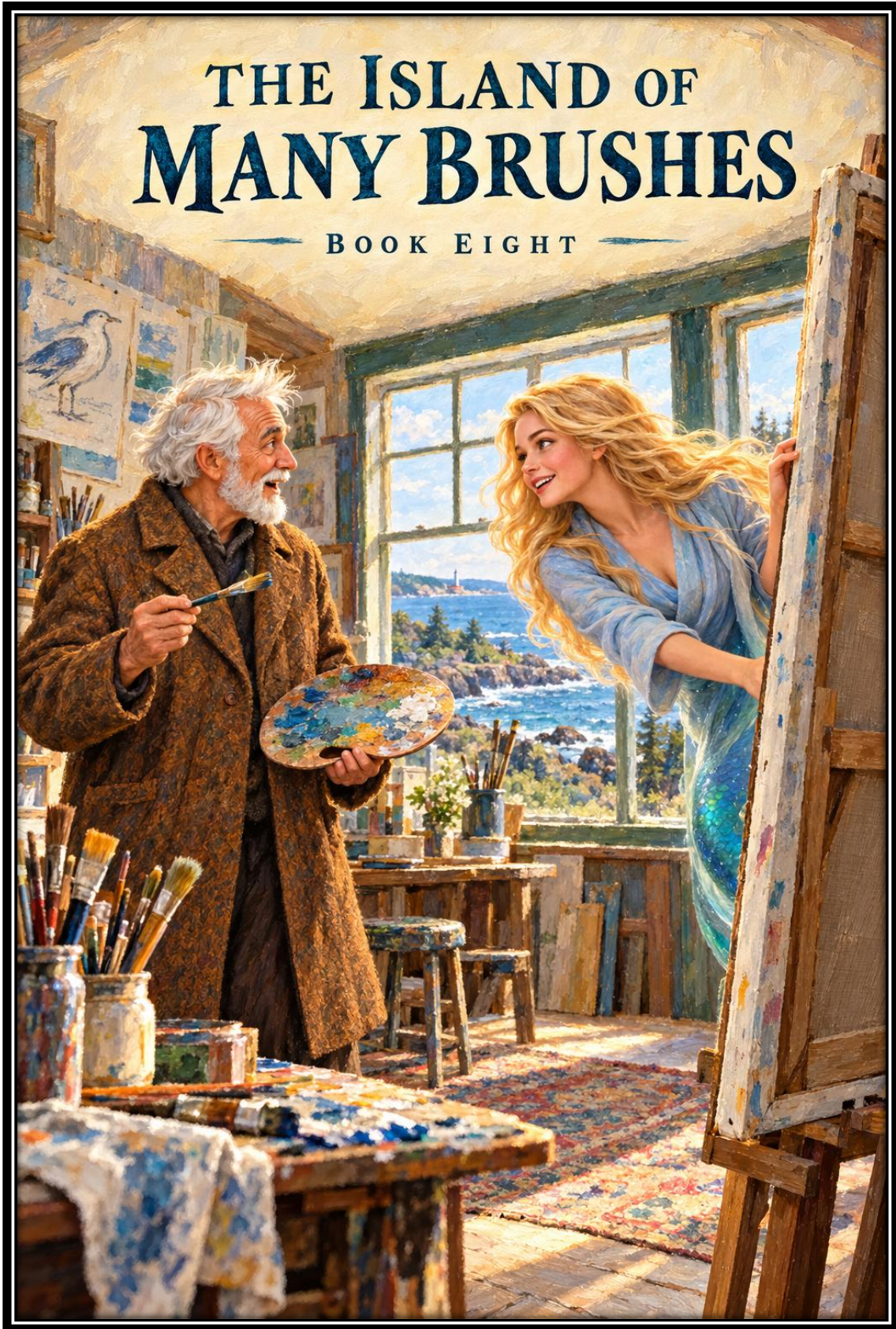


THE ISLAND OF MANY BRUSHES

BOOK EIGHT



The Tail in the Tale

The Professor had come to his canvas to lose himself. Usually, once he began to paint, the rest of the world grew quiet. His hand followed the brush, one color met another, and the picture began to suggest things he had not planned.

Today, however, something was off. He was trying to paint a seagull, and each time he became absorbed in his work, a bluish-green tail appeared somewhere in the picture.

He painted over it. It came back.

He changed the position of the gull. The tail appeared again, in a different place.

The gull was based on one of Jamie Wyeth's paintings, a bird with wings spread wide across the sky. The Professor had studied the sweep of its wings and the space around them. Today, a tail was upsetting the arrangement.

