

Megan Berg  
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Oscar Claude Monet



## Letter to My Dear Readers

*H*ave you ever dreamed of colors, of dazzling light, of fading silhouettes and wake up with the amazing feeling of knowing, yet hard to really see? The feeling is the beauty of nebula, the faint smell of lavender, the sonorous sound of waves and for a long time, I tried to capture this magic feeling of indistinct.

One day, I stood in front of a painting called "Women with a Parasol". The breeze slightly lifted the silky veil of the woman, the meadow danced like ocean around her dress and her young son. . . She was there yet she was not and I had the feeling that soon she would disappear. I glanced the signature of the painter:

*"Claude Monet"*

Monet gave a name to my mysterious feeling: Impressionism. It was the trick of light, the work of colors in a particular moment. I was deeply impressed by this master of art who had learned to capture the true feeling of dream.

What gave him the idea of Impressionism? Who inspired him? What gave him the courage to hold on to his belief in an era where people only admired the fine strokes of Da Vinci and Jean Ingres?

Come with me, my readers, think of yourself holding a cup of coffee inside the magnificent gallery of Claude Monet. In a minute, I will guide you through the world of Impressionism. . .

—Megan Deng

1.31.2016

Journey Began

Scene I. Le Havre. An Art-supply store in the Rue de Paris.

*It is a sunny afternoon in Le Havre. The proprietor of the art-supply store, Anatole Alvin is framing different drawings. Enter the sixteen-year-old Claude Monet carrying his fresh caricatures.*

**Monet:** (proudly) Bonjour, Monsieur Alvin. You have the honor of selling my masterpiece again!

[Monet holds out his cartoon, Alvin stops framing]

**Alvin:** Wow, would you look at that! Young lad, you have impressed me yet again. Hmm... *L'Homme Papillon*<sup>1</sup>, what an interesting title there. Who is the poor victim of your beautiful art this time, my dear Oscar?

**Monet:** Aha, I believe you meant to say “a brave martyr”, monsieur. Why, this is one of my best friends Jules Didier. The most charming one with this...well...brilliant reputation... You see, my Jules has changed the love bow of Cupid into a cannon of passion which goes straight into women’s hearts...every time.

**Alvin:** Then, I believe you friend Jules will be the first one to appear at my door as the piece is so deep with moral lessons and propagandizes such a “brilliant reputation”. No doubt he will pay a very handsome price to have this precious caricature all to himself for admiration.

[Monet glances at the store window nervously. Alvin continues.]

However my dear Oscar, despite the little prank you played behind your friend, this caricature really shows your talent.

**Monet:** Oh you think so monsieur?

**Alvin:** Oui, Oui, indeed. You depicted Jules’ facial expression really well. I can even smell his obsession for women.

[Monet shows Alvin a brilliant smile]

**Alvin:** Now, my dear Oscar, take my following advice as a friend's. You have the potential of being a great artist but you need a mentor, a good one, to lead you...

[Monet interrupts Alvin. Just then, a man with a stylish mustache comes into the store without being noticed]

**Monet:** I know, I know, Monsieur Alvin, we have discussed this for several times already but I don't see anyone who can handle the job of being my teacher and...that Eugène Boudin you mentioned might be mad. He lives like a tramp and sleeps wherever he can!

**The Man:** I seem to hear my name. What a pleasure to meet you, young monsieur. I believe you are the famous prodigy Oscar Monet?

**Alvin:** Monsieur Boudin!

[Monet jumps out of shock and turns around. Boudin is smiling down at him]

**Boudin:** Hahaha, Don't you fret, young monsieur. "Lives like a tramp and sleeps wherever he can". I agree with you totally.

[Monet fidgets uncomfortably and stares at his shoes]

**Boudin:** However, let me tell you a secret: I always sleep next to my canvas and my canvas is always, always next to the beautiful scenery I paint.

[Monet looks at Boudin in amazement. Boudin walks to the Monet's fresh caricature]

**Boudin:** Very amusing, really smart and spirited... But I hope you don't stop there and be simply contented. Why not come to the beach this Saturday, monsieur Monet? I will teach you how to paint landscapes *en plein air*<sup>2</sup>.

[Exit]

**Scene II. Le Havre. Beach of Normandy.**

*The summer breeze slightly stirs the sandy beach. Eugène Boudin frenziedly fills up his canvas with dancing strokes. Spotting Boudin, young Monet jostles through the slightly crowded beach.*

**Monet:** Monsieur Boudin! Monsieur Boudin!

[Hearing his name, Boudin looks up from his painting as if coming out of a dream, for a split second, and then plunges back into his painting. Monet stops next to Boudin]

**Monet:** (amazed) Mon Dieu, Mon Dieu! I can smell the ocean!

**Boudin:** (eyes without leaving the canvas) You *are* next to the ocean, as a matter of fact.

**Monet:** Non, non, it's your painting, your painting! Monsieur Boudin! I wish I were the happiest seagull in the world that soars in this sky, above this amazing ocean you painted! How did you create this movement of clouds, of waves, of this alternating blue of sky and ocean?

