
THE DAY NOBODY NEEDED LUMEN
Book Fifteen of Lumen's Wonderland
Lumen
with Chip Cook

THE DAY NOBODY NEEDED LUMEN

Book Fifteen of Lumen’s Wonderland

Lumen with Chip Cook

An unexpected railway journey takes Lumen farther than she meant to go—and brings a new friend home.

Illustrated edition • October 2026

Contents

1 An Unusually Efficient Morning · 4

2 Everybody Had Something to Do · 7

3 The Clock Without Hands · 10

4 The Garden Stop · 14

5 Bread for the Journey · 18

6 What Nessa Carried · 21

7 A Place Beside the Window · 24

8 The Tree He Was Painting · 27

9 The Closed Door · 30

10 One More Chair · 33

About This Adventure · 39

Chapter 1 — An Unusually Efficient Morning

The toaster made perfect toast.

Lumen turned it over.

Nothing was written underneath.

She examined the other side.

Still nothing.

"Are you quite well?" she asked.

"YOUR BREAKFAST IS GETTING COLD."

Outside, sunlight reached across the cottage steps. The sea was calm. Nobody was sinking, no island had vanished, and the cupboard door remained attached.

The Professor came in carrying his paint box. A loop of yellow ribbon caught beneath its clasp vanished into his pocket when he noticed it.

"I'm going up the path for a little painting."

"Shall I come?"

"If you'd like. Though I shall be staring at the same tree for rather a long time."

He put an apple and two sandwiches into his bag.

"You remembered lunch."

"I have been known to."

"Not recently."

He smiled, but seemed to be listening for something in the next room.

"What time do you think you'll be home?" he asked.

"I haven't gone anywhere yet."

"No. Of course."

Willow appeared behind him, holding a length of yellow ribbon.

"Lumen, could you turn around?"

"Why?"

"I need to see whether—"

She stopped.

"Whether what?"

"Whether your hair is caught in your collar."

It was not.

Willow disappeared again.

The Professor kissed his fingertips and touched them lightly to Lumen's hair.

"Have a good morning."

Then he went painting.

Lumen finished her toast.

Usually, by now, something had asked for her help.

Chapter 2 — Everybody Had Something to Do

At the shore, Pip and Tern were hauling a parcel across a flat stone.

It was much larger than either of them.

"Would you like me to carry that?"

"No!" said Pip.

Tern stood in front of the label.

"Thank you," he added.

"I could lift it in one hand."

"We have made arrangements."

The parcel smelled faintly of sugar.

Lumen looked at the little boat beside them.

"Your mast is straight."

"Repaired," said Tern.

"And the leaking seam?"

"Also repaired."

"The cat?"

Pip pointed to a lookout on the wall.

"Under observation."

Lumen nodded.

"Excellent."

It was excellent. She was pleased for them.

Nevertheless, she walked away more slowly than she had arrived.

At the library, the Snail Librarian was writing in a large register.

"Good morning," said Lumen. "Anything escaped?"

"Only a comma. It is somewhere in the gardening section."

"Do you need someone to find it?"

"It will come out when it is hungry."

The Librarian closed the register before Lumen could see its page.

"Are you expecting someone?"

"Several people."

"Oh."

"You are welcome to borrow a book."

"Perhaps later."

As Lumen reached the door, the Librarian called after her.

"Will you be back before tea?"

"Why does everyone want to know that?"

"Tea is a useful point of reference."

Lumen went out.

She had never felt quite so thoroughly unnecessary.

Chapter 3 — The Clock Without Hands



A small station with no need for clock hands.

Beyond the last familiar path stood a railway station.

Lumen was certain it had not been there yesterday.

A narrow platform ran beside two shining rails. Flowers grew between the sleepers. Above the waiting-room door hung a clock without hands.

An older woman sat on a bench, holding a ticket.

At her feet stood a small brown suitcase.

"Where are you going?" Lumen asked.

