s usually been with Mr Gruber on one of his outings, and he insists on paying.”

A Fishy Business

Hearing an outbreak of tooting from behind as the traffic in front showed signs of moving, the bus driver reached for his dashboard.

“Well,” he said, since I’m not in a position of being able to wait around on the off chance your Mr Gruber might come past, I suggest you take yourself on an outing right now and vacate the platform. I’ve got a busy schedule to keep up and we’re running late as it is.

“If you’re going to be doing a lot of travelling,” he added, “your best bet is to get yourself an Oyster.”

Paddington pricked up his ears. “Mr Gruber says you can go anywhere in the world on an oyster,” he exclaimed excitedly.

“I wouldn’t go as far as to say that, not in this traffic,” said the driver. “But in principle you can go wherever you like within the Greater London area.”

With that he pressed a button and a metallic voice from somewhere inside the bus called out, ‘Stand Clear. Doors Closing. Stand Clear. Doors Closing’.

Paddington scrambled out of harm’s way, and then stared after the bus as it pulled away from the kerb and continued on its journey for a few more yards.

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

He sat down on his suitcase at the side of the road for a moment or two in order to consider his next move.

Mr Brown was right. Only the other day he had been saying that what with credit cards and computers and something called ‘shopping on the net’ it wouldn’t be very long before paying for things with real money would be a thing of the past, but he hadn’t mentioned the possibility of having to use an oyster to get on a bus. It was no wonder he went on an underground train when he travelled to and fro from his office in the city.

With that thought uppermost in his mind, Paddington picked up his suitcase and set off for the nearest fishmongers.

Overtaking the bus which was held up by yet another hole in the road, he raised his hat to the driver, who gave him a gloomy thumbs up sign in return, and shortly afterwards, having reached a row of shops, he made for the one he had in mind. It was where Mrs Bird went whenever she was shopping for fish.

“I would like an oyster, please,” he announced,

A Fishy Business

raising his hat politely to a boy behind the counter, who was busy making sure all the fish heads were facing the same way.



“There’s a young foreign gent wants an oyster,” repeated the boy over his shoulder.

“I’d like a day return one, if I may,” added Paddington, trying to be helpful.

“I’m afraid we don’t get any returns here,” said the assistant. “They’re fresh in from France twice a week and once they’re gone they’re gone...”

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

“In that case I’d better have two,” said Paddington.
“One for going and one for coming back.”

The assistant didn’t actually say ‘we’ve got the last of the big spenders here’, but his look said it all. “I’ll have to ask the manager,” he said.

“He wants two!” he called. “One for going and one for coming back. I think it’s some kind of outing.

“We usually sell them by the dozen,” he explained, addressing Paddington, “and the only returns you get is if there’s a bad one, and if that happens you’ll wish you’d never gone wherever it was in the first place. Ho! Ho! Ho!”

“Tell him there aren’t many around at the moment,” shouted a voice from the back of the shop. “And there won’t be any at all soon when there isn’t an R in the month.”

The assistant repeated the message for Paddington’s benefit.

Paddington gave him a hard stare. “There isn’t an M in a lot of months,” he said. “But that doesn’t stop Mrs Bird giving me marmalade for breakfast.”

“Tell him we’ve got some kippers,” shouted the

A Fishy Business

manager. “Fresh in this morning.”

“Can you get very far on a kipper?” asked Paddington hopefully.

“You can if you set light to its tail and hang on tight,” said the assistant. “Ho! Ho! Ho!”

“We don’t normally have oysters all through the summer,” said the manager, as he emerged from a back room to see what was going on. “It’s the breeding season.”

“It must make travelling difficult in August,” said Paddington.

“Er... yes,” said the manager, not wishing to commit himself.

“As a matter of interest,” he continued. “Where are you from exactly? I only ask because we don’t get much call for oysters at this time of the year. They aren’t at their best and if it’s for some kind of national celebration...”

“I’m from Peru,” said Paddington. “Darkest Peru.”

“Darkest Peru!” repeated the manager. “Well, I suppose you wouldn’t get many oysters in the jungle.”

“I saw a film about Peruvian bears on television the other night,” broke in the assistant. “They were

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

going through people's dustbins after dark. But I don't think they were after oysters."

Paddington gave the assistant another hard stare. "I've never, ever, gone through anyone's dustbin after dark!" he exclaimed hotly. "Mrs Bird would be most upset."

"Mrs Bird?" repeated the manager. "Of number thirty-two Windsor Gardens? Why ever didn't you say so in the first place? She's one of our best customers.

"Seeing he knows Mrs Bird, you'd better stretch a point and give him a couple," he continued, addressing his assistant. "Anything for a quiet life," he added in a whisper.

