

Paddington's Story – Part 8

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PINK!

The word invaded my dream. It came from the voices of my pets in the front of the Toyota. I didn't want to wake yet, as I had to get back to my dream and save Sooz from a dingo.

The dingo reappeared, big, bold and pink.

It sneered at me before looking back towards where Sooz paddled in the shallows of a waterhole. It was crouched behind a wattle, ready to pounce and growled a low throaty warning at me.

I looked back at Sooz. I had to save her, she was my pet and no dingo was going to take my pet from me.

'Oooooohhh, Oooooohhh,' the howl stopped everything. The birds stopped singing – the trees bowed at my feet – the fish in the waterhole lifted their fins in salute and the rabbits ran to their holes.

I wasn't to be messed with? I was Paddington Bear from Balhannah – fierce, brave and strong.

The dingo looked at me – it didn't look scared! Its lips curled back revealing long white canines.

'Sooz, Sooz, Sooz.' I called to her. She didn't hear me. Why can't she hear me?

The dingo turned its fierce teeth towards me.

I suddenly didn't feel so fierce, but I had to do what I could for Sooz. 'Don't you touch my pet!' I pushed the growl up from my gut and it burnt my tonsils and throat from the power of it.

The dingo's body shook as it laughed. 'What da ya think you're going to do little man?' It sat down suddenly to scratch behind its ear.

'I might be small, but I fight like a tiger.'

'I've seen rabbits bigger than you,' laughed the dingo. 'What breed are ya?'

'I'm a pure bred Bearded Collie and that's my pet you're stalking.'

'I'm a pure bred bla bla bla...'

'Don't make fun of me,' I showed him my teeth and dropped my tail between my legs.

'Call them teeth? Now these are teeth!' He pulled his lips back and I got another glimpse of his incisors.

He was making fun of me – two can play that game. 'Why are you pink? Aren't dingo's supposed to be yellow?'

'Pink's the in colour around these parts – you don't know much, do you?'

'Pink...' the dingo's mocking expression disappeared and Sooz voice came to the front of my brain.

'Another Pink sign,' she said.

'Adam's signs cover hundreds of k's,' said Pete.

Pink! My eyes flicked open and I woke with my dream foremost in my mind. 'I saw a pink dingo Sooz, it was going to eat you. I fought it off and saved you.' I yawned and pushed into a sitting position to look out the window. 'Pink, what colour is pink Sooz?'

'Hello sleepy head.' Sooz looked over her shoulder and smiled. 'Pete we need to stop and give Paddington a drink.'

'Okay. It's probably time for refreshments.'

'Thanks Sooz. I'm hungry too.'

'It's nearly lunch time. Why don't you find a shady spot and we can have a bite.'

Lunch! How I loved that word. There were times when Sooz read my mind.

'There's another sign,' Pete pointed and we all looked as we flashed past it.

So that's pink!



Paddington's Story – Part 8

We stopped and Sooz put my bowl onto the ground and filled it with water. I lapped up mouthfuls slurping greedily. While I drank she filled my food bowl with biscuits. I moved from the water to biscuits without lifting my head and gobbled them down.

Once I'd finished, I sat and watched the pets eat their lunch. I was vigilant for any little morsel that might fall at my feet – damn, it didn't happen today. Once they were finished and Sooz and grand Moo packed away the leftovers, we were back on the track.

'Not a lot of shade around here,' said Pete. 'It's too hot to be caught out in the open.'

'It can't be far to Oodnadatta,' said Sooz. 'Look over there, another sign. Stop and you can take a picture of Paddington and me.'



'Oh Sooz. Do we have to? It's hot outside and I was dozing.'

There was no getting out of it. She attached the lead to my collar and lifted me to the hot sandy ground. I reluctantly followed her. 'Sooz, the sand's burning my pads. It's alright for you, you're wearing boots. Sooz, why can't I have boots?'

'Come on Paddington stop being a wuss. Pete's going to take a picture.'

'Not another one, Pete. You must have taken millions by now.' I looked up at the sign. I didn't see what the big deal was. It was another one of those pink signs that talked about the

Pink Roadhouse. Why my pets needed to take millions of pictures of pink signs, was beyond me – they had some funny ideas. It was a good job I understood them.

'We can get an ice-cream at the Pink Roadhouse,' said Sooz.