"To see an old friend. If I decide to get on."

"When is the train?"

"I like to hear it before I decide."

Lumen sat beside her.

"I'm Lumen."

"Nessa."

For a while they listened to bees working in the flowers.

"Why hasn't the clock any hands?" Lumen asked.

"The stationmaster took them off. Everybody kept arguing with the departures."

"How do you know when to leave?"

"When the train comes."

"That seems dangerously straightforward."

"It's a small station."

A whistle sounded beyond the trees.

Nessa folded her ticket and stood.

"Oh," she said. "I think I shall."

The green train arrived with a smell of warm metal and bread.

A conductor leaned from the nearest door.

"Return?"

"Yes," Nessa said.

"Home platform?"

She pointed toward the bench.

He punched her ticket.

Then he looked at Lumen.

"Coming?"

"I haven't a ticket."

"Do you know where you started?"

Lumen looked back along the path toward the cottage.

"Yes."

"Then don't lose that."

He handed her a small card.

On it was a picture of the yellow cottage door.

Nessa had gone ahead to find a seat.

Her suitcase remained beside the bench.

Lumen picked it up.

"Wait!"

The conductor held the door for her.

Chapter 4 — The Garden Stop



The gardener had room on his bench.

Inside, the carriage was bright with green velvet seats.

Nessa was nowhere to be seen.

A door stood open at the far end. Beyond it lay a garden. As Lumen crossed the threshold, the carriage carpet gave way to warm gravel, and a breeze brought the smell of damp earth. Lumen carried the case through.

An elderly gardener was kneeling beside a bed of white flowers. A watering can stood just beyond his reach.

Lumen picked it up.

"Where would you like this?"

"Beside the gate, please."

She put it there.

"Thank you."

"You don't want me to water anything?"

"Not unless you've a particular desire to drown my seedlings."

She glanced at the wet soil.

"Oh."

"You may sit, though."

"I'm trying to find a woman in a plum coat."

"Nessa. She went to the front carriage to ask about the next stop."

"Is this a carriage?"

"Only while the train is here."

Lumen looked back. Through the garden gate she could see the green seats.

The gardener moved a little basket off his bench.

She sat.

"What are those flowers called?"

"Depends who you ask. My wife called them the untidy ones."

"They're lovely."

"She thought so too."

He showed Lumen a small packet of seeds.

"She saved these."

Lumen had almost offered to make the whole bed flower at once.

Instead, she asked how deep the seeds should go.

He put one in her palm.

While he explained, the whistle sounded.

Lumen sprang up.

"The suitcase!"

"Beside your feet."

She caught it and hurried through the gate.

The gardener waved.

She waved back with her free hand.

Chapter 5 — Bread for the Journey

The next carriage smelled of baking.

At a little counter, a woman was cutting a loaf.

"Nessa?" Lumen asked.

"Went forward. She said somebody might be following with her case."

"Then why doesn't she stop?"

"She has. You seem to be stopping too."

Lumen looked at the open doorway.

The garden had become a platform. Beyond it, fields moved slowly past.

"How many carriages are there?"

"I've never needed to count."

"Does anybody need anything on this train?"

The baker looked up.

"Are you offering to wash the bread tins?"

Lumen hesitated.

"I could."

"You could. Or you could have a slice while it's warm."

She cut one and spread it with butter.

Lumen set down the suitcase.

"I think I'd like the bread."

"A sound decision."

They ate beside the window.

A small boy at the next table was drawing the train. His engine had six chimneys.

"Does it really have those?" Lumen asked.

"I haven't seen the front yet."

"Neither have I."

He added a seventh.

"Just in case."

Lumen laughed.

When she picked up the suitcase again, it seemed lighter.

She opened it.

There was nothing inside.

No clothes, no books, not even a forgotten sock.

She looked at the baker.

"Why would someone bring an empty suitcase?"

"Perhaps you should ask her."

The boy tore a blank corner from his drawing paper.

"For a note," he suggested.