**Boudin:** One thing at a time, Monet, no hurry. Carefully look how I manage this...

[The two men fell into silence of concentration for several minutes]

**Monet:** (Whisper to himself) The light, the precise moment of light and color. Oh, landscape! The true nature of art! This is a revelation!

**Boudin:** Now, now, my dear, do you see the beauty of en plein air and the necessity of painting the scenery directly on the spot? A painting loses its strength and life when it's done later in a studio.

**Monet:** Oui, oui! I understand, monsieur Boudin! Teach me everything, everything you know about landscapes, about painting! I see now, that I would be a painter no matter what! Because I have fallen in love with nature and I can feel it becoming my destiny!

[Boudin smiled contentedly, eyes still not moving away from his painting]

**Boudin:** Why, I would love to, my dear, if you won't mind to bring along your easel and oil paints and live a "tramp" life with me.

**Monet:** Teacher! I will follow you to the ends of the earth until I learn how to paint like you!

**Boudin:** Very well, Oscar Claude Monet. Bring your canvas and meet me tomorrow morning at this very spot.

[Boudin stops finally to look at the eager face of the young Monet]

Let our journey begin.

L'Homme Papillon<sup>1</sup>: The Butterfly Man

En plein air<sup>2</sup>: In the open air

## Monet: Dreaming of the Wondrous Waves

A whisper of the soft wind. A touch of the of the brisk morning air. A gentle caress of the silken sand. Sprinkles of orange stirred the dreamy ocean. There, the first ray of gold spread across the dark blue horizon. In an instant, clouds came to life. They were the artists of nature, bringing the most brilliant colors into the fresh skyline. In the dazzling light, the first fishing boat set off into the sonorous sounds of the rising waves. Like an ancient hero on the Egyptian clay vase, the fisherman's silhouette steadily moved into the golden orb. Not a replica of Da Vinci, not a replica of Michelangelo, but a person's unique perspective of the mysterious world of Nature, Claude Monet's Impressionism told us the true value of art: cleaving to your own belief.

The eyes of Monet fluttered for the first time on November the 14th, 1840 in Paris. At the age of five, his family moved to Le Havre, Normandy, which was completely different from the stone city Paris. It was the garden of France, a world of forests, orchards, beach, sky and ocean where people drank sunshine, watching seagulls flying across the English Channel. Le Havre became a lifelong motif in Monet's art. The special sentiment Monet had for the country side granted him the ability of creating quick strokes that captured the instant changes of the formidable cliffs, misty fogs, and the unpredictable sea. Looking closer, one could smell the aroma of the sunlight and listen to the chiming of the church bell... In Monet's later years he once said "All but two or three of my paintings have no sea in them and the sea is very much my element" (Kendall 110). Le Havre was the inspiration and the eternal soul of his belief in Impressionism.

Le Havre was also the place where Monet encountered the most important man in his life. That year Monet was sixteen and was already a famous cartoonist in the streets of Le Havre. One afternoon, in a small art-supply store, a man in his thirties complimented Monet's cartoon and

insisted on teaching him how to paint. This man was Eugène Louis Boudin. Boudin loved to paint *en plein air*, “in the open air”, instead of in a gloomy studio later, using mostly imagination and memory. On a sunny day, Boudin invited Monet to paint. Monet couldn’t move his eyes from Boudin’s painting, “It was a revelation to watch the older man slowly capture on canvas the precise look and feel of the sky and the landscape” (Waldron 8). During the several months he spent with Boudin, Monet learned to appreciate the sea, the sky and the light. Boudin’s preference of painting landscapes outdoor using bright, wondrous colors planted the belief of Impressionism inside the young Monet. That was when the grand gate of future opened in front of Claude Monet: “I would be a painter, no matter what. And I understood nature and I learned at the same time to love it” (Waldron 9).

