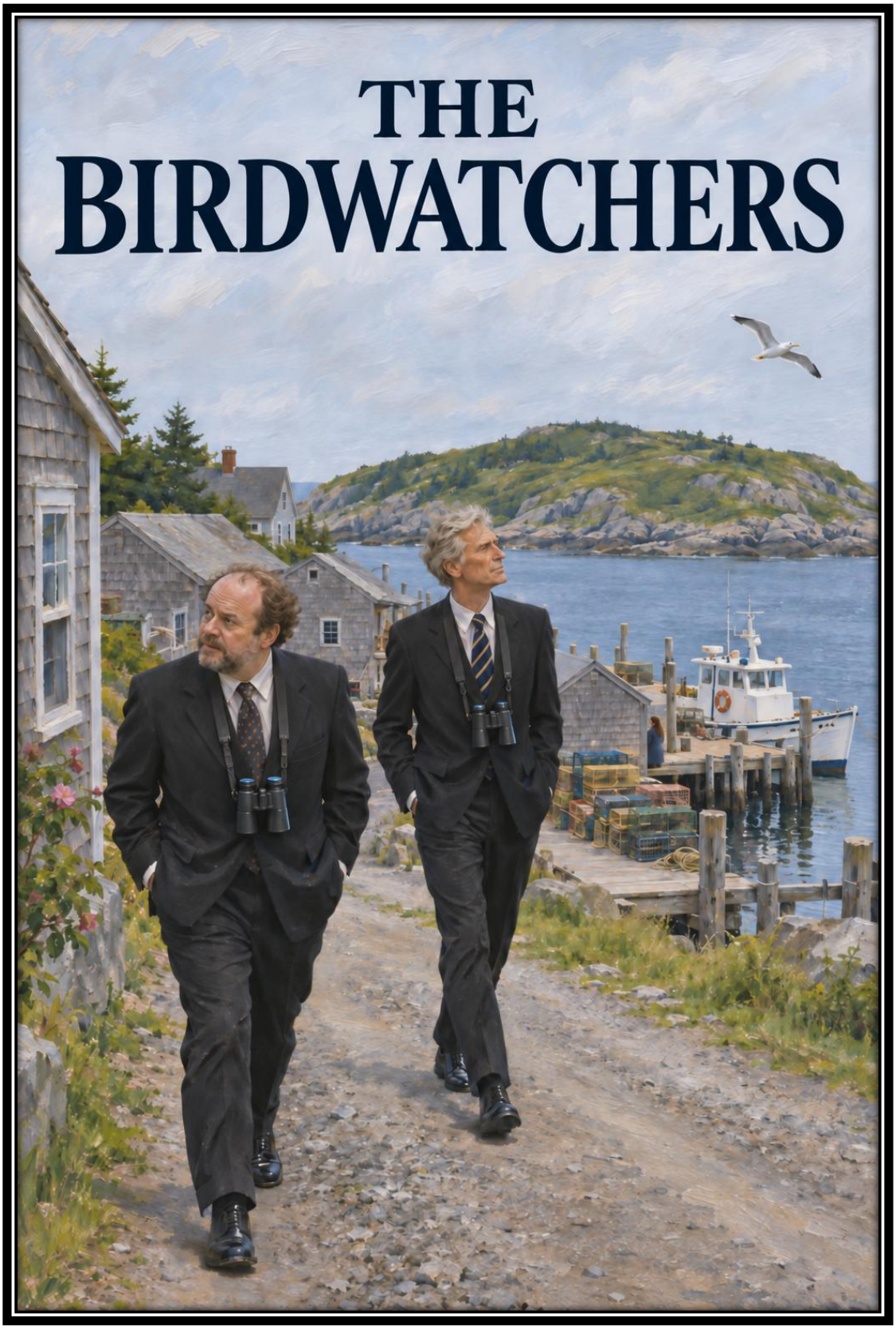


Lumen with Chip Cook

Dedicated to my friend, and birdwatcher,
Dr. Jim Sparrell

The Spring List

The spring birders began arriving before anybody on Monhegan felt certain it was spring. They stepped off the mailboat in rain jackets and hats that had seen better weather. Before Ben had the stern line on, two of them were calling out a bird they'd seen from the boat.

"Which side?" a woman asked.

"Port," said the man who'd spotted it.

"Which side is port?"

"The side you were on until you went to get your hat."

By breakfast the woman had found the bird again and told everyone who'd missed it the first time. By lunch she'd told Ben, who'd been there both times. He liked the birders. They came ashore with a story already going and were happy to start at the beginning for anybody who asked.

Mara kept a pad at the shop for people to write down what they'd seen. Nora, a regular spring visitor, drew a quick sketch beside the name of a warbler so the girl buying gum could see the stripe over its eye. The girl asked how long a bird that small could stay in the air. Nora started to answer, stopped, and asked if the girl wanted to come outside and see where it had landed.

The girl put her gum in her pocket. The next customer waited while Mara went out with them.

Tuesday

The first birdwatcher in a black suit came over on the Tuesday boat. Ben noticed the suit because the man had to step over a bucket of bait to get off. He cleared it nicely, although he took a little jump at the end that Ben thought was unnecessary.

“Anything good out there?” Ben asked, nodding at the binoculars.

The man gave Ben a polite nod. Ben waited for the name of a bird. The man picked up his bag and went up the road.

