

# Of Mice and Mrs. Meyers





“John. What on earth are you doing?”

Dropping the edge of the kitchen curtain, John McLane turned toward his wife, Maddie. He smiled at her sheepishly.

“You caught me. I was spying on Mrs. Meyers.”





Sighing, Maddie shook her head. “It’s late in the season, honey. Whatever has been grown has been grown. I don’t think her strawberries look any different today than they did yesterday.”

“You never know. A rabbit or a mouse could have come along and eaten them all overnight,” John said hopefully.





Putting her coffee cup down on the counter, Maddie smiled at her husband. “The pie baking contest is in two days. I think you had better be more concerned about your own pie. Do you want to bake a practice pie today?”







John nodded. He loved eating, and now baking, pies. Since retirement, he had also taken up gardening. He tenderly nurtured a growing garden in his yard. His first year, he planted roses and zucchini. By his second year, John graduated to raised garden beds filled with vegetables and flowers. He even dedicated a little patch to strawberries. He was excited to watch them grow, eagerly anticipating how delicious strawberry pie would be.



Then, one morning, John went out to water his plants. He discovered that a creature had crept into the strawberry patch and eaten them all. His neighbor Mrs. Meyers had leaned over the fence and chuckled. That morning, Mrs. Meyers sealed her fate as John's archenemy.





“Oh, you got attacked by some critters,” she said. “Next time put a net over the berries. Otherwise, you’re just laying out a snack for the field mice. I always add extra protection for my strawberries. I use them for my award-winning pies, so I can’t take any chances.”







John went back inside, seething. “She was just so rude!” he told his wife.

Maddie had been surprised.

“Mrs. Meyers? Rude? She’s the sweetest lady. I’m sure she simply meant to offer you advice. You are pretty new to gardening. She just wanted to help.”



No matter what his wife said, John continued to feel slighted. He began to plan for the next year. He researched heirloom strawberry varieties. He ordered fancy garden netting. He even started his strawberry plants under a little lamp in the living room before carefully transplanting them in the garden. But deep down, he knew that just having delicious strawberries would not be enough. He needed to win the county fair pie contest. He needed to beat Mrs. Meyers.





His wife had always been a great pie maker. She used her mother's recipe, which she said was perfect. "The secret is that I use butter-flavored vegetable shortening," Maddie explained. "It has all the taste of butter, but it holds together like lard." John practiced by baking a pie almost every week.





John liked key lime pie the best, but the trees were impossible to grow in his climate. He wanted the satisfaction of growing his own fruit. He was excited about entering a strawberry pie at the county fair.







The day before the county fair, John got up early to go collect his strawberries. To his horror, every single one of the strawberries had been eaten up. The net had been torn through by tiny mouse teeth. He could have cried.

As he crouched over the remains of his berries, he heard a voice.

“Oh, no!” Mrs. Meyers was staring at him over the fence.



John felt himself getting very annoyed.

“Your wife told me you were planning on baking a strawberry pie for the contest tomorrow. Is that true?”

Unable to turn and face his neighbor, John nodded and said, “I was.”





“I am so sorry. Hold on a minute!”  
With that, Mrs. Meyers was gone.

Sighing, John looked at what was left of his strawberry patch. There was just one large, plump strawberry left. It was hidden under a leaf. Just as John was reaching for it, he heard Mrs. Meyer’s voice again.







“Here, John! It would just break my heart to not see you at the judges’ table next to me. I have more than enough strawberries for us both to make pies.”

John stood up. He looked at Mrs. Meyers with surprise. She was leaning over the fence, offering him a large bowl filled with plump, red strawberries.





“You’d give me some of your strawberries?”

“Of course, John! We’re neighbors!”

With a smile on his face, John accepted the gift.

“Thank you so much. You have no idea how much this means to me.”



The next day, standing next to his wife, John watched the judges take bites of all the pies. Across the room, he saw Mrs. Meyers and waved at her. He wasn't sure who would win that year. And, suddenly, it didn't really matter. John smiled at Mrs. Meyers and realized that he already felt like a winner.







**THE END**



## Discussion Starters

- John's favorite type of pie is a key lime pie. What are some other kinds of pies?
- John thinks that his neighbor Mrs. Meyers is trying to ruin his gardening attempts. In the end, he discovers she is actually a thoughtful and helpful friend. Why are first impressions sometimes wrong?
- Do you enjoy gardening or being outside in a garden? What advice would you give to a new gardener?



A top-down view of several strawberries with green leaves and thin stems scattered across a grey, weathered wooden plank surface. The strawberries are in various stages of ripeness, with some showing more red than others.

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