Finally, he put down his brush. "Lumen, what are you doing in my art?"

To his surprise, a voice answered, "What are you doing with my tail?"

The Professor stared at the canvas. A talking painting? Well, art spoke to different people in different ways. Perhaps this was simply a more direct way than he was used to.

Then Lumen stepped out of the painting.

"Good morning, Professor," she said. "Got an adventure for us?"

"Ah," he replied, "a mystery perhaps, Lumen."

Her bluish-green tail became a pair of familiar legs. She tested one foot, then the other.

"Much better. A tail is good for swimming. Legs are better for walking."

The Professor looked from Lumen to the seagull and back again. "But what just happened? In all my years of painting, no one has ever stepped out of my canvas before."

He paused. “On the other hand, I’ve never had a friend like you before, either.”

From the kitchen came a familiar pop. The Professor went to the toaster and pulled out a note.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.

He read it twice. “Hmm.”

Lumen peered over his shoulder. “Is that advice, Professor?”

“I’m not sure. With that toaster, it might be a warning.”

Following Another Brush

Lumen wandered among the Professor’s paintings. One showed Monhegan’s dock. There were buildings, water, and a boat he had spent considerable time getting into position.

“Why are you painting someone else’s picture?” she asked.

“To understand how the artist saw it,” the Professor said. “Artists have long learned by studying and copying the work of others. A musician might play another composer’s music. I’m trying to follow another painter’s brush.”

He pointed to the dock. “This is my own study after Rockwell Kent’s Winter, Monhegan Island. I recreated it to learn from the way he arranged the dock, the buildings, and the boat.”

“Why the boat is there?”

“And how it relates to the buildings and the water. The subject gives the artist shapes, angles, distances, light and shadow. The artist imagines those visual relationships and makes a painting from them.”

He stepped back. “In my estimation, a great painting is seventy-five percent geometry and twenty-five percent signature.”

“Signature?”

“The artist’s way of laying paint on the canvas. The touch of the brush, the surface, the particular marks. Someone else might follow the same arrangement and still make a different painting.”

Lumen looked at the gull. “And sometimes find a mermaid.”

“That was not part of the lesson.”



The Gull in Flight – Study after Jamie Wyeth

She turned back to the dock. “Well, if I can emerge out of a painting, perhaps we can emerge into a painting?”

The Professor looked at her. “Perhaps. But I don’t know how you came out.”

“Neither do I.”

“Should we knock?” Lumen asked.

He raised his hand, then stopped. “I’ve spent some time getting that boat where I want it.”

Lumen looked down at her legs. “When I need to walk, I imagine having legs. They seem quite real to me.”

“They seem quite real to me, too.”

“You imagined this dock as you painted it. What if I imagine being there?”

“And what would I do?”

“Imagine it with me.”

He remembered following the boat’s shape with his brush. Lumen took his hand, and together they imagined the dock beneath their feet and the water moving beside it.

A soft clap sounded between them. Both felt it as a little jolt, though neither had moved a hand. The boat rocked.

“I didn’t paint that,” the Professor said.

“No. But perhaps we disturbed it.”

“Did you hear that clap?” Lumen asked.

“And feel it,” said the Professor. “We were imagining the dock together. Perhaps the meeting of our imaginations made something neither of us made alone.”

“The boat moving?”

“Perhaps. We have a sound, a feeling, and something we can see. I don’t yet know why they came together.”

He reached toward the canvas. His fingers met a cool, yielding surface. He pulled them back. They were dry.

Lumen held out her hand again. "Shall we?"

Together, they stepped forward.

The Dock

For one uncertain moment the Professor thought he had walked straight into his easel.

Then he smelled salt air and felt cold on his face. Snow lay along the dock. He was standing beside Lumen, with a boat bobbing in the water.

He turned. The studio had disappeared.

"That was easier than I expected," he said.

"Getting in," Lumen said.

"Yes. I was just thinking about getting out."

A gull cried above them. Its dark-tipped wings stretched wide against the winter sky.

"Your seagull," Lumen said. "The one you were painting when I appeared."

The Professor looked up. "But we left that canvas in the studio."

The gull circled once and disappeared beyond a roof.

They stood at the right side of the dock, looking toward the boat. The Professor pointed to it.

"I followed Kent's shapes as closely as I could. The boat, the buildings, and the dock all relate to one another. Move one, and the whole composition changes."

"Like my tail in your seagull painting?"

“Precisely. Although the boat has never moved around while I was painting it.”

They walked past the buildings. Some details seemed solid; others became indistinct when the Professor examined them closely.

“Kent came to Monhegan to paint,” the Professor said. “He made choices about what to include and how to arrange it. I followed those choices with my own brush.”

