



Micawber

By John Lithgow

One Sunday in springtime, Micawber arose from his Central Park Carousel nest. He straightened his whiskers and polished his nose to set off for the place he loved best.

He scampered past pigeons and poodles and geese, past boathouse and band shell and zoo, past joggers and skaters and mounted police to a palace on Fifth Avenue.

For inside was a splendid collection of art, a sight for a squirrel to treasure, a feast every week for his eyes and his heart which Micawber could savor at leisure.

Through the window he'd gaze at *Van Dyck* and *Van Gogh*, appraise every *Rembrandt* and *Titian*. He would scrutinize *Rubens*, peruse each *Rousseau*, inspect each *Lautrec* and *Cassatt* and *Miro*. He would find a new favorite each time he would go, and nobody charged him admission.

But a stranger appeared this particular day as Micawber peered down through a skylight.

She stood at an easel beneath a *Monet* that depicted a haystack at twilight.

Micawber observed her for hours on end as she copied each texture and shade. He noted the stroke of each brush she'd extend, the rare concentration and care she'd expend.

She'd become his unwitting and unknowing friend by the time the day started to fade.

So he hid in the box where her paints were all stowed while she bicycled home unawares.

Then he sneaked himself into her modest abode as she hauled her equipment upstairs.

Micawber *(continued)*

From the box after midnight the stowaway crept, stretched his limbs and adjusted his eyes. And while his beguiler contently slept, he rifled through her supplies.

Micawber's dull life, with its tedious toils, all at once seemed a hundred times duller, as he straddled a palette and squeezed out some oils and discovered the wonders of color.

He daubed at the canvas with cadmium green, employing his tail as a brush. Then **magenta**, **vermillion**, **ultramarine**. **Alizarin crimson**, and bright **tangerine**: such a radiant rainbow he never had seen — so splashy and lavish and lush!

By morning Micawber was finally done and so proud that he practically fainted. He'd been looking at paintings from day number one, but never a painting he'd painted.

As the sunlight poured in, he was ready to go, leaving everything just as he'd found it. Through the transom he scrambled, his canvas in tow, rolled up with a shoelace tied round it.

A truck trundled by as Micawber alit: on the side it said, Park Sanitation. He bounded aboard it, ignoring the grit and completed his peregrination.

He returned thirty times by the following fall, and the paintings poured forth like a geyser. He fastened them all to his living-room wall and the woman was never the wiser.

So if some July you should chance to pass by a **viridian** Central Park dale,
Look around for a squirrel with a gleam in his eye and some paint on the tip of his tail.

And if you should visit the old Carousel, look up at its uppermost part. Inside, although nobody ever could tell, a talented squirrel continues to dwell.

If you try you can picture it, clear as a bell.

Micawber's Museum of Art