'Ice-cream! Do you mean like that time you gave me a taste of your ice-cream Sooz. Oh, yes please, I love ice-cream. Can I have my own this time?' I remembered Sooz sharing her stick of ice-cream with me one day before our trip. She saved a bit for me and my tongue sluiced around the stick. I nearly swallowed it and Sooz had been firm about not doing that. The creamy, delicious flavour had left a lasting impression. I wanted an ice-cream.

'Come on,' I woofed. 'Let's go to the Pink Roadhouse.'

Staring through the window, I noticed the landscape changing. A tyre with something written across it indicated the entrance to a house. Then I saw a shed and another tyre and rusty equipment lying at the edge of the track. People around these parts used tyres for all sorts of things. After not seeing any other vehicles, there were four-wheel drives and trucks motoring along the same main street as us. It wasn't like the Balhannah main street, which was civilised with tarmac roads and pavement to walk on. This was dusty, dry, windy and hot. On the left, large buildings rose up, with vehicles queued at petrol pumps and people sitting outside drinking and licking l – c – e – c – r – e – a – m – s I salivated at the sight. So this was the Pink Roadhouse, where we could buy ice-cream. I noticed the yard was dotted with bits of bric-a-brac and after seeing nothing but desert for days, I didn't know what to look at first.

Then I saw a movement, low to the ground a swaggering walk. Was that a dog? My head swung back – yes it was.

'Pete, stop, stop. Sooz a dog. Pete, there's a dog. I haven't seen a dog since Power in Marree, please stop.' I tried to move but couldn't. Damn this seat belt.

'Paddington calm down. 'Pull over there Pete, there's shade.'

Pete stopped our wheels and the grand pets parked next to us. The grand pets got out and stretched. Sooz and Pete joined them and they huddled together talking.

I stretched my neck looking for the dog. 'Me, don't forget me. Have you forgotten something? Sooz, I'm still here.'

'I don't think you should get Paddington out here. Remember what the vet said. No contact with strange dogs. Open the window for him while we got to the shop.'

Paddington's Story – Part 8

'What was that Pete? No... I pulled against the seat belt but the damned thing wouldn't budge. I played with Power. What's the difference? I looked after you when the snakes were after you. Why can't you let me play with those nice dogs? They look nice to me. Friendly – a bit mucky – but I'm sure they'd like me – because I'm very likeable – I won't get into trouble – I promise – Pete come back.'

I sliced my tongue over Sooz's hand as she opened the window for me. 'Sooz, you'll let me play with the dogs – won't you?'

'We won't be long Paddington.' She patted my head and walked away.

I watched in disbelief as my pets and grand pets left without a backward glance. 'It's not fair,' I barked my annoyance.

'Oui, you up there – Oui.'

I stopped crying and looked out of the window. 'Did someone speak?'

'You blind! – You city dogs, are all the same.'

I stretched my neck to get a better view. Below my window looking up was the scarred face of a large brown dog. His tattered ears hung around his face and his wet drooping eyes looked like he'd been crying. I'd never seen a tongue as long as his and it hung out the side of his mouth, with drool dripping in a pool at his very large feet.

'Hello, I'm Paddington. Why don't you have a tail?'

'G'Day. I'm Fred. It got caught in the boss's grinder. I nearly died.'

I looked at him in awe. He looked like he was still recovering, with his skin hanging around his large frame. I didn't like to be rude. 'You're looking well – considering.'

'What kind of accent is that? You don't sound ocker. Oh I get it, you're one of those high bred types from the city – a snob?'

'I'm not. I'm just a pup.'

'I can see that – you thick or something?'

'No, I'm still learning.'

'Hey Sid, we got a right one over here.'

I watched a skinny dog with a long body and short fat legs waddle over. His head looked too big for his body as did his skin and his tongue was longer than his tail. I thought Fred had a long tongue but his mates touched the ground. I licked my lips delicately wondering if my tongue would one day be as long.

Fred's mate tipped his head back to look at me. 'Who's this?'

'He saiz his name's Paddington.'

'You ear long?'

'Sorry Sid, you are called Sid, aren't you? I don't understand your question?'

'What he means is how long ya here?' said Fred.

'I don't think we're here long.'

'You with those oldies, that went to the shop?' Sid strained his head to look at me.

'Yes. They're my pets. We're travelling through the outback.'

