

A Riddle for Rosie

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An extract

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4

Rosie throws her crayons down on the table.
A portrait of Pia, she'll never manage it.
She screws up the drawing into a ball and throws it into the waste paper basket.
That's what she always does with drawings that just won't come out on paper.

Rosie stands up from her stool, walks around the table, and goes and sits back down.
It's not her fault that Pia died. So she doesn't have to draw her back to life.

Wouldn't it be better to make a self-portrait? With blue coils all over her head... But how can she draw the sadness lodged in her throat?

She takes a notebook out of the desk draw. A present from Pia for Rosie's tenth birthday.
It contains ten verses that Pia wrote herself.
And a task:

*One out of one.
Ten out of ten.
Rosie will see, but when?*

*A riddle for Rosie,
From your big sister,
Pia.*

And a puzzle indeed it is. Rosie still doesn't understand a word of it. And tomorrow she's going to be eleven.
You'd be fifteen now, Pie, she thinks.

5

Rosie had read Pia's verses when she was given the notebook.
But too fast.
And too caught up in the excitement of her birthday.
Less than a week later Pia was... Gone.

And since then she hadn't dared to look.

She turns a page.

One

Don't I like One?

Everyone's friend.

Someone, that one, everyone...

No one I've met who didn't like One.

Belongs everywhere, is rarely alone.

My name? Lonely.

Lonely...

'Stupid Pia,' says Rosie out loud.

And she thinks, I was there wasn't I?

7

Orange, pink, red...

Rosie puts the crayons neatly back in the tin.

She'll paint Pia instead. She knows she can do it.

With a few of those mysterious purple shadows.

She really saw that once, that their house cast a purple shadow on the garden path.

She fetches a soup dish from the kitchen cupboard. There's a crack in it.

She rummages in the box with the tubes of gouache paint.

A little red and a little blue...

Rosie squeezes two little snakes of paint into the dish.

'I can do magic,' she whispers.

She dips a brush into an old tin can full of water.

The tip of her tongue moves back and forth like a windscreen wiper over her upper lip.

'Purple!'

Rosie hesitates. She sits motionless, brush in hand, staring ahead of her.

Those hats... It's maybe six years ago, but suddenly she thinks of those knitted hats again.

You were in your nighty, Pie. Me too.

There were two big gingerbread men by the stove.

And there were marzipan pigs and oranges and a chocolate horse on a plate.

And there were another two presents. A book?

A jigsaw puzzle?

We ripped the wrapping paper away.

You were the fastest as usual. A purple woolly hat.

And for me? Another stupid purple hat.

We forgot to sing a song for Santa Claus.

8

Another verse.

Two

*Far cry from a meal! On my sandwich,
two halves of a hardboiled egg shine.
They're mine.
Hey, hey, hey!
One's running away!
Pity, chuck.
Half bad luck.*

'Silly,' Rosie hiccups. But she thinks, what a nice little poem.

She wishes Pia would come back. That she would say again, in her deep voice, 'Draw a bit more, little sis.'

Rosie wouldn't find it annoying any more. Or would she?

11

Rosie cleans her brushes.
Her mouth looks like a capsized boat.
Not exactly what she wanted, this portrait.
Two weird. And not the right shade of purple.
She puts the painting in a deep draw.
And she sits down for a while to ponder, the notebook with the poems on her lap.

A little later the boat is smiling again.
After all, the portrait doesn't have to look like her does it?
When you look at it, it feels as if Pia is home again.
Something like that.
As if.

Rosie puts the notebook on a chair.
She washes her hands.
And she brushes her stubborn curls.
She jumps.
From the mirror above the washbasin Pia's eyes look back at her.

12

Rosie reads.

Three

Three sweet little kisses tied up with a bow.

A gift, just so.

Your eyes say O!

Closed lips No. Then

shall I take the kisses

- gleaming clean dishes –

all three kisses back again?

Pia's mischievous smile remains like a photo on Rosie's retina.

Now to get it down on paper.

Paper!

Rosie slams the paint box shut and picks up a pad of coloured paper from the shelf.

And in a big cardboard box she has cuttings and scrap paper in at least a hundred colours.

Why didn't she think of this before?

A pair of scissors, a brush, the pot of glue...