"Two pounds five each . . . that'll be four pounds ten pee." said the assistant.

"Four pounds ten pee," repeated Paddington, nearly falling over backwards with alarm.

"Don't worry," said the manager hastily. "I'll put it down on her account."

"Would you like them gift wrapped?" asked the assistant.

"Shh," said the manager, glaring at him.

A Fishy Business

“Thank you very much,” said Paddington, “but I shall need one straight away.”

Only seconds before he had seen a red bus go past, and sure enough, it had stopped a little way along the road. A small queue of people were already boarding it through a door near the driver.

“Wait for me!” he called.

Luck was with him, for just as he heard a by-now familiar voice calling out, ‘Stand Clear. Doors Closing’, he caught sight of another opening in the side of the bus and before the message was repeated, he scrambled through it in the nick of time.

“Dear me,” said a lady on a seat just inside. “Are you all right?”

Paddington raised his hat. “I think so,” he said. “But I was in a hurry because I want to test my oysters.”

“I think you will find there are some seats upstairs,” began the lady haughtily, but before she had a chance to say any more a rather less than friendly voice made an announcement.

“Will the person who has just boarded the bus through the door marked Exit kindly report to the driver!”

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

Paddington made his way to the front of the bus. “I was wanting to test one of my oysters,” he explained. “I’ve never used one before and I need to do it while there is still an R in the month.”

“Well, hurry up,” said the driver. “At this rate it won’t be long before it’s May.” He pointed to a large yellow button on the side of his cabin. “Show it to the electronic reader.”

“I didn’t know oysters could read,” said Paddington.

“You learn something new every day,” said the driver. “Now, hurry up so we can get on our way.”

“Hear! Hear!” came a voice from the back of the bus. “Some of us have got trains to catch.”

“I won’t report you on this occasion,” continued the driver, “but don’t do it again. I haven’t got all day.”

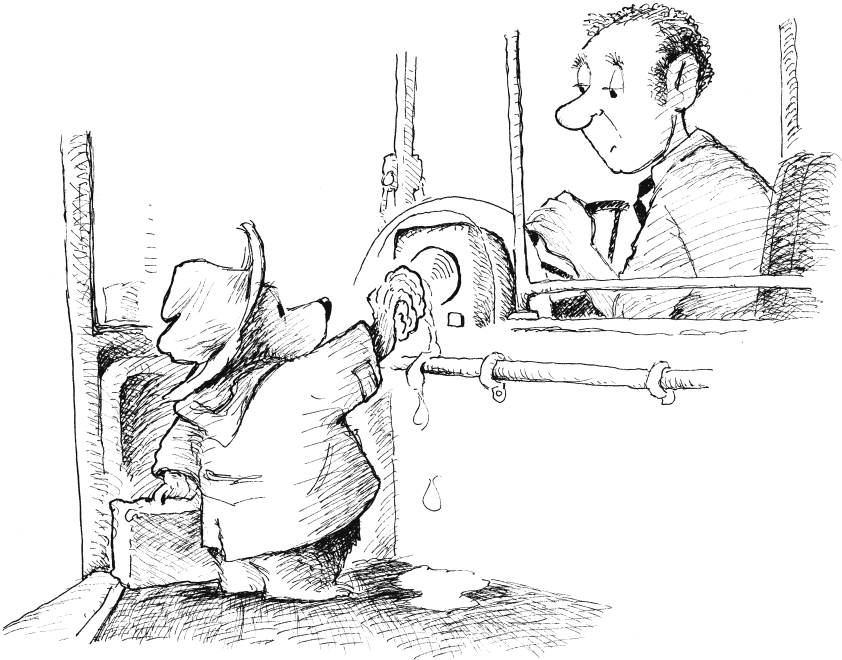
Carefully undoing the wrapping on his package, Paddington removed one of the oysters and pressed the inside of it against the button as hard as he could, twisting it first of all in a clockwise direction, so that it made good contact. Then, because despite the hard shell it felt rather softer than he had expected, he tried turning it the other way.

A Fishy Business

As he stood back and removed the shell a stream of liquid oozed on to the floor.

“I’m afraid your bus doesn’t seem to be moving,” he said. “I think there must be something wrong with it.”

“I said show it to the reader, not grind it into the works,” said the driver.



PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

His nose twitched as he leaned over the side of his cabin to take a closer look.

He stared at the object in Paddington's paw as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

"That's a blooming oyster!" he bellowed. "Ugh! Look at it! No wonder it didn't work! Wait till the inspector sees what you've done! He'll have your guts for garters!"