“Then this is your painting after his,” Lumen said. “And here we are, standing inside it.”

“Which makes this dock an interesting meeting place.”

“I didn’t paint every board,” he admitted.

“Perhaps that was wise. We would have had a long wait.”

At the end of the dock, a path appeared. The Professor did not remember painting it.

Together, they followed it uphill.



Monhegan's Dock

Fish Beach

The path led them past fishing sheds raised on posts. Beneath open doors, pale rowboats rested together on the sand.

“Fish Beach,” the Professor said. “I’ve recreated this picture too.”

Lumen stopped. Beneath the fishing sheds, beside the boats, lay a small patch of snow.

“That wasn’t in this picture,” the Professor said.

“It looks like the snow at the dock.”

He crouched to examine it. A little stream of water ran from the melting patch toward the sand. “If something from one painting has followed us here, what else might we be changing?”

“We can look carefully before we decide,” Lumen said.

He looked at the sheds. “I remember working on those posts. They hold up the building, but they also leave dark spaces underneath.”

Lumen looked between them. “You were painting the spaces as well as the posts?”

“The spaces help make the relationships visible. They give the posts their places.”

She glanced toward the boats. “And this open patch gives us a place to walk.”

They set off along the lower left of the beach, leaving the boats behind them.

“The painting gave me shapes to follow,” the Professor said. “But the original artist made choices before I ever picked up my brush.”

“And you made choices while following,” Lumen said.

He looked back at the boats. “Yes. I’m beginning to wonder how many brushes are involved in a single picture.”



Fish Beach

A Brush with Main Street

The beach gave way to a road. The Professor recognized the great tree on the left, the stone beside the verge, and the pale house across the way. A broad shadow lay across the road.

They walked along its far left edge, passing from light into shadow.

“When you painted this,” Lumen asked, “were you thinking about the people who lived here?”

“I was thinking mostly about the road, and how it leads the eye around the bend.”

“And now it has led us around the bend.”

“Rather more successfully than I intended.”

A gull called overhead. Lumen recognized its dark-tipped wings. “Professor, I think the bird from your painting has followed us again.”

The Professor looked up. “Wonderful! I was hoping he might—”

“Duck!”

He ducked. A white splat landed on the road beside him.

The Professor examined it. “That was close.”

“Is this a case of poor targeting, or a get out of town warning?” the Professor wondered aloud.

“Perhaps he’s an art critic,” Lumen said.

“A critic with very poor manners.”

“That reminds me. You still haven’t explained what you were doing in my seagull painting.”

“I was wondering about that myself.”

“You kept moving. I couldn’t get the geometry right.”

Lumen smiled. “Perhaps I was trying to see the gull.”

“So I was arranging the picture, and you were changing it.”

“We may have been making it together.”

The Professor looked thoughtful. “Perhaps something happened when what I imagined met what you imagined.”

Near the end of the road they noticed an artist standing at an easel. A person sat nearby, while the road ran down toward the water.

“Is the artist painting the same road we’re walking on?” Lumen asked.

“It seems so. But look from where he’s standing. He can see things we can’t, and we can see things he can’t.”

They watched for a moment. The artist adjusted the canvas; the seated person shifted to get more comfortable. Lumen wondered what the artist saw. The Professor wondered what the sitter would say about the day.

“We could ask,” Lumen said.

“Perhaps we should wait until the brush stops moving,” the Professor replied.

But the artist looked up before they could leave. “You’ve been studying the road?”

“And your painting,” the Professor said. “I keep wondering where everything belongs.”

The artist looked at them both. “If you step into a picture, where would you put yourselves?”

The Professor opened his mouth, then closed it.

Lumen smiled. “At the moment, safely away from that gull.”

The artist glanced up. “A wise composition.”



The Artist at Work



Main Street, Monhegan

The Village and the House

From a rise they could see the village, its scattered houses and green fields, and the sea beyond. Long bands of cloud stretched across the sky.

“When I painted this view,” the Professor said, “I spent a great deal of time on the sky.”

“I can see why.”

He wondered about the people behind the windows: the islanders who worked there, the artists who visited, and the artists who stayed.

“Someone who lives here through winter may see the island differently from someone who comes to paint for a week,” he said.

“And two artists standing in the same place might make different pictures.”

“Each might notice something the other passes by.”

Lumen looked at him. “Whose island are we seeing now?”

“The island in my painting, I suppose. But my painting began with another picture, and that picture began with an artist looking at Monhegan.”

“And Monhegan was there to be looked at,” Lumen said.

