

*No. 7*

*The Magic Pencil*

By Phillipa Rae

Once upon a time there was a struggling painter called Rudi. He was quite poor and hardly had any money. He shared a small flat above a chip shop with three other people. He usually slept on the sofa to escape his room mate's snoring and the smell of frying fish hung in the air. He desperately wanted to be a famous artist but times were hard. So by day he spent most of his time hanging out at places like Trafalgar Square and Buckingham Place to try and catch the tourists by drawing their portraits. At night he would toil into the small hours of the morning painting his masterpieces.

On the days that he wasn't working he packed all his paintings into a case, hauled it onto his back and tried to sell them at art galleries. But the answer was always the same. No thank you! It seemed to Rudi that they were already well stocked with pictures by established painters and didn't need anymore.

One day he was sitting outside Buckingham Palace. He wistfully peered thorough the wrought iron railings and looked at the magnificent building. He had had hardly any customers that day and all he had was a twenty pound note. He was hungry but his rent was due and he needed the twenty pounds to make up the money. He was just about to head off when a strange old lady appeared.

“Hello,” she said. “It’s my husband’s seventy fifth birthday today but I don’t have a present to give him. He would so love a portrait of me. But these five pound coins are all that I have.”

Rudi sighed to himself. The cost of a picture was twenty pounds. But she was only his second customer that day and it was lunchtime already. With five pounds he could buy himself a cheese roll and still have a little money left over for his bus fare home.

“Okay,” he said and he pulled out some paper from his case and set to work. He noticed how worn and old her clothes looked.

When he had finished, he showed her the picture.

“No,” she said. “I look much too old and scruffy in that picture. That surely can’t be me. You’ll have to draw it again.”

Rudi sighed. He thought he had captured a very good likeness of her but started again. This time he tried to smooth out some of the wrinkles in her brown skin and he tidied her grey hair so it was not quite so unkempt.

He showed her the picture but again she frowned. “That’s not me.” She exclaimed. “I’m not smiling in that picture and I want my husband to see me happy.”

Rudi groaned inwardly and his tummy grumbled.

Once again he started to draw the old woman. He carefully sketched in her hair and shaded in her clothes. He drew a big smile on her face. Finally he showed her what he had drawn.

“Wonderful!” She exclaimed and she snatched the picture away. “Now I will have something to give to my husband for his birthday. The only thing is I won’t be able to buy him a birthday cake because these five pounds are all that I have.”

Rudi sighed again. He thought of the cheese roll for lunch and he thought about his rent. “It’s okay,” he said. “You take the portrait for nothing. I hope your husband has a wonderful birthday.”

The old woman smiled and disappeared. A couple more hours passed but there was no more customers. Rudi was just about to pack up for the second time when the old woman appeared again.

“Hello Rudi,” she said. This time she looked different somehow. Younger and fresher. Rudi was a little taken back. He didn’t remember telling her his name.

“I gave my husband the picture for his birthday and he was delighted with it. I also bought a lovely cake and had enough to put candles on it with the five pounds. I told him about you and how you did this picture for me for nothing. For the selfless actions you have done I would like to give you this pencil.”

“Thank you,” said Rudi but inwardly he groaned to himself. What do I need another pencil for, he thought. I already have many of those. That won’t buy me lunch but he said nothing and graciously accepted the pencil. The old woman carried on speaking.

“This is a magic pencil. Do not be fooled by its ordinary appearance for it will bring you success and wealth beyond your wildest dreams. But once you have all these wonderful things you must never forget your past and where you started out from.” For one second she was holding the pencil in her outstretched hand and then she was gone.

Rudi stared at the pencil on his palm. It looked like a pretty ordinary green pencil to him. He decided to test the pencil to see if it really was magic by drawing his shoe. He looked at the drawing and traced the pencil line of cracked brown leather with his fingers. It was just the same as all his other drawings. He decided to try something else and drew the twenty pound note. But still the drawing didn’t look magic to him. Rudi had had enough and began to pack

up and go. He was just putting things into his case when he was knocked into by a portly man running for the bus. As he was spun round he dropped his drawings. They fluttered to the ground and then there was a clatter.