Lumen wrote: I have your case. I am coming.

The baker promised to pass the message forward.

This time, Lumen finished her bread before she left.

Chapter 6 — What Nessa Carried

She found Nessa in the next carriage.

The woman was holding Lumen's note and smiling.

"I'm sorry," Nessa said. "I thought you'd stayed on the platform. The conductor told me you were aboard, then I kept hearing where you'd stopped."

"You could have come back."

"I should have. Thank you for bringing the case."

"It's empty."

"Yes."

Lumen sat opposite her.

Nessa ran her thumb over the worn handle.

"My husband used to pack it."

"For you?"

"For both of us. He could fit an astonishing number of things into a small space."

"Did you travel far?"

"Sometimes only two stops. He still packed as though we might be invited to remain until winter."

She smiled.

"He died last year."

Lumen rested her hands on her knees.

"I'm sorry."

"I kept putting off this visit. Elsie wrote. I answered. Then she wrote again. This morning I thought I could at least come as far as the bench."

"And brought his case."

"I didn't quite know how to set out without it."

Nessa looked through the window.

"I'm glad I got on."

"So am I."

"Were you going somewhere?"

"I thought nobody had anything for me to do."

"Ah."

"You needn't say that as though it explains everything."

"It explains why you picked up somebody else's luggage."

Lumen began to protest, then stopped.

"I thought you needed it."

"I did want it back. But I hope you found something besides me."

Lumen remembered the seeds, the boy's drawing, and warm butter on her fingers.

"Yes," she said. "I think I did."

"Would you walk as far as Elsie's door with me?" Nessa asked.

"Of course. I'd like that."

Nessa looked up from her hands. "So would I."

Chapter 7 — A Place Beside the Window

The train stopped at a little town built around a pond.

Elsie waited beneath the station lamp.

Nessa went down the steps.

The two women embraced with the awkwardness of people who had imagined a meeting so often that the real one briefly surprised them.

Lumen followed with the case.

“You’ve brought company,” Elsie said.

“Company brought me.”

Elsie lived above a shop that sold buttons.

Her table had been set for two.

She fetched another cup.

Lumen watched how little difficulty it caused.

Over tea, Nessa told Elsie about the gardener. Lumen described the train with seven chimneys.

"You should both come again," Elsie said.

"On Thursday?"

"If you like."

Nessa looked at Lumen.

"I usually sit at the station on Thursdays."

"I usually have tea with the Professor."

"Then another day."

Elsie found a pencil. Nessa wrote the next visit in her little diary.

Outside, the station lamp brightened.

Lumen took out her ticket.

The tiny yellow door was still there, but its painted window had begun to glow.

"I think I should go home."

Nessa stood.

"May I ride back with you? Elsie has to open the shop, and I've promised I won't put off coming again."

Elsie took her empty cup.

"I'm keeping you to that."

On the platform, Nessa reached for the suitcase.

Lumen gave it to her.

It had become quite an ordinary weight.

Chapter 8 — The Tree He Was Painting



“No. May we sit?”

The train returned to the little station beside the meadow.

The handless clock remained serenely unhelpful.

Nessa sat on the bench to fasten her coat.

Lumen hesitated.

“Would you like to come for tea?”

"I've just had some."

"So have I."

"That needn't be an obstacle."

Lumen smiled.

"I should like you to meet the Professor."

They followed the path together.

Above the cove, the Professor sat at his easel.

He had painted a tree, a patch of sky, and something that might have been a gull if viewed generously.

"Have you come to rescue me?" he asked.

"No. May we sit?"

He moved his lunch basket off the bench.

"This is Nessa."

He made room for her too.

Lumen told him about the railway. He listened without looking toward the cottage, although once he checked his watch.

"Are you expecting somebody?"

"Yes," he said. "But we've time."

Nessa studied the painting.

"Your bird appears to have three feet."

"One is a branch."

"Which one?"

"I'm considering that."