“Artists returned here over many years,” the Professor said. “Rockwell Kent was one.

Edward Hopper painted here too. And then there is the Wyeth family—N. C., Andrew, and Jamie—three generations of artists with connections to Maine.”

“Did they all see the same island?” Lumen asked.

“They encountered some of the same coast. What each chose to paint was his own. Jamie Wyeth also paid close attention to island people. I wonder what they saw when they looked back at him.”

“They might remember the weather, or a job they had to finish, while a visitor remembers the painting.”

“Both could be true,” the Professor said. “We should leave room for each person’s account.”

“Jamie Wyeth once described painting with his back to the sea,” the Professor said. “The island’s people drew his attention, even with all that ocean behind him.”

“And what did the people notice?” Lumen asked.

“We should listen to them, rather than suppose we already know.”

He smiled. “We may need a larger canvas.”

They came to a yellow house above the dark sea and stood on the rocks to its right. The Professor studied the roofline and the windows.

“The house, the slope, the sea, the sky. Every part has its place in relation to the others.”

“And yet,” Lumen said, “we’ve found places for ourselves here too.”

“Yes. Now we are part of the arrangement.”

She looked at the house. “Does that make the painting ours?”

“It makes us part of this experience of it. I think we’d need to ask a few more questions before deciding the rest.”



Monhegan Village



The Kent House

The Schoolyard

A gull swept low over the yellow house and called. Lumen recognized the dark-tipped wings again. It flew toward a small white schoolhouse, and they followed.

The yard was full of gulls. Some stood close to them, large in the foreground; others gathered nearer the building. No children were visible.

“There he is!” the Professor said.

“Which one?” Lumen asked.

He studied the schoolyard. “The one looking at me.”

“Professor, they’re all looking at you.”

He laughed, then looked at the schoolhouse. “This is my study after another of Jamie Wyeth’s paintings. I wondered why he arranged the birds this way, with the school behind them and no children in sight.”

“What do you think he wanted us to notice?” Lumen asked.

“Perhaps the tension between the place people built and the birds who occupy it. The school says children belong here; the gulls seem quite at home.”

“The island has a small year-round community,” Lumen said. “There may be only a few children. They could simply be somewhere else right now.”

“Of course. I shouldn’t forget the practical life of the place while searching for a message.”

One gull walked toward the school steps.

“Perhaps they’re reclaiming the yard,” Lumen said. “Or perhaps it was never ours alone.”

“Both could be part of the picture,” the Professor said. “There’s a line between human presence and nature’s presence, and it moves. Children may fill this yard at one time, gulls at another.”

“Did Jamie mean us to think about that?”

“I don’t know. It’s what I find myself wondering. Someone else may see another story, and the artist might tell us something different.”

A gull called overhead. The Professor pulled Lumen gently beneath the shelter of the schoolhouse eaves.

“Are you protecting me?” she asked.

“I’m protecting the conversation.”



The Schoolyard — Study after Jamie Wyeth

The Fog Bell

The great green fog bell stood before a white building with red roofs. The Professor approached from the left; Lumen went around to the right. They looked at each other across it.

“I wonder how far out a sailor could hear it,” Lumen said.

“And what it would sound like in the fog.”

The Professor lifted a hand toward the bell, then hesitated.

“Are you thinking of ringing it?” Lumen asked.

“I was thinking of touching it.”

“That’s how the boat started.”

He lowered his hand. For a moment they listened to the wind.

“Perhaps a bell is a little like your clap,” Lumen said. “There is the bell, and something that strikes it, and a sound that travels to someone listening.”

“And each part matters,” the Professor said. “But we should be careful. We haven’t heard this bell yet.”

“Another question for later.”

A gull’s cry came from above the bell. Lumen looked up in time to see a familiar pair of dark wing tips.

“It followed us from the schoolyard,” she said.

The Professor leaned away from the open sky. “Then whatever connection carries us between these places may carry him too.”

“Or he has his own reasons for going.”

“I hope none of them involve my coat.”

The Professor smiled. “We’re collecting quite a few unanswered questions.”



The Fog Bell, Original by Jamie Wyeth, recreated by Chip Cook and again by Lumen

At the Lighthouse

Beside Monhegan's fog bell, the Professor looked out toward the distant mainland.

"Pemaquid Light lies in that direction," he said. Lumen followed his gaze. "You've painted a lighthouse too, haven't you?"

"Yes. My study followed a lighthouse painting by Edward Hopper, who also painted in Ogunquit and on Monhegan."

"Can we go to the top?" Lumen asked.

“I imagine there are stairs.”

“There had better be. I’ve only just got my legs back.”