“That was a loud noise for just a bit of paper,” thought Rudi and he bent down to pick it up. As he did he saw that the paper was blank and there on the ground was a brown cracked leather shoe just like the one he was wearing! But even better next to the shoe lay a purple twenty pound note! Both the shoe and the pound note drawings had now become real objects. Rudi gasped as it began to sink in what had happened.. He trembled with excitement though he scarcely dared to believe it. The pencil really was magic just as the old woman had said and his mind raced with the possibilities.

Back at his chip shop flat Rudi began to draw money – coins and pound notes of all denominations soon filled the room. His eyes gleamed as he added up his haul. He now had enough to buy his own house and the riches didn’t have to stop there - gold jewellery, precious stones, rare antiques – all of which Rudi could sell to make even more wealth for himself and establish himself as the famous artist he so craved. Within a few months Rudi had set up his own art gallery and was exhibiting his work. Word spread about his brilliant talent and as his fame grew and grew, he was able to set up art galleries in cities throughout the world. Within a few years he had

became rich and famous beyond anything that he had ever dreamed of. But so engrossed in his new whirlwind life the old woman's words slipped from his mind and he forgot about being a hungry artist painting for a crust outside the tourist attractions of London.

Throughout all this time he kept the magic pencil a secret. To keep it safe he stored it in a large metal safe in his back room. One day he decided to move it to a deposit box at the bank where no one would see it. He popped the pencil into a small wooden box and put it into his brief case. The bank was only around the corner from his gallery so Rudi wasn't worried for the magic pencil's safety. He had almost reached the bank when he saw three suspicious looking young men loitering by the steps. Rudi was anxious when he saw them and he quickened his steps. In his haste to get indoors safely he stumbled on the pavement and dropped his case with a loud thud. The catch sprang open and the wooden box was flung out of the case onto the curb. Rudi could only watch as the pencil rolled out the box and dropped straight down into the drain. His heart sank as the pencil disappeared with a splash into the murky grime. He tried to console himself with the thought that he no longer needed the pencil, now that he was such a famous artist.

The just over night the world hit a very bad patch. People lost their jobs and things got tough. Every newspaper carried the stories of the recession. People didn't have much money and they didn't

need paintings anymore. One by one Rudi's art galleries shut till finally he was left with just the first one he started out with in London. He thought back to what he had achieved and with deep regret how it had now slipped away from him. He remembered his humble beginnings five years ago and the old woman from his past. If only he listened to her words and not turned his back. Perhaps this was his just rewards.

One evening Rudi had been working at the gallery and was just about to close for the night. Suddenly in walked a tousled haired and care worn looking man.

"Excuse me, said the man, "but I am an artist. Could you spare me some time to look at my paintings."

Rudi was about to turn him away and shut the door but something about the man pricked at his memory. It was like looking at a ghost of himself from the past.

Rudi nodded and studied the pictures. They were quite good. He looked at the man's strained face and his heart was filled with sympathy. Suddenly he became the kind Rudi once again. "I have just about enough money in the till tonight to buy your paintings." He handed the man the last of his week's takings. Next week would have to take care of itself.

Suddenly before his eyes the man changed. Rudi remembered in an instant that it was the old woman of five years previously.

“Rudi, she said. “It’s been five years to the day to the day that I met you. Do you remember you drew my picture outside Buckingham Palace for nothing?”

Rudi nodded. “Oh how much the world has changed since then?” She said. “I can see how much you have changed too. Perhaps a little wiser now. Once before you helped me and now you have again. You have made mistakes but tonight you have tried to put them right. For that I would like to give you another chance.” And with that she handed him something small and green. It was the magic pencil!

“Take the magic pencil again and rebuild yourself. But this time remember my words. You must never turn your back on your past.” And with that she was gone.

The world didn’t stop and carried on turning. Things got a lot better and Rudi started again. With the magic pencil he was able to rebuild himself. He painted more pictures and started his business began to flourish again. But this time Rudi kept his promise to the old woman and never forgot his past. He helped hospitals and

schools. He set up scholarships for struggling artists and gave large donations to charities. And the more he helped other people the more successful and famous he became.

Today Rudi no longer has to work as his children run his galleries. He's much older now of course and but still likes to paint while sitting out in the sun with his grandchildren. And as far as I know he still has the magic pencil.

*The End*