

Mr. Muse's Five Pieces of Advice

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1. The Lost Inspiration

"It's gone!" Sherry got angry and crumpled the sheet of paper. "No trace of it!"

"Hm," Andy, her brother, muttered. "It happens, Sherry. It'll be back. I've lost mine too at times.

"This never happens to me!" Sherry snapped. "I am always inspired. What shall I do now that my inspiration's gone?"

Sherry rushed out into the garden, climbed the tree and settled on her own branch.

Her eyes were fixed on the board fence in the front. She started counting the planks. It sometimes helped her get her ideas in order. The thing was that there was now not a SINGLE idea. So there was nothing to put in order.

Her brother appeared at the door of the house and headed to the tree but Sherry shooed him away silently. He shrugged and went back inside.

Sherry was left alone. She kept counting the silly planks but nothing happened. As minutes went by, her nose wrinkled more and more, and the wrinkle between her eyebrows became deeper and deeper.

"I don't think It's going to work," a voice came out all of a sudden. Sherry turned around and stared. A funny tiny middle-aged man was sitting on the branch next to her.

2. I Am Mr. Muse. It's Nice to Meet You.

"How do you know?" Sherry asked grumpily.

"I know because that's what I do. I am Mr. Muse. It's Nice to Meet you!" the man held his hand out with a wide smile.

"Shirleen," the girl answered briefly and looked at him critically. "You're funny. Especially your moustache."

"Don't envy me!" Mr. Muse winked at her. "That's not good!"

"I don't envy you," Sherry laughed. "I need neither moustache, nor such a belly."

"Did you just call me fat?" The man saddened dramatically. "This is where I keep my ideas. That's why my belly is so big. And when I do this with my moustache," he started playing with one end of his moustache, "I turn the ideas over in my head until I choose the best one. You, however, have no moustache, so you don't know how that works. That's probably why you envy me. As far as I can see, you have no belly either, so you have nowhere to keep your ideas."

"What about that suit?" Sherry looked at him carefully. The trouser legs are too short for you, you have ice-cream painted on your socks, and a bow tie doesn't fit a T-shirt at all. All in all, you're quite a funny man."

"You don't say!" Mr. Muse snapped. "I dress just as I like. I can do whatever I want at my age. How old are you, Shirleen?"

"I am eight but I am already a writer, just like my brother. And a painter like my mom. And a cook!"

"Wow, all those things?"

"Yes but I somehow got damaged now. I want to write but nothing comes to mind. I want to draw but it doesn't turn out beautiful. As for cooking, I don't even feel like going into the kitchen. The inspiration is all gone! It has vanished!"

"You're lucky," the man smiled. "I will give you five pieces of advice and your inspiration will come right back. Are you ready?"

"Yes," Shirleen straightened her back and the wrinkle between her eyebrows was gone.

3. Mr. Muse's First Piece of Advice

"So, Sherry," Mr. Muse cleared his throat. "The most important thing about inspiration is to learn to see."

"But I can see," Sherry frowned. "Here, I can even see you."

"That's true but the important thing is to see, not just look. You need to practice so as to learn to see things you don't see just like that. Try and you will tell me about it tomorrow."

Mr. Muse pulled his suspenders and disappeared. Sherry kept sitting on the branch, dangling her legs. She counted the planks once more. Then she went to practice her eyes.

4. Andy's First Lesson

Andy found her sitting in the dark pantry.

"Are we playing hide-and-seek?" He asked.

"No, I am doing exercises with my eyes." Sherry answered.

"What are you doing?" Her brother stared. "How exactly are you doing these exercises?"

"How? Don't you see? I am looking in the darkness. Then I will go outside into the daylight and look there too."

"Hmm..." Andy drawled. "I know a better way to practice. Come with me."

The two of them found themselves on the riverbank. It flew just behind the garden fence.

"Now look over there." Andy pointed. "Do you see?"

"Do I see what? There is only a big rock there."

"That's just the thing. However, this is not just an ordinary rock, Sherry. If you look closer, you will see that it is moving. Because that's the river monster!"

"Yeah, right!" Sherry didn't trust him.

"Honestly! It stands up at night and roams about with his rocky body, making circles around the house. It loves blond ponytails the most."

Andy pulled his sister's ponytail and startled her.

"It's not true!" Sherry squealed.

"Alright then! I lied to you. It loves eating pigtales the most, as well as donkey tails, and rabbit tails but if it doesn't find any, he eats blond ponytails out of necessity."

He pulled her tail again. Sherry was startled again. Cold shivers went down her spine. She thought the rock really seemed to move and she ran back home.