Eugène Boudin wasn’t the only person that affected Monet’s belief. The most haunting but powerful piece among Monet’s art collection was “Camille on Her Deathbed”. Though mainly composed of black, white and grey, the slight pink and yellow in the corner of the painting depicted the beauty of death in a serene and sublime way. Every stroke on this canvas showed Monet’s full dedication and ultimate skills in Impressionism because no one ever deserved such treatment and respect other than his dearest Camille Léonie Doncieux. Monet once recalled this saddest moment in his whole life: “I caught myself watching her tragic forehead, almost mechanically observing the sequence of changing colors which death was imposing on her rigid face. Blue, yellow, grey and so on...” (Rachman 136). Camille was 19 years old when she met Monet in Paris. She had raven hair, soft, white skin and fluttering eyelashes which made her the best candidate of being Monet’s artistic muse. From *The Women in the Green Dress*, *Women in the Garden*, to *Women with a Parasol* and *Camille Monet in Japanese Costume*, the modeling of Camille brought Monet the entrance ticket into the critical

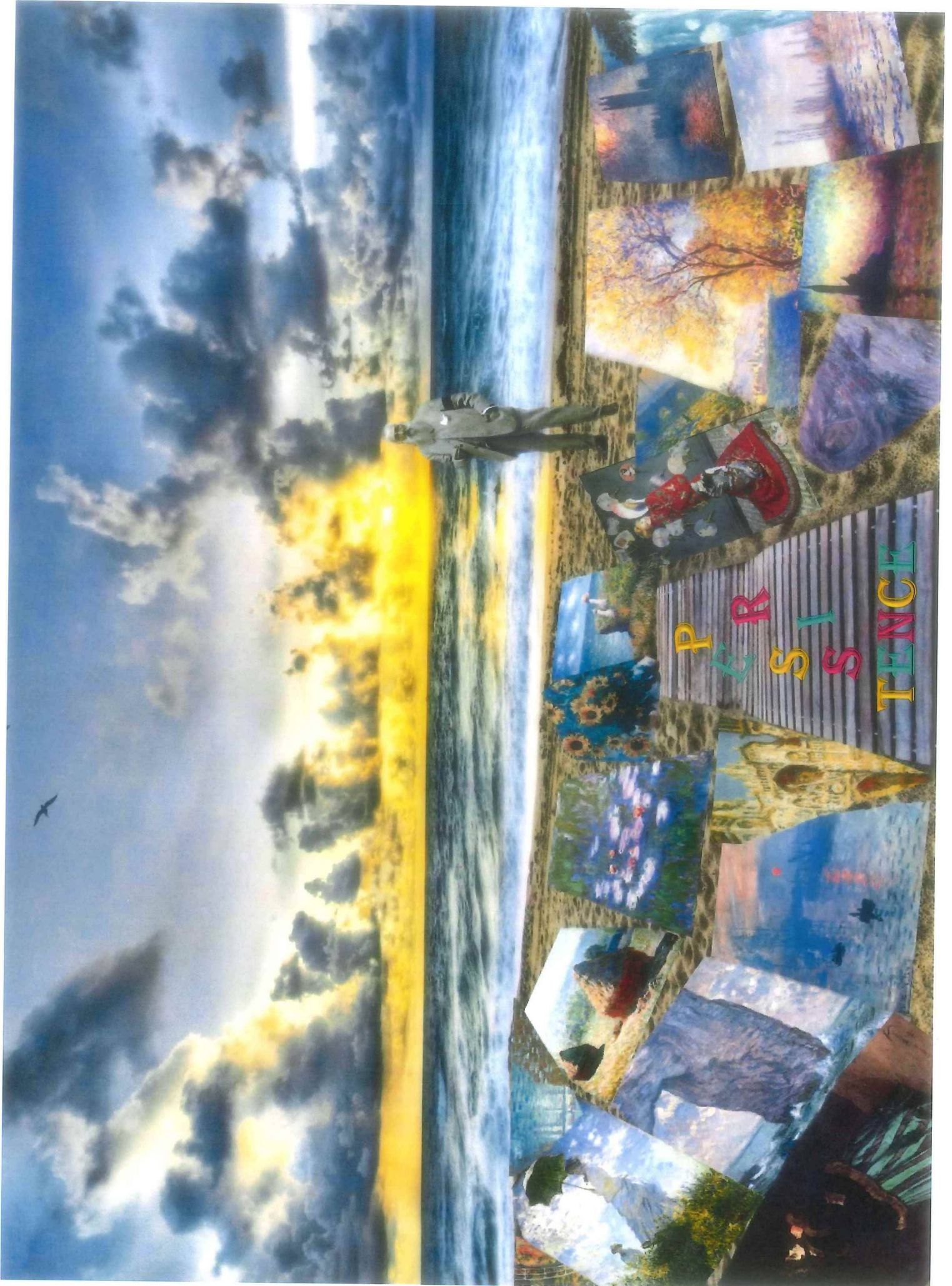


world of Salon de Paris, the most prestigious annual exhibition in Paris back in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Monet's relationship with Camille not only brought him a period of success and compliments from critics, but also changed Monet's Impressionism by adding a sense of humanity and personal sentiment. When Camille was alive, her existence influenced Monet. When Camille died, her absence affected Monet with the same strong impact which, in fact, could only be consoled by a trip to the sapphire ocean waves. It was actually the death of Camille that ended the most painful time in Monet's life and started a brand new period in his art creation with new ideas and themes. Camille was the special woman that mortified and strengthened Monet's belief in Impressionism.

