

# NOW YOU SEE IT.....

by Sue Haley

It wasn't the first time that Brian had made his way to Mouse's chamber "the deepest chamber of all", but it was the first time he had done so alone. Mouse was supposed to meet him, but the last time he waited over 30 minutes, so he decided this time he wouldn't wait. Too much time was wasted waiting. If he was very late back again, there'd be explaining to do and he didn't like lying, so it was better to be in a bit earlier and save on the excuses. He was getting on so much better with his dad now and he didn't want to wreck it.

At last he arrived at the grill and reached up to turn the carved head which operated the 'express route' - a sheer drop....

Arthur was chattering away as usual and Mouse was so engrossed he didn't seem to notice Brian's somewhat ungainly entrance. Brian was reminded of the first time they met.

"Ow! My leg!" he complained, as he rubbed his shin. What should have been a soft landing was spoiled by one of Mouse's 'gizmos'.

"Hi Brian," Mouse greeted him without looking up "Hand me that gizmo"

"What are you making?" Brian asked, as he joined his friend at his workbench.

"Going to 'get' Sebastian!" Mouse declared triumphantly.

"Who's Sebastian?"

"A helper ... Does magic"

"Why do you want to 'get' him?"

"Not hurt, TRICK. Every Winterfest he tricks me ... but I can do better" Mouse's expression was wide-eyed with anticipated pleasure "Better than better!" he added for good measure.

"How?"

"Tried last year ... Took rabbit out when he wasn't looking. Put Arthur in instead ... Didn't work though!" Mouse looked dejected.

"Why not?"

"Arthur does what HE wants!" Mouse looked across at Arthur, with what looked more like admiration than disappointment." ... Spoiled the food... Father was mad!"

"So what are you making now?" Brian asked.

"You'll see...when it's done."

Brian was trying to work out what it was that Mouse was making, but it just looked like an empty box to him. He couldn't even see where Mouse had put the 'gizmo'. He knew Mouse well enough by now to know that he would tell him when he was good and ready, and not before.

"Can I help?" he offered, thinking this might be a way of finding out.

"Yes," came the reply "help test ... when it's done"

Brian contented himself to waiting by looking along the bench at all the things Mouse had built before. There

was 'Vincent's sky - Mark II' - the first one had been broken along with a lot of other things, not long after Brian had met Mouse. Mouse didn't say how they got broken, only that it was probably his own fault. Mouse had been quite badly injured too, but he had made light of it. He had not only rebuilt Vincent's sky but countless other lamps with wax and oil, or oil and glitter in them. Brian admired Mouse more than any of his friends Above. He had even introduced a new character to the board game he played with his friends - it was beginning to sound like a 'Who's Who Below' and it gave Brian a wonderful feeling of sharing his life with his secret friends and having them there with him at home; 'Lady Catherine' and 'Vincent The Protector' and now 'Mouseman The Inventor' smiled at him, whenever he looked their way. Oh, he hadn't told Mouse about it - he would only have been embarrassed. It was a secret he shared with no-one!

At last Mouse's 'box' was ready - although it looked no different to Brian than before.

"Do you have a watch... or a coin?" Mouse enquired with a sheepish grin.

"This do?" Brian handed him a quarter, judging that he could afford to lose that much better than his watch!

Mouse held the box on the palm of his left hand, steadied only by the tips of his fingers. He dropped the coin into the box then, in grand fashion, waved his right hand over the top. He then invited Brian to look inside. The coin had vanished.

"Must have a false bottom" Brian declared.

So Mouse shook the box to show that it did not rattle and handed it to Brian to examine it, which he did - very thoroughly. He was impressed. He didn't have to say so, Mouse could see it written all over his face. To top it all - Mouse 'produced' the quarter from behind Brian's ear while he was still holding the box.

"Mouse..?" Brian said with a delicious grin "Can I come to Winterfest this year?"

END