"Don't be afraid!" Andy shouted laughing after her. "The monster won't do you any harm during the day! And it is enough to sleep with your hair loose at night."

"Oh, I'll show you!" Sherry threatened him from the door of the house. "Once I've finished exercising my eyes, I'll be able to count all your pimples in just one look!"

5. Mr. Muse's Second Piece of Advice.

Sherry tried a few exercises more: fast winking, eye-rolling, squeezing her eyes, then staring. Nothing helped but she finally got so tired that she fell asleep.

Next day, Mr. Muse found her in bed.

"Heeeeey, did it work?" he asked.

"NO!" Sherry snapped without turning around. "I'm not going to trust you anymore."

"As you wish! I will give you some advice and you can follow it or not – you decide."

"Sherry turned towards Mr. Muse and burst out laughing. The man was wearing loose Turkish trousers and a sleeveless jacket on his bare skin. His big belly looked even bigger.

“Excuse me, I spent last night telling Arabian fairy-tale stories,” The man looked embarrassed, snapped his fingers, and an electric green suit substituted for the Turkish trousers and the sleeveless jacket.

“Now you look like a grasshopper,” Sherry laughed.

“That’s the way it should be.” Mr. Muse lifted his finger. “It’s time for your second task: to practice with your ears so that you not only listen, but hear and catch even the most inaudible sounds. For example, the sounds made by grasshoppers.”

“You mean crickets,” Sherry corrected him.

“I mean just what I said! Anyone can hear crickets. Try to hear a grasshopper, though.!” Mr. Muse bristled up.

“Is it going to work this time?” She asked hopefully.

“It might work or not. A writer, an artist, a cook has to try everything before they give up,” Mr. Muse said, snapped his fingers, and disappeared.

6. Andy’s Second Lesson

Sherry listened for a sound. She couldn’t hear a single one. She started massaging and pulling her ears, sticking her fingers inside them, closing them, and opening them. How does one train their ears? She didn’t want to ask Andy in the least, but she probably had to.

Andy was very happy to hear his sister’s question.

“I have an idea,” he said and pulled her by the hand. Then went into the kitchen and he started taking all sorts of pots, pans, ladles, spoons, and forks out of the cupboards.

“We’re going to make a noisy concert. The more noise, the better the practice. Are you ready? Here’s the ladle and the pot. Start knocking on the pot just like that.” He took the lid of the pot and started hitting it in a pan using all his strength. The noise was going up with every single move. The children’s laughter filled the whole house.

“Now, Sherry, shout! Shout as much as you can! And close your eyes, so that you can hear better,” her brother said.

“Sherry raised her voice – she shouted with all her might and hit the cooking pot with the ladle. The sound took her to a secret Indian ritual: men and women with their faces all painted, walked in circles and shouted at the top of their lungs.

The unbelievable noise startled Sherry’s mother so much that she ran, at the speed of lightning, to the kitchen. When she found her daughter among a pile of dishes, screaming at the top of her lungs, she barely managed to shout her.

Sherry opened her eyes. There was no sign of her brother. What a traitor! She started justifying herself but her mother not only put an end to the concert, but also put everything back to its place, and drove Sherry outside.

7. Mr. Muse's Third Piece of Advice

Sherry once again found herself perched on the branch. She dangled her legs energetically. She was never going to ask Andy anything ever again.

"You are not right," Mr. Muse interrupted her thoughts.

"How am I not right? Look at him! He pretends to be helpful at first, and then only makes fun of me.

"You help him too. He's older but when he plays with you, he feels younger again. This is good for his inspiration. He is a writer, isn't he?"

"My older little brother," Sherry laughed and looked at Mr. Muse. "You want to be little too. That's why you talk to me, isn't it?"

"I talk to many like you, Shirleen. You are not that special at all. Are you ready for the third piece of advice?"

"Yes, sir!" Shirleen saluted.

"Then listen carefully. Now you have to train your nose. To catch all sorts of smells – nice or bad, because they hide a pinch of the best inspiration inside of them."

"That I can do!" Sherry clapped her hands joyfully. "Watch me now!" She said and turned to Mr. Muse. Then she closed her eyes so as to concentrate, and started moving her nostrils energetically.

"What are you doing now?" Andy's voice came.

Sherry opened her eyes but Mr. Muse had gone.

"I am practicing so as to be able to feel all smells."

"Hm," Andy said. "Need help?"

"Alright but this time no making fun of me!"

"Upon my word!" Her brother grinned.

8. Andy's Third Lesson

Sherry was sitting blindfolded in a chair. Her brother had piled up all sorts of things on the table in front of her. He took one of the little jars and put it under her nose.

"This is... this is some kind of spice!" Sherry cried out. "Ummm... savory... oregano? Something of the kind, right?"