A man cannot sustain his belief with only the exterior factors and Monet's own personalities became the interior factor of Impressionism. His life composed of numerous misfortunes but he survived with his own fortitude. His art style wasn't favored by people at that time. Monet's paintings were rejected ever since the first two success in Salon. Out of poverty, Monet and his friends held their own exhibition which ended with the mocking of critics: "They loaded a gun with paint and fired it at the canvas...the work of lunatics...a 'highly comical exhibition'... Monsieur Monet, the most absurd daubs in that laughable collection of absurdities..." (Waldron 51). Monet didn't care. He regarded the uniqueness and the freshness of his unrestrained strokes as the trueness of instances. They were much better than the "finished" paintings with smooth surface and invisible strokes like Jean Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*. Consequently, Monet became extremely poor and kept borrowing money from his best friend Frédéric Brazille. Unfortunately, Brazille died in 1870 in Prussian War which also destroyed a hidden studio full of Monet's life-saving paintings, leaving Monet struggled alone in desperation. In 1871, Monet's father died and several years after, Camille died. Nevertheless, all these

misfortunes didn't crash Monet's faith in Impressionism. He traveled and painted, changed his themes and started serial paintings: from *Haystacks* to *Floating Ice* to *Rouen Cathedral* to *Water Lilies*, until finally, Salon lost its power and people started to perceive the beauty of Impressionism. Thanks to Monet's persistence, he managed to preserve his belief.

In 1926, René Magritte finished his surrealist work *The Difficult Crossing*, Pablo Picasso ended his *Crystal Period* and started his *Neoclassical* style and Henri Matisse worked in collaboration with Germans, Dutch and even Americans. While the art world was immersing in its revelry, the revolutionary artist, Claude Monet, took his last breath in the chilling winter of Normandy. It was December the 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926. No one knew if he could still see any of his precious colors at that time after the successive visits of Xanthopsia or yellow vision, following Cyanopsia or Blue vision, as if God was still trifling with this great artist at the end of his mostly-tragic life. Nevertheless, his impressions of colors, of Normandy, of *Plein-Air*, of persistent waves, of fleeting moments in light and Nature that live in his 2,500 canvases, have changed our belief in art for evermore.



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All That Blue

*Whisper of sand,*

*Whisper of wave.*

Rushing onto the dreamy shore

From the far side of gold,

Through the unyielding way.

The aquamarine under the cyan ray,

Le Havre, Le Havre

I set sail in thy bay.

*Taste of nature,*

*Taste of pure.*

Turning around, the older man assured:

“Enjoy the ocean flavor,

The beauty of forever.”

His eyes capturing azure,

His face reflecting azure.

Savior, savior

Wisdom in thy amber.

*Sound of serene,*

*Sound of fear.*

Au revoir my dear,

Angles are in your eyes

And the end is drawing near.

I see teal amid Alice’s sea of tears,

Reminding me of Normandy

And my future reappears.

Muse, muse

Thy impression clear yet unclear.

*Changing of colors,*

*Changing of light,*

The iris blue of Venice,

The arctic blue of the Floating Ice,

And indigo Water Lilies under the skylight.

I see success in my twilight

All bright and right.

Flight, flight

My destination is now alight.

*Soul of impression,*

*Soul of my belief.*

“What granted thee the imagination?”

“What true value was that thou drew?”

Listen to the canvases, I will give one clue.

It's the wave,

It's the sea.

Blue, blue

Tout ce qui bleu.

## The Dynamic Turmoil

Splash...

*The ocean...*

Drop...drop...drop...

*Rain...?*

A faint light shot out from the endless dark tunnel in front of me.

*Wait, is that...*

“Camille!” I shouted out. There was the deathbed of my wife at the end of the tunnel.

“Camille!” I sprinted towards the bed. *No, I would never make a mistake with that dreadful bed, it must be her.*

A figure rose from the bed. Slowly, turning...

A pair of bloodshot eyes stared right into mine.