"That settles it. We can't go any further. Everybody off! Everybody off!" He pressed a button, and the disembodied voice began uttering the words, 'Stand Clear. Doors Opening. Stand Clear. Doors Opening'.

A moment later all was chaos.

Being in pole position, Paddington was the first to leave, and he didn't stop running until he reached the safety of the Portobello Road.

Mr Gruber looked most concerned as Paddington burst into his shop, and having made sure there was no one else behind him, stood there mopping his brow with a handkerchief.

"Whatever is the matter, Mr Brown?" he asked. "You look as though you've been in an earthquake."

A Fishy Business

“I’ve been having trouble with my oysters,” said Paddington.

“What are garters, Mr Gruber?” he gasped as soon as he could get his breath back.

“They are things gentlemen use to keep their socks up,” said Mr Gruber. “Why do you ask, Mr Brown?”

“Well,” said Paddington. “The driver of the last bus I was on said his inspector would have my guts to make a pair of them if he ever caught up with me.”

“Oh dear,” said Mr Gruber. “You had better tell me all.”

And while he set about making the second helping of cocoa that morning, Paddington related all that had happened to him since they had last seen each other.

“I would say it isn’t so much the oysters that have been the cause of all the trouble,” said Mr Gruber, when Paddington had finished. “It’s the English language again. We live in an age when people will insist on shortening things. In your case, I’m sure with the best of intentions, your driver suggested you should buy an oyster rather than an Oyster *card*. I will show you one.”

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

Reaching into his wallet he produced an old card to show what he meant.

Paddington looked very downcast by the time Mr Gruber had finished. “It’s no wonder people didn’t know what I was talking about,” he said. “Now I’ve got my return oyster left over and I don’t suppose anyone will ever want to eat it.”

Mr Gruber stirred his cocoa thoughtfully. “All is not lost, Mr Brown,” he said. “I have a suggestion to make...”

“I think,” said Mrs Bird, a few days later, “before you are very much older, Paddington, you had better bring whatever you have made downstairs to show the rest of us.”

It being the weekend, all the family were present and at her suggestion they gathered together on the lawn.

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Mr Brown, as Paddington held up his handiwork. Don’t tell me you made that all by yourself. Er...what is it?”

“Whatever it is, it’s better out than in if you ask me,” said Mrs Brown.

A Fishy Business

“It’s what’s known as a *collage*,” said Paddington, knowledgeably. “A *collage* with an overlay of some eggs and graphite *tempera*.”

“Good gracious,” said Mrs Bird. “Whatever next? As for using eggs... I thought I was running low.”



“No wonder you wanted to borrow my bicycle puncture outfit,” Jonathan chimed in. “There I was, thinking your hot-water bottle must have sprung a leak.”

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

“It looks wonderful,” said Judy loyally. “Whatever gave you the idea?”

“It’s a long story,” said Paddington vaguely. “It’s to do with not going anywhere on a bus.”

“But what is it meant to be?” persisted Mr Brown.

“Mr Curry on a bad day?” suggested Jonathan.

“The oyster in the middle looks so real,” said Mrs Brown. “And the inside of the shell is so shiny it looks good enough to eat.”

“I wouldn’t if I were you, Mrs Brown,” said Paddington.

Mrs Bird sniffed the air. “If I might make a suggestion,” she said. “It’s like a lot of modern paintings. They are at their best if you stand well away from them. Why don’t we hang it down the end of the garden for the time being?”

But it was Mr Gruber who paid Paddington the best compliment of all. He stood it on the table in his shop alongside the picture that had started it all.

“It bears out what I have always said about there being no such word as *can’t*,” he said. “I doubt if

A Fishy Business

Picasso at his peak could have produced anything better.”

“So it could be worth a lot of money,” said Paddington excitedly.

“Not just yet, I’m afraid,” said Mr Gruber. “Very often it’s a matter of waiting until the creator is no longer with us.”

“I could do the rest of my shopping, if you like?” said Paddington.

“I think it might take even longer than that, Mr Brown,” said his friend tactfully.

For a while lots of passers-by dropped in to admire Paddington’s handiwork, but as the weather grew warmer it was noticeable that fewer and fewer actually entered the shop and if they did, they didn’t linger.

There came a time when even Mr Gruber began to have second thoughts.

“If you have no objection, Mr Brown,” he said. “I may find another home for your masterpiece.” And he hung Paddington’s work on a tree in the tiny patio behind his shop.

First of all he made a photocopy of it for his

PADDINGTON RACES AHEAD

shop window, and alongside it was a notice saying:
VIEWING BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

Acting on Mr Gruber's advice, Paddington added
his special paw print in the bottom right hand corner,
just to show it was a genuine original.