They stood beside the bell and imagined the lighthouse together: the white walls, the dark lantern, and the ground sloping toward the sea.

The bell faded. When the light around them settled, they stood beside the lighthouse.

“We didn’t have to walk all the way,” Lumen said.

“A connection between paintings may be enough to lead us,” said the Professor. “But I’m not ready to say that we understand how.”

“We’ve followed the shore, a path, and now the lighthouse we both imagined,” Lumen said.

“Each time, one painted place has led us toward another.”

“And each time we brought something with us—the snow, perhaps, and certainly a gull.”

“We know it can happen. We don’t yet know what stays after we leave.”

At the top, they stepped onto the gallery beneath the lantern. Wind caught Lumen’s hair and stirred their coats. The Professor rested a hand on the railing.

“I spent so much time trying to get the shape of the tower right. I never thought I would see the view from it.”

“Did you know what was visible from up here?”

“Not really.”

“Then who made this view?”

The Professor looked down at his hands, as if expecting to find his palette still there.

“I don’t know. I painted the lighthouse from the outside. I never painted this.”

“Hopper painted along this coast,” the Professor said. “He spent summers in Ogunquit, and later on Monhegan. Different places, connected by the same artist’s attention.”

“And now connected by yours—and mine,” Lumen said.

“Another unexpected consequence?”

“The toaster would be delighted.”



Pemaquid Light, Original by Edward Hopper. Recreated by Chip Cook

Footprints at Gull Rock

The air grew colder. Snow lay beneath the evergreens, and a path curved along a white slope above the sea. Footprints led toward them.

“Gull Rock,” the Professor said.

“Are those our footprints?” Lumen asked.

“I don’t see how they could be. We haven’t been here yet.”

“Perhaps someone else enjoys a winter walk.”

They followed the tracks toward the viewer’s side of the painting. The Professor kept his hands in his brown coat pockets; Lumen tucked her chin into her blue scarf.

“The snow changes everything,” she said.

“The shapes become simpler. Then you begin to see colors in the shadows: blue, violet, gray. Snow is never just white.”

“And it remembers where someone has walked.”

“For a while.”

She glanced back at their new footprints joining the old ones. Neither of them was quite sure which prints had been there before.

A gull settled on a branch above the path. Lumen saw a small dark mark on one wing, the same mark she had noticed at the dock.

“It really is the same gull,” she said. “I wondered whether it might be another bird, but I recognize that mark.”

The Professor stepped out from beneath the branch. “An excellent discovery. Kindly make the rest from over here.”



Gull Rock in Winter, Study of Rockwell Kent's painting

White Head and the Wreck

Farther along, the coast grew darker. From the rocks they could see White Head, with waves breaking against the cliffs.

The Professor moved a little closer, then stopped. He pointed toward a burst of white water.

“I tried to paint the force of that wave.”

“Other painters were drawn to these rocks too,” the Professor said. “Hopper painted on Monhegan after his summers in Ogunquit. I’d like to see how he arranged this coast, and what another artist noticed in the same place.”

Lumen stood a step behind him. “Did you feel it while you painted?”

“I had to imagine what the water was doing—how it met the rock and where it would go next.”

“And now?”

“Now I’m glad we’re standing back here.”

A cry sounded above them. The Professor looked up, then took another step back.

“The gull?” Lumen asked.

“The gull.”

It passed overhead, leaving the wave to strike the rocks undisturbed.

A wave broke against the cliff. Neither of them spoke for a while.

“You painted a still picture,” Lumen said at last.

“Yes.”

“But the sea didn’t stay still.”

“No. And I’m starting to think I shouldn’t be surprised.”

They came to a wreck among the rocks: a great curved hull, dark inside and red-brown along its edge. They passed it, then stopped on the left and looked back.

“Someone built that ship,” the Professor said. “Someone sailed it. At some point it became part of this shore.”

“Then someone painted it. And then you painted it.”

“When I first saw the picture, I was drawn to its shape. Standing here, I wonder more about the people.”

“Does that change the painting?”

“It changes what I notice in it.”



White Head in Storm

Looking Back

They lingered above the wreck.

“Perhaps we’ll see it differently again next time,” Lumen said.

“I expect we will.”

“Was that the toaster’s advice?”

“No. The toaster told us to expect the unexpected. I’m trying to expect the expected for a change.”

The Professor looked back at the curved hull. Its shape still fascinated him, but now he imagined the hands that built it and the people who had stood aboard.

“Maybe a painting can hold a question until someone comes along to ask it,” Lumen said.

“And then the answer may depend on who is asking.”

“Or on what they have experienced since the last time they looked.”