"Mint! Mint tea! It's my favourite!" She clapped her hands at the next scent.

"Oh, that's ummmm, that's mother's perfume!"

"Coffee?"

"Strawberry?"

“Father’s car’s air-freshener?”

Sherry had found herself in the most scented room in the world. The trees, flowers, houses, and people smelled indescribably nice there! And she seemed to be floating about that sunny colourful city, rolling over from cloud to cloud, diving into a ripe apricot scent, lilac rain, and delicious food... She couldn’t wipe the smile off her face.”

“Now, I kept the best last,” Andy announced. “Don’t forget to take a deep breath because this is the most wonderful smell in the whole world!”

“I’m ready,” Sherry breathed out and once she breathed in, her scented city broke into pieces at once and a fierce thunderstorm swept away the pink candy clouds.

“Yuck! What is this!” She cried out. She was disgusted and she took off her blindfold. Her brother was kneeling in front of her, dramatically holding his sneaker under her nose.

“This, my dear Sherry, is the most divine smell because it was produced by my feet.” He said and burst out laughing. Sherry waved and her brother’s sneaker found itself at the other end of the room. Her brother was rolling on the floor laughing.

9. Mr. Muse’s Fourth Piece of Advice

They had Sherry’s favourite omelet with bacon, fresh pepper, and a sprig of parsley for dinner.

“Mmmmm, it’s divine, mom, dad!” Sherry munched.

“This is because you trained your nose and now you not only feel scents, but you also understand their stories,” she heard a silent little voice somewhere near her ear. “That’s why the food is more delicious. Now is the perfect time for you to train your taste,” Mr. Muse whispered.

“How do you train your taste?”

“What, dear?” Her mother looked at her with surprise.

“Oh, nothing. I just wonder how I can train my taste for food,” Sherry answered.

“Well, you taste different types of food and let them take you on a most surprising and strange journey,” Her father answered.

“In that case, I have an idea - a desert.” Andy exclaimed. “Meet you in my room after dinner!”

After dinner, Sherry knocked on Andy’s door. She had forgiven him about the sneaker thing because of the delicious dinner.

10. Andy’s Fourth Lesson

“Well, are you ready to taste something super special,” - Andy smiled mysteriously and took out a plate covered with a towel.

“What’s in it?”

"A cocktail of stories!" Her brother answered and lifted the towel from the plate in a dramatical manner.

"Um... I can only see chopped fruit?"

"No, my dear Sherry, these are different types of taste from all over the world!" He poked a little piece of mango with his fork and licked it. He closed his eyes, then grinned, and giggled.

"What is going on with you? Sherry asked.

"Nothing, it's just..." Andy could hardly take his breath. "This seems to be the funny mango that makes you laugh! It was picked by a tanned man with moustache. His hair was quite curly and sticking out 10 centimeters above his head. This friend here," Andy munched, "still remembers the fruit-picker's bright teeth and the funny stories he had told him. The mango travelled in a truck whose carriage didn't have a cover, so the mango laughed so hard that it nearly fell on the road. Oh, no, there it goes, I can feel it's working on me."

Her brother started hopping about, then he threw himself upon Sherry and started tickling her while all the time justifying himself, saying it was the funny mango's fault.

When Sherry finally broke free from her brother, she was laughing so hard that she could hardly take a breath.

"Nonsense! There's no way the mango told you all that. And there isn't the slightest possibility that it infected you with laughter."

"Come on, try yourself." Her brother pushed the plate towards her.

Shirleen suspiciously reached out towards a piece of banana. She chewed it energetically and frowned.

"I cannot feel a thing except that it's green."

"Oh, no! So you'll have to learn the story of... Capo di Bandana! He is the grumpiest of all bananas. They say that he ran away from the rainforests in Brazil. He wanted to be a mafia leader. That's why he's not sweet at all. Quick, Shirleen, take something sweet or you'll always be like Capo di Bandana!"

"Capo di who?" Shirleen asked with her mouth full and at the same time thought that her good mood was quickly fading away. That's why she quickly picked a piece of strawberry – just in case.

That night they travelled to Turkey, Africa, Chilly, Greece, and Spain with every seed and slice of fruit in the bowl. They met barefoot kids, singing tribes, women with big turbans on their head, and sophisticated gentlemen with spiky moustache...

They probably would have played until dawn in case they hadn't eaten up all pieces of fruit to the very last one. That was not only the most delicious dessert but it was also the funniest.

11. Mr. Muse's Fifth Piece of Advice

Sherry couldn't fall asleep that night. While she was tossing and turning in bed, she heard a familiar voice.

"I cannot sleep either."

