

Mystery at the Museum

They're here.

I feel the rumble of the buses idling at the curb and smell their exhaust sneaking through the spaces around the windows.

I hear the sigh of the bus doors opening and the echo of the students' feet thundering down the steps.

It sounds like millions of feet, but I know better.

One foot of an eighth grader these days is like a hundred feet of the sort that I remember. I think it has something to do with their shoes – giant, rubbery, irreverent.

Their feet are not the only parts of them that are loud. Their voices carry into the building before they've even entered, laughing and shouting, then shushing and giggling as they spill into the Rotunda and see the elephant.

That elephant.

It's probably the only thing these students will remember about their visit to the Natural History Museum.

At least that's usually the case, but maybe not this time.

Today I have other plans. Today they will notice *me*.

I listen as the docent leads a herd of them into the Hall of Gems. I can't see anything, not from where I am, but I've been in this situation long enough to have found other ways to learn without seeing. Listening is my specialty. I can hear everything that happens in this place. The paper-thin wings flapping in the Butterfly Pavilion. The kid sticking his gum on the sign for Teddy's Roosevelt's rhinoceros.

Now I hear the students grunting and shoving each other as they crowd around the Hope Diamond. I bet they're leaving prints on the glass. I wait for the inevitable whispers.

"I thought it would be bigger," one boy complains. That's always the first comment. Kids are hard to impress nowadays.

"I read that it's cursed," a girl breathes. Second comment right on schedule. The girl goes on to recount the many ways that the diamond brought bad luck to its various owners. Beheading and bankruptcies make for a good story, but it's all pure coincidence. I mean, Marie Antoinette had it coming, diamond or no.

I smile. If only they knew what was really cursed in this museum.

The students have made their way to my exhibit, and I listen as the docent talks about my cat. Everyone always seems surprised that it's in a jar, along with my organs. I guess after thousands of years I'm no longer surprised.

A girl named Hazel is standing over me now. I can feel her. She's probably looking at the painted decorations and all the intricate symbols on my case. Maybe she's thinking about sticking her gum on my sign.

The docent is talking about my "habitat." Desert, like a camel. That's kind of an insult. I'm not like a camel. I remember camels - they spit.

I wonder who has solved the mystery. Do they know what I am? And how will they feel when I open my case and step out? Let's see, shall we?



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. According to the narrator, what do students usually remember most about the museum? (Literal)
 - a. The elephant
 - b. The butterflies
 - c. Teddy Roosevelt's rhinoceros
 - d. The Hope diamond

2. Where does the docent lead the students first? (Literal)
 - a. To the butterfly garden
 - b. To the Hall of Gems
 - c. To the bus
 - d. To the Rotunda

3. Who is the narrator? (Inferential)
 - a. A medieval knight
 - b. An Egyptian mummy
 - c. Teddy Roosevelt's rhinoceros
 - d. Marie Antionette

4. What clues helped you figure out the narrator's identity? (Inferential)
 - a. Age (thousands of years), beheading and bankruptcies, gum
 - b. Sensitive hearing, desert habitat, beheading and bankruptcies
 - c. Jar of organs, paintings on case, desert habitat
 - d. Paintings on case, age (thousands of years), sensitive hearing

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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 - d. Paintings on case, age (thousands of years), sensitive hearing