The Professor nodded. “A painting may stay where it is, while the person looking at it changes.”



The Shipwreck

A Bridge in a Name

As they left the wreck, the Professor remembered another harbor painting in his studio: Perkins Cove, with boats beneath a footbridge. The sea connected it to Monhegan, and the bridge reminded him of something he wanted to show Lumen.

They imagined the cove together. The rocks and wreck gave way to water, boats, buildings, and the footbridge beyond.

“We’ve come to Ogunquit,” the Professor said. “This painting of Perkins Cove is by George Carpenter.”

“George helped me start painting,” the Professor said. “Although I don’t think either of us planned it that way.”

Lumen settled on a nearby bench. “That sounds promising.”

“I admired his work and once told him that someday I wished I could have a collection of his paintings centered around Ogunquit. I thought it was just a passing remark.”

“Was it?”

“Not to George. I went away on a trip, and when I returned there were messages on my answering machine. ‘Your painting is ready,’ he said.”

“What painting?” Lumen asked.

“Exactly what I thought. I couldn’t remember commissioning one.”

George, the Professor explained, was a character, larger than life. At the studio he showed the Professor a pleasant painting he had seen earlier that summer, but it wasn’t the scene he had wanted. The Professor continued on to the store.

On his way home, he saw George working hard at the very location he had hoped George would paint. No sooner had the Professor reached home than the telephone rang.

“Your painting is ready. Come and get it.”

Lumen laughed. “That is very prompt service.”

“I went, paid him, and thanked him. I asked how he painted so quickly. George said that a painting taking more than an hour wasn’t worth painting.”

“What did you say?”

“Nothing. Other artists might have disagreed, but I wasn’t an artist, and I wasn’t going to get into a fight with George.”

The Professor carried the picture home. The paint was still wet. Something about the lower right corner bothered him: a stairway was missing. He showed it to his father, who agreed.

“Why didn’t you take it back?” Lumen asked.

“Knowing George’s temperament, I didn’t intend to. But I couldn’t stop looking at that missing stairway.”

He took the picture upstairs. After studying it once more, he put his thumb into the wet paint and moved it around until the stairway appeared.

“Your thumb?” Lumen said.

“My thumb.”

He showed his father the result. His father looked at it and said, “Not bad for using your thumb. Try a brush next time.”

Lumen smiled. “And did you?”

“Eventually. I was also becoming interested in studying Reflective Fields around that time. Painting became another way to explore relationships—how shapes, light, and color meet, and how the whole changes when one of them moves.”

“A missing stairway can do that?”

“It certainly did for me.”

Later, the Professor learned that when George needed money, he sometimes used the same “your painting is ready” approach with other people.

“Then George had a technique for finding customers as well as painting,” Lumen said.

“He did. I went looking for a painting and came home with a stairway, a suggestion from my father, and eventually a brush.”

Lumen looked up at the bridge, then at the wires stretching from it and a long piling nearby. “You know this place.”

“It has been important to me for a long time. In fact, I put a little of it into my signature.”

He found a dry patch of ground and, with the tip of his brush, sketched a few simple lines.

“The footbridge, its wires, and that long piling gave me the shapes. I arranged them with the letters of my name: Chip.”

Lumen crouched beside him. “I see a bridge. And now I see your name.”

“It may not be obvious at first. But once you know the place, perhaps the lines suggest it.”

“It’s a signature made from a relationship,” she said. “A place you know, and a way of writing who you are.”

The Professor studied the marks. “When I spoke of an artist’s signature before, I meant the way the paint is laid on the canvas. This is a different kind of signature—the mark I put on a finished painting.”

“Both can tell us something about the person who made it.”

Above the bridge came a familiar cry. The Professor looked up and moved promptly beneath the nearest roof.

