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Dramatic Publishing



WONDER ON PAPER

By
Mary Hall Surface

Inspired by the Second Commandment

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CHARACTERS

SHELLY, 14 years old

RUSSELL, 16 years old, Shelly's brother

Two actors are costumed as statues of RA and BASTET,
gods of ancient Egypt.

SETTING: The Egyptian gallery of a museum.

TIME: Today.

Wonder on Paper

AT RISE: *SHELLY sits on a bench in the Egyptian gallery of a museum. A statue of the Egyptian sun god, RA, and the cat-goddess BASTET, are the centerpieces of the gallery. Around her on the floor are crumpled sheets of paper. SHELLY sketches furiously in her sketchbook, but flips the pages, starting over and over, then finally rips yet another page and crumples it up, tossing it on the ground. RUSSELL rushes into the gallery.*

RUSSELL (*entering*). Shel? (*Sees her.*) Great. Got the right gallery. Thought I'd taken a wrong turn at the sphinx. What's up with the litter?

SHELLY (*drawing*). I'll pick it up. What time is it?

RUSSELL (*checking the clock on his cell phone*). Three o'clock. Exactly. I had my phone alarm programmed to beep in increasingly smaller intervals, with a mounting sense of urgency.

SHELLY. It can do that?

RUSSELL. Man and machine. We can do anything. Come on, we gotta go!

SHELLY (*drawing*). Can't.

RUSSELL. We promised Dad in blood we'd taxi back to the hotel by 3:30.

SHELLY. Can't.

RUSSELL (*rapidly picking up SHELLY's discarded drawings, shoving them into her backpack*). Shelly, if we blow this, our vacation is doomed! They won't let us out of their sight again!

SHELLY. I can't leave until I draw "beauty."

RUSSELL. Do what?

SHELLY. "Beauty." What is it? I want to draw it.

RUSSELL. It's summer, Shel. Honors art class is over.

SHELLY. This is for me! I've spent all day in this museum filled with gorgeous paintings and sculptures that artists have made for thousands of years—

RUSSELL. So draw one of those. (*Checking his clock.*) Quickly!

SHELLY. But they're beautiful *things*—not beauty itself. That's what I want to capture!

RUSSELL. OK. We'll look it up.

SHELLY. What?

RUSSELL (*punching keys on his cell phone*). Oxford English Dictionary. On-line. Mobile access. Definition: "Beauty."

SHELLY. Russell—

RUSSELL. Shelly. I have the information. The Knowledge.

SHELLY. You have a cell phone.

RUSSELL. I have the Holy Grail of access, a golden bowl of answers. But I can sign off—

SHELLY. Wait! What does it say?

RUSSELL (*reading from his Web access*). "Beauty: A quality that pleases the mind or senses." There you go. (*SHELLY does not move.*) So draw!

SHELLY. How do you draw that: a "quality"?

RUSSELL. You're an artist, Shel. Figure it out or give it up.

SHELLY. Is that your philosophy of life?

RUSSELL. Excuse me?

SHELLY. Anything you can't figure out, you just don't think about?

RUSSELL. Yes. Exactly! (*Looking at his phone.*) Depleting power bar. Now we really have to go.

SHELLY. Look at this statue.

RUSSELL. Shelly—

SHELLY. I need five minutes. Time me!

RUSSELL (*programming the phone*). Deal. Four fifty-nine and counting.

SHELLY (*looking at the statue*). Do you see?

RUSSELL (*reading the label*). "Egyptian. 2500 B.C. Sandstone. Ra, the sun god." And?

SHELLY. Whoever carved this wanted to know how the sun rises and sets. So he made a god.

RUSSELL. Who sailed in a golden boat across the sky, until sunset. I know all about him. Then he road down into the underworld, and rose again at sunrise. Sunset. Sunrise. But! Science has subsequently explained the actual patterns of the earth's rotation. So that's why this statue is no longer worshiped, but sits in a museum. Can we go now?

SHELLY. But did the artist really believe in Ra or was he trying to do what I'm trying to do?

RUSSELL. I'd call this guy "beast" before I'd call him "beauty."

SHELLY. Stop joking, Russell! Look at this one. She's Ra's daughter, Bastet.

RUSSELL. Who were the first people to keep cats as pets? (*Before SHELLY can answer.*) Egyptians! (*Congratulating himself.*) Score!