

## The Mouse in Monet's Garden

Lying on the ground, Monet looked at the sky. His back was sore after standing so long. His painting was finally done after weeks of hard work and struggle.

As he lay on the grass, another smaller artist studied Monet's work. This artist was a mouse. He jumped onto the easel to get a better look at the painting.

"Hmm..." thought the mouse, "*Nice sky color, better than his last picture. Would you just look at that perfect grass color! Oh dear, his boat looks a little too long.*" The mouse looked at the river and the boat on the shore, "*This painting is bad, now that I see it up close. As I always say, he needs to improve.*" The mouse was just about to jump down when suddenly he heard, "Shoo! Get away!"

The mouse jumped! He had been caught. This had never happened before. The mouse knew Monet had a famous temper...

The artist grabbed a paint brush.

"Get off!" he cried. He swung the brush, like a bat, at the little mouse. The mouse jumped into the air as the brush came near. The brush hit the painting instead, giving the mouse time to escape. He scurried down the easel and onto the ground where he wondered what would happen next.

Unfortunately, the brush Monet used still had paint on it. Red paint. Monet rarely used red paint!

A thick blotch of red paint splattered onto his artwork.

"Ah!" cried Monet as he saw what had happened, "Look what you made me do you little pesky thing! *Oui*, out with you!" Thinking the mouse was still in front of him, Monet lifted the easel and his painting and threw them into the river. His supplies sank beneath the rippling water.

Monet leaned back against a tree and pressed his hand against his forehead.

"Oh," he groaned, "all of my hard work, gone!"

He was still muttering to himself when the mouse spoke up, "Oh Monet, you could have done better anyway. Who cares about a messed-up picture."

Monet turned sharply toward the sound.

Now I have no idea how this happened, but Monet actually heard the mouse speak. Very high and squeaky, Monet said later, as would be expected.

When Monet turned, he saw a small mouse wearing an artist's coat and a beret. The little rodent leaned against a tree, breathing hard. The mouse prepared to run if need be.

"What did you . . . how did you," Monet was confused, "I'm . . . I threw you and my things into the river! Mice cannot swim, can they?"

"Of course..." said the mouse haughtily. He looked down sheepishly and admitted, "...not." The mouse continued, "But you didn't throw me into the river. I had climbed off of the easel and was watching your rage."

Monet stared in amazement at the mouse.

"I suppose you have weak eyesight. You would have seen me otherwise," stated the mouse matter-of-factly.

Angered at this, Monet started forward. Suddenly he stopped and burst out laughing!

"Oh," he sputtered. Monet laughed and laughed and laughed. He said, "I heard a man once say that artists live strange lives. I never really believed it, but now I do . . . talking to a rodent!" At those words, the mouse shook with anger and his tail stiffened.

"Don't you dare call me a rodent!" shouted the little mouse, stomping his foot, "For your information, I am the only mouse who dares to live inside your garden. I wanted to learn how to draw, and I have. I know far more than you. I was critiquing your artwork when you woke up and this whole thing started. Now that I've met you, I can say two things. One is I am glad you threw your supplies into the river, and the other thing I have to say is I'm moving. You are mean!" The mouse turned and left. "He called me a *rodent!*" he muttered angrily.

"Wait!" Monet called gently, "Don't go!" He raced after the mouse as best he could.

Before long though, Monet reached his limit. He dropped to the ground, panting. He thought he would never see the mouse again.

Monet didn't know he was being watched. The mouse lay nearby, deciding whether or not he should give the artist another try.

The mouse made up his mind to do it. Besides, he could always run away.

"I'm giving you another chance," he said.

"What!" cried Monet, clearly startled. When he saw the mouse his face softened, "Oh, it's you."

Monet knew that if he wasn't careful, he might lose his chance.

The artist began cautiously, "Perhaps we could talk about how I could have improved my picture."

"I will help you with your failing eyesight, if that is what you are asking."

"Um, yes!" said Monet, even though it had not been what he meant.

"I have watched you for many years and examined your artwork when you aren't watching. Over the past few months, I have noticed a dramatic change. Your paintings are becoming less vibrant. Your eyesight must be failing."

"Oui," said Monet sadly, "My clients have said the same."

"I have passed you in your skill," continued the mouse proudly, "I think our solution to this problem is clear. I should paint for you."

Monet was surprised, but he held it inside. Instead he said, "It might work, but that would be deceptive. If my customers discovered the plan, they might leave me and I would be poor once more!" Monet shuddered at the thought.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed the mouse, "Mice don't have names. Why don't you name me 'Monet'? I could sign my artwork with the same name."

Monet smiled.

"It's a deal," he said and shook the mouse's paw.

That is why Monet's paintings from his later years are just as amazing as his early works, even though his eyesight continued to fail.