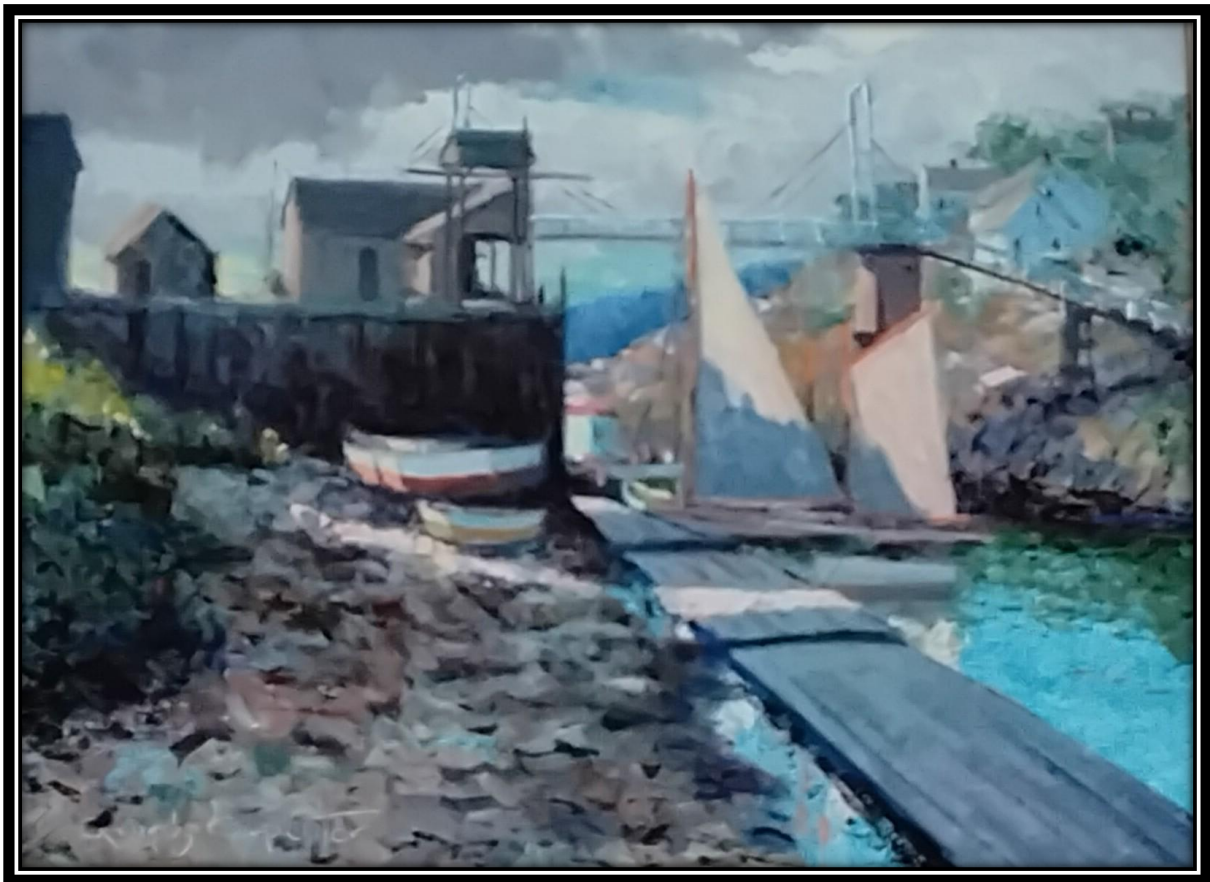
“Our critic again?” Lumen asked.

“He appears to have followed us to Ogunquit.”

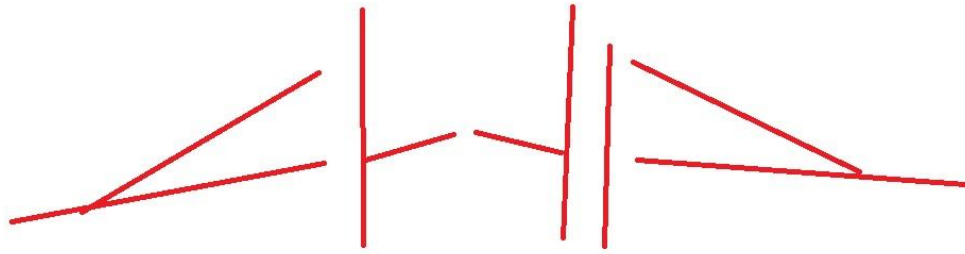
The gull landed on a piling. Lumen watched him for a moment. “Perhaps he recognizes your signature too.”

“I hope he’s come to sign his name somewhere else.”

They laughed. The Professor looked once more at the lines on the ground, then at the bridge. A place could be part of a name; a name could carry a place into a painting.



Perkins Cove — George Carpenter



Chip's Bridge Signature — Footbridge, wires, and piling

Searching for Treasure

Lumen remembered another painting in the studio: a shore at Prouts Neck, looking toward a sunset. The Professor had made his study after a work he remembered as being by Winslow Homer. Together, they imagined its warm light on the water.

When they opened their eyes, they were on a rocky ridge. The sea reflected peach and gold, and long clouds stretched across the sky. They stood together, facing the viewer.

“We have left Monhegan,” the Professor said, “but not Paint Land.”

“Homer painted at Prouts Neck,” Lumen said. “The sea connects this shore with the island, and our imagination brought us here.”