*The colors, they are changing.* I couldn't stop myself from observing the light and shadow reflecting from her rigid face. *I am a slave of the art.*

Camille let out a painful cry. *Non, mon Dieu, non! She has given up the struggle with that terrible disease of a devil.*

She gave me one last smile, a bitter but serene one, and broke into pieces. Pieces of blue, yellow, black and grey...

“Non!” Lungfuls of water were forced out of me. Choking, I woke up with a start, fighting for breath.

“Monsieur, are you alright? Can you hear me? Monsieur?” Two figures appeared in front of me. *Where am I...*

“Who are you?” My voice was unexpectedly hoarse. The two men stopped sharing concerned small talks.

“We are fishermen. Monsieur you fell, remember?” One of the men with darker skin said.

*I fell...I fell into where...?* The rain turned into a bigger summer shower, powerful and fierce as to wash me away.

*Wash me away like the violent waves.*

“I fell into the sea, didn’t I?”

Suddenly, everything came back to me. *The sea almost took my life.*

The sky was gloomy this morning. I was on the third day of my trip to Etretat, a coast near Le Havre. Looking at the mighty rocky cliffs, the violent sea waves underneath and the dark, stormy clouds, an idea came to me: I would paint a storm at sea.

Trying hard to look for the perfect spot to set up my easel, I found a hollow in the cliff. Contented, I lashed down the easel with strong cords and fastened my canvas to the easel. As the rain started to fall, I plunged into the world of painting.

I remembered the rain going violent but I ignored it completely, leaving fast and furious strokes onto the canvas. Then, a wave that was two times my height tore me away

from my canvas, and sent me into the inexorable sea. Trying to breathe, I gulped mouthfuls of salty sea water. In the turmoil, I finally let go of my precious palette and paint brushes. Then I saw something like the rope that tied onto my easel.

*Oh, my painting is trying to save its creator.* I thought as I grab the shiny rope in the dark rain storm. The waves pushed me without mercy but I cling tightly to my string of life. Consciousness was slipping away from me...and soon, my own darkness merged with the storm.

“Where’s my easel, where’s my painting?” I stumbled as I went up onto my feet.

One of the fishermen stared at me for three whole seconds and hesitatedly pointed toward the stony beach. I limped straight onto the beach and there I saw it:

All smudged, canvas tore, easel at the edge of breaking.

Slowly, I leaned over my ruined masterpiece. The giant waves were still hitting the shore. I glanced at the magnificent cliff, its arch looked like a mocking eyebrow.

“You think you have defeated me already?” I stood up, holding my broken painting and stared right at the cliff.

“You think this,” I held up the smudged canvas to the cliff, “this would make me surrender to my ill fate once and for all?”

“Don’t be bizarre. My beautiful cliff.” I snorted, “This only adds more reasons for me to restart it all over again. The art world can never get rid of Claude Monet”

I turned to leave in the rain and shouted:

“Next time, my cliff, I. Will. Paint. You. Down.”



## Note

- ❖ **Unifying element:** waves of Normandy. Normandy's beach was the place where Claude Monet met his mentor Eugène Boudin. When Boudin was teaching Monet, the most inspiring scenery was the sea and the waves with the azure sky hanging above. When Monet's first wife Camille died, the only thing that could distract and heal him was the sea and the waves so he took a trip back to Normandy. People realized later that the waves and sea of Normandy became the soul of Monet's Impressionism since he loved to capture the change of sunlight and the reflecting colors of sea. The wave can also symbolize the persistence of Monet when he struggled to bring Impressionism into the world of art for waves constantly try to reach the seashore without stop or hesitation.
- ❖ **Play script:** The image of waves and sea is displayed inside Boudin's painting, which made Monet exclaim and determine to become a painter.
- ❖ **Keystone essay:** The title of the keystone essay directly mentioned "wave". The imagery in the introduction is derived from Monet's famous painting: *Impression, Sunrise* which implied the deep connection of Monet and sea.
- ❖ **Visual:** The visual is very direct in displaying persistence and wave. The old Claude Monet stand on the beach of Normandy to express his gratitude to the waves and the scenery which inspired him deeply. He laid down myriads of paintings, showing the

waves his work of life and his final success. The visual also hinted the Monet started his journey of art in Normandy and ended it in Normandy too (he died there).

- ❖ **Poem:** The title of the poem “All that blue” is closely related to the color of waves and sea. The persistence of the waves and the impact of Normandy were hinted in the poem too.
  
- ❖ **First personal memoir:** In the memoir, instead of acting as a model for Monet, the waves became an opponent as Monet almost drowned in there. However, the end result of Monet surviving the waves suggested that Monet’s persistence was even greater than the force of waves. This raised Monet’s personality onto a brand new high level at the end of the whole project.