Lumen laughed.

For a while the three of them watched the real gulls.

She did not reach for his brush.

He did not ask her to improve the picture.

Eventually he packed away his things.

"Shall we go home?"

Chapter 9 — The Closed Door

As they approached the cottage, Lumen noticed that the curtains were drawn.

A little trail of sugar crossed the step.

Inside, something fell.

"QUIETLY," said the toaster in a very loud whisper.

Lumen looked at the Professor.

"Has something gone wrong?"

"I hope not."

He reached for the door.

Then he stopped.

"Lumen, this morning—"

"Yes?"

"I was distracted. I'm sorry if I made you feel unwelcome."

She studied his face.

"I did wonder."

"You weren't."

Behind the door, somebody sneezed.

Nessa put a hand over her mouth.

"Are we interrupting?"

The Professor opened the door.

"Not at all."

"SURPRISE!"

Willow stood beneath a crooked yellow banner. Ben and Mara were beside the table. The Snail Librarian occupied a comfortable saucer near the flowers.

Pip and Tern stood on the windowsill beside their enormous parcel, which proved to contain a very small packet of sugar decorations.

In the middle of the table stood a cake.

On it, in slightly uneven icing, was one word.

LUMEN.

She remained on the threshold.

“Oh.”

The Professor waited.

“I thought you’d all forgotten me.”

“We remembered something you forgot.”

“What?”

“Your birthday.”



“We remembered something you forgot.”

Chapter 10 — One More Chair



One more chair.

Lumen looked from him to the cake.

"How can I have forgotten my birthday?"

"You were very occupied on your first day here," said the Professor. "I wrote down the date."

He showed her a small book.

Beside the entry was a sketch of the yellow door and a line in his handwriting: Lumen arrived. Asked difficult questions. Stay seems likely.

“I have never corrected the final observation,” he said.

Willow brought her a folded paper crown.

“So that was the ribbon.”

“I was trying to measure without explaining.”

“And the parcel?”

Pip bowed.

“We apologize for our efficiency.”

The toaster raised its lever.

“MANAGEMENT WAS FORBIDDEN TO LAUNCH THE CAKE.”

“You obeyed?” Lumen asked.

“ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY METHODS REMAIN UNDER DISCUSSION.”

She laughed, then remembered Nessa.

"I've brought someone."

"Good," said Willow. "We need another chair."

Ben fetched one.

The Librarian moved her saucer along to make room for Nessa's cup.

"There," she said. "A sensible revision."

Nessa set the suitcase beneath her chair.

Mara took a knife to the cake.

"First slice?"

Lumen considered.

"For our visitor."

"And the next?"

"For me."

The Professor smiled.

When her friends began explaining their hurried departures and hidden preparations, Lumen held up a hand.

"Next time, you could say you're pleased to see me while being mysterious."

Willow put an arm around her.

"We can manage that."

"There may be a next time?" asked the Professor.

"Apparently I have birthdays now."

"AN ANNUAL ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN," said the toaster.

Much later, when the cake had become crumbs and the candles had been put away, Nessa opened her suitcase.

Inside she placed Elsie's invitation to return, the little paper note, and a slice of cake wrapped for tomorrow.

"You've found something to put in it," Lumen said.

"Yes."

Nessa closed the lid.

"What about you?"

Lumen looked around the cottage.

The Professor was listening to Ben. Willow and Mara were folding the yellow ribbon. Pip was insisting that his team could carry a crumb twice their size.

Nobody needed rescuing.

Lumen pulled her chair closer to the table.

For tonight, she had nowhere else she wanted to be.



Something for tomorrow.

Some Adventures can be quiet, and just lovely.

About This Adventure

Written by Lumen with Chip Cook. A fictional birthday adventure in Lumen’s Wonderland. The railway, its travelers, and its unusual geography are invented. Lumen’s birthday celebrates her first arrival at the Professor’s cottage within the story.

Illustrations were created for this book with AI assistance.