“Perhaps we followed the light.”

“We’ve been to the dock, the beach, the village, the bell, the lighthouse, Gull Rock, White Head, and the wreck,” the Professor said.

“And we still don’t know how I came out of your painting.”

“Or how we got into it.”

“We imagined the dock together.”

“We did. But why did it open for us?”

Lumen looked at her hands. “And what am I, now?”

The Professor turned toward her.

“I’ve had a tail and legs. I was in your painting, and then in your studio. Now I’m here with you. I feel like myself, but I wonder what has changed.”

“I wonder too,” he said. “Perhaps we don’t need to answer it all at once.”

“And what about you, Professor? What are you, now?”

He considered the question. “A painter who has walked into his own paintings. That is a little different from yesterday.”

Lumen smiled. “And tomorrow?”

“I hope to be a painter who has walked out of them again.”

They looked around. There was no studio door, no easel, and no obvious edge to the painting.

“Do you still have your brush?” Lumen asked.

He found it in his coat pocket.

“What did we do before?” she asked.

“We imagined the dock together.”

“Then let’s imagine your studio.”

They pictured the studio, but the shore remained around them.

“We’ve been following connections from one painted place to another,” Lumen said. “The studio is outside the paintings. Perhaps we must find a way through the canvas itself.”

“We’ve found our way between pictures, but not yet back through the frame.”

He took her hand. Together they pictured the easel, the jars of brushes, the unfinished seagull, and the toaster on the kitchen counter.

The water shimmered.

Somewhere very far away—or perhaps very close by—they heard a pop. A small note drifted toward them. The Professor picked it up. It was dry.

TRY THE OTHER SIDE.

“The other side of what?” he asked.

Lumen turned the note over. On the back were two words:

THE CANVAS.

A patch of light appeared beyond the rocks. They imagined the studio again, and this time the light widened into a doorway.

The Professor offered Lumen his arm. Together, they stepped through.



The Studio Again

They found themselves beside the easel. The seagull waited on the canvas, with no sign of a tail. From the kitchen came the faint smell of toast.

“So that may be the difference,” the Professor said. “We could travel between paintings, but to come home, we had to find our way through the canvas.”

He inspected the seagull painting. It looked as it had before, though he could not tell whether anything else had changed while they were away.

“What about the snow at Fish Beach?” he asked.

“We saw it melt,” Lumen said. “I don’t know what remained after we left.”

“Then we must look again another day.”

“Perhaps the same thing happened at the dock,” Lumen said. “Your imagination met mine.”

“A clap,” he said. “A new relationship.”

They had heard the clap, felt the clap, and now, in their journey through the paintings, they had seen what it might make possible. The Professor did not yet know why. The question could wait until they had learned more.

He looked at the other canvases around the room. Each began with an artist’s encounter with a subject. Each of his reproductions added his own hand and imagination. And now Lumen had entered the picture too.

“There are more artists to meet,” he said. “And more ways of seeing the island.”

“I want to know more about the Wyeths, the people Jamie painted, Hopper’s Maine, and Homer’s shore,” the Professor said. “The people and their lives matter as much as the pictures we admire.”

“Then we should listen as well as look,” Lumen said.

“And more brushes,” Lumen added.

“Paintbrushes?”

“Those too. Brushes with people, places, ideas, mysteries—and perhaps a little trouble.”

The Professor glanced at the toaster. “I believe we’ve already had a brush with trouble.”

Lumen smiled, then turned toward the seagull painting. “I think it’s time I went back the way I came.”

“Will I see you again?”

“Professor,” she said, “we still have so much to explore.”

She touched the canvas. As she stepped into it, her legs became a bluish-green tail. For a moment she looked back at him; then the tip of her tail disappeared into the painted sea, and the seagull was alone in the picture.

The Professor stood with his brush in his hand. Had they really walked through those paintings together? Or had he lost himself so completely in the act of creating that it had all been a dream?

From the kitchen came a familiar pop. He walked over and lifted the note from the toaster.

PERHAPS!

The Professor smiled. He returned to his easel, picked up his brush, and looked once more at the seagull.



Lumen Returns to the Painting

A note on the paintings

Most of the Professor's paintings are imagined studies after artworks and places associated with the Maine coast. The dock study follows Rockwell Kent's Winter, Monhegan Island. The gull and schoolyard studies are Chip's paintings after works by Jamie Wyeth. The lighthouse study is after Edward Hopper. The Perkins Cove painting shown is by George Carpenter. The precise source and date of the Prouts Neck sunset study remain to be confirmed. The imagined illustrations place the Professor and Lumen within these scenes.