It was Mr. Muse in baby-blue pyjamas with little pink clouds on it.

"We can tell each other stories," he suggested.

"I have no story to tell," Sherry answered sadly.

"Well, well," Mr. Muse disagreed. "What did you just do with Andy? What about the story of the scented city? What happened after the thunderstorm?"

"Well... the smelly monster came. It swooped over the city like a shadow and all of a sudden, all nice scents vanished. There was only that terrible stuffy smell of a dirty sneaker left. The monster was wearing a bandana just like... CAPO DI BANDANA!"

Sherry heard a soft snore. Mr. Muse had fallen asleep on her pillow just like a baby. Sherry covered him with her blanket and fell asleep before she knew it.

Next morning she was woken up by a pinch.

"Ouch!" She cried out with indignation and looked around.

"There, there," Mr. Muse grinned. He was now sitting cross-legged on her pillow, sipping coffee.

"I don't have the whole day to be at your disposal. Today your task is to touch, feel with your fingers and body each and every puff of wind, every touch, every pinch, every gentle stroke, every pull of a hair. You have to feel even things that aren't usually felt."

"Is that why you pulled my hair?" Sherry frowned.

"Feel even things that aren't usually felt." Mr. Muse repeated. "See you soon, Shirleen!"

12. Andy's Fifth lesson

The tasks were getting more and more difficult. How do you feel something that isn't usually felt? Sherry shuffled towards the bathroom. After she brushed her teeth, she decided to try the toothbrush on her tongue.

"Haha, it tickles!" She laughed. Next she drove it through her face, combed her eyebrows with it, she turned it upside down – with the uneven side up and tried to wash her teeth with it. Her eyes kept looking about. What else could she touch to practice her touch.

She rushed out into the garden and gently drove her fingers through the tips of the grass.

"It's fresh because of the dew."

The flowers...

"They are so gentle that they are almost transparent!"

The snails...

"There are tiny uneven spots on their shells.

"Hey" Andy turned up in front of her. "Do you have another task?"

"Aha," Sherry nodded. "This time I have to practice my sense of touch."

"Look. Can you do that?" The tips of his hands' fingers touched and he started bending his fingers and then straightening them again faster and faster. Don't you feel as if you were touching a balloon?"

"No," Sherry turned her head away sadly. "It doesn't work for me."

"Do you feel as if there were an ant walking on your skin?" Her brother asked again.

"An ant? Where?" Sherry was startled.

"Right here." Her brother pointed and dropped an ant upon her leg.

"You are horrible, horrible! Sherry shouted and jumped to her feet. "Leave me alone!"

13. It Was a Pleasure, Sherry!

Sherry felt as if thousands of tiny ants kept walking all over her body. Everything was itching and at times she startled and scratched a leg or her back; sometimes the fingers or the back of the neck.

"I can see you've learned quite sufficiently about the sense of touch." She heard Mr. Muse's laughter.

"Are you coming from the beach?" Sherry looked at him with a frown.

Mr. Muse was in his swimsuit with ducky yellow floats around his big belly.

"By the way, I have the same floats."

"I know," Mr. Muse said. "That's why I use them. You do know that if it itches a lot, the best thing to do is throw oneself into the sea.

"Yes or into the river... How I wish I could jump into the river." Sherry got all dreamy.

"What will you do about the river monster?"

"I'll drive it away. I'll send it off to fight with the smelly monster and save the scented city." Sherry waved her fist."

"That'll almost do."

"What do you mean, "almost"?" Sherry looked at him with surprise.

"That's the most difficult part: recreate the story and put it into painting, fairy-tale, dish, whatever comes across your mind," Mr. Muse explained.

"Well, that's the easiest part," Sherry jumped to her feet. "You know that everything works out well when I have my inspiration."

"In that case, I am afraid this is the last time we meet... for now... Since I'm wearing my swimsuit, I'm going to the seaside."

"What if my inspiration goes away once again?" Sherry got worried.

"Now you know Mr. Muse's five pieces of advice and there is no such danger, my dear Sherry." He smiled at her.

His knitted hat threw some shadow over his face. In spite of that, Sherry saw his eyes filled with tears. Now that she had learnt to actually see, not just look, nothing could escape her notice.

"Thank you for bringing back my inspiration, Mr. Muse!" She whispered.

"It was a pleasure, Sherry!" Mr. Muse replied, snapped his fingers, and disappeared.

"I heard you!" Andy turned up out of nowhere.

"What did you hear?" Sherry asked.

"You were talking to someone!"

"I'm talking to myself," Sherry snapped.

"What a pity!" Andy shrugged. "I was hoping you had finally met Mr. Muse. I've told him so much about you..."