'Fair dinkum.' Sid looked at Fred. 'Well, what'd ya know. I've never seen a pup like him out these ways before.'

'I'm gobsmacked,' said Fred. 'That's some Galah, would be foolish enough to take a puffed up little fuzz ball like him walkabout?'

'It beats me,' said Sid. 'He wouldn't last long round these parts.'

Galah? Walkabout? They'd lost me, but I needed to let them know I was no ordinary fuzz ball. I puffed up my chest and said. 'I'm the first Bearded Collie to travel this way.'

'He talks like those pommies that travel through from time to time.' Sid plonked his backside down into the dust and scratched at his hairless neck.

'Do your pets bath you?' I couldn't help but notice they didn't look very clean and in comparison to my lush clean coat, their coats were sparse and flea ridden.

'Did you ear that?' Sid's lips pulled back over his yellow teeth as he laughed. 'Pets – bath.'

'What's a pet?' Fred's watery eyelids blinked.

'It's like what those kids down the street keep caged.'

'Oh right.'

Paddington's Story – Part 8

'I do know about a bath – it's luxury around these parts,' said Sid.

Fred whirled around and barked a warning towards a dog lurking by the compound fence. 'Keep your thieving teeth off my tucker.'

I glimpsed a big burly man pouring left over food into two bowls, while another big dog skulked close by looking at it. 'Is he your friend?' I asked, thinking the dog didn't look like he'd have many.

'He won't be, if he touches that sanger my truckie friend left,' said Fred.

'Sanger?' I'd never heard of such a thing.

'We have our regular visitors that looks after us,' said Sid.

'I haven't spent all my spare time building up relationships with the truckies to have some mongrel from the other end of town sneaking my food. You learn your place around here, or you die young.' Fred lopped away towards his bowl.

'Come on Sid, dinner's up.'

'Hooroo.'

'Goodbye.' I woofed, watching them saunter over to their bowls. Another man appeared from the front of the shop and hurried over to where they waited by their bowls. 'Good boys.' I heard him say to them as he poured leftover food into them.

'Thanks,' said Fred and Sid to the stranger.

I picked up the aroma of meat and pangs of hunger hit.

I looked for Sooz and the other pets. Sooz appeared through the doorway with her arms full of goodies.

Pete walked behind her and the grand pets behind him. After they packed the goodies into the back of the Toyota, Sooz came looking for me.

'Poor you, you must be starving?' she said cooing in that voice that made me go all gooey.

'Sooz, I thought you'd forgotten me.'

Her fingers caressed my head and I pushed into her hand. 'Look what I've got for you. An icy pole.'

She wafted a stick like object wrapped in paper under my nose. I sniffed it. Yeah, Urgh – this wasn't ice-cream, what was it? I pushed my nose into the wrapper, it smelt sweet and sticky.

'Let me get the paper off first,' said Sooz as I tried to eat it paper and all. I impatiently waited as she peeled the paper away and then held it for me to lick. The coldness hit my throat and slid down like silk. It was so delicious, icy on the outside with ice-cream in the middle. 'Thank you Sooz.' I looked at the clean stick. 'Can I have another one please?'

'Time to hit the road if we're to find a camp at Eringa Waterhole before dark,' said Pete.

'I guess that means no.' Damn. I looked for the grand pets. They were usually forthcoming with extras.

No such luck. They were closing their car doors and as Pete reversed the Toyota into the street Fred and Sid looked up.

'Watch out for bunyips,' woofed Fred.

'I will,' I barked through the open window while wondering what they were. 'Nice to have met you.'

'See ya next time, Cobber,' woofed Sid.

'Don't be a Dipstick Fred, there won't be a...'

I ceased to hear their conversation as Pete accelerated away from the Pink Roadhouse and along the main street.

'What's a bunyip? Sooz.'

She obviously didn't know as she didn't answer me.

Paddington's Story – Part 8



I stared out of the window and watched the town pass in a dusty blur. It didn't take long, and we'd left the town behind and were back on the open plain continuing our journey north and the only remanence of our visit to the town of Oodnadatta was our banner of dust left in our wake.

Footnote – Adam Plate of the Pink Roadhouse was tragically killed during a motor rally in Adelaide in August 2012.

Lynnie and Adam Plate – Pink Roadhouse Oodnadatta



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