On Thursday two more came over. Same kind of suits, same kind of binoculars. At the top of the road, one raised his glasses in the direction of Ruth’s front window. The other stood with his hands in his pockets, looking across the harbor at Manana. A bald eagle went by low enough to turn heads all along the wharf.

Neither man looked up.

By noon Ruth had moved her good silver.

“Where’d you put it?” asked her sister Ellen.

“I’m hardly going to tell you after all the trouble I took.”

“Then I suppose you’re having everybody for Thanksgiving.”

Two Kinds of Looking



On Thursday Nora caught up with the men on the lane above the wharf. She'd just seen a warbler drop into a budding branch and wanted somebody else to see it before it went.

"About halfway up," she said. "Just to the left of the fork."

The nearer man lifted his binoculars. Nora lowered hers to give him room.

"Can you see it?"

He adjusted the focus. Then he took a pencil out of his pocket and made a mark on a folded sheet of paper.

Nora turned to see what lay along his line of sight. The branch was a good twenty feet above it. Beyond the lane were two roofs and the far shore of the harbor.

The man gave her a polite nod and walked on. His companion held a gate for her. She thanked him. He nodded, too.

Later, Nora told Mara she'd never met birders who could both get through a sighting without saying so much as *where?*

"Perhaps they already knew where," Mara said.

Nora thought about that. "That's what was odd."

An Offer of Help

Ben found one of the men beside the floats, waiting for two lobstermen to finish unloading. He had his binoculars out this time. Ben looked from the glasses to the far shore.

“Trying to get across to Manana?” he asked. “I could run you over after I finish here.”

The man lowered the binoculars. He looked at Ben, then looked down at his polished shoes. He shook his head and moved far enough back to let the men pass with their tubs.

Ben went about his work. When he came back for the empty tubs, the man was still there, looking down between the pilings. He waited for a wave to lift the float, then glanced at his watch. When it happened again, he did the same thing.

“Maybe he gets seasick,” one of the lobstermen said after the man left.

“He never got on anything,” said Ben.

“Then he’s got it figured out.”

Ben laughed. He might have left it there if he hadn’t noticed the two little marks the man had made in pencil on the back of his boat ticket. Each was a short line with a number next to it. Ben could see that much. The man pocketed the ticket before Ben could tell whether they were times or measurements.

Three Rooms

Mara found Ruth and Ellen at the shop comparing the men who'd turned up at their B&Bs. Ruth had brought her booking book to settle the question of when hers had called.

"Mine booked a year ago," Ruth said.

"So did mine," said Ellen.

"I thought we were talking about one man," Mara said.

"We were until Ellen had one."

Dot, who let two rooms up the hill, went home for her own book and came back with it open to the right page. All three reservations had been made on the same afternoon, a year earlier. Each man had asked for one room with a view of the harbor. Dot had given hers the room overlooking her laundry. He'd given her a little nod and paid for the full stay anyway.

"They didn't want to be seen together," Ruth said.

"They walked up from the dock together," Ben said.

"Well," Ruth said, "I didn't say they were good at it."

Mara had one other thing to contribute. A man had written a question on the back of his receipt. As Mara told it then, he wanted to know how much weight the dock could take. She'd asked what he was bringing in.

"What was it?" Ben said.

“He just folded up the receipt. The only thing he asked for was the ginger ale, and he did that by setting it on the counter.”

By supper the men had a truck coming on Saturday. By the time word got back down to the wharf, the truck had two axles too many for the dock and a load nobody was allowed to look at.

Arthur, who’d spent three summers trying to get the road fixed, said they ought to let it come. If it got stuck in the worst hole, they could put gravel around it and save the trouble of hauling it out.

The Breakfast Question

Friday morning, Ruth put the toast where her guest would have to pass it on his way out. Her real birdwatchers had been up since dawn, and by the time the coffee was ready she knew which of them had seen an owl and which of them was annoyed to have slept through it.

“Did you get out early?” she asked the man in the suit.

He took a piece of toast, set it on his plate, and gave her a small smile.

“What did you see?”

He buttered the toast right to the edges. Ruth waited. He ate it, put the knife neatly across his plate, and folded his napkin.

Then he took his room key out of his pocket and put it beside the plate. He’d paid through Saturday.

“He said thank you, surely,” Ellen said later.

“He left a tip.”

“Then perhaps that was his thank you.”

“It was two dollars,” Ruth said. “I still would’ve liked to know what he saw.”

The other guests came back from their walk with three sightings and an argument about the owl. Ruth made another pot. For the first time all week she was grateful to have a house full of people who wouldn’t stop talking.

The Loaner Pair

The shop kept a pair of binoculars on a shelf beside the window. They had a nick in one lens and a piece of string where a strap ought to be. In spring Mara loaned them to anyone who came in wishing they'd brought their own.

On Thursday the shorter man in black had reached for the loaner pair. Mara remembered because his own glasses were hanging against his tie.

"Those are all right if you look through the good side," she'd told him.

He turned them over and read the little strip of tape with her name on it. Then he set them back exactly where they'd been. What he took from the shelf was the hand-drawn map Mara put out for visitors.

Later she found that he'd left the map on the counter and taken the tide table tucked underneath.

Ruth thought he was trying to find out who supplied the binoculars. Dot thought he'd taken the tide table to be polite because he'd realized he wasn't buying anything. Ben thought he'd wanted the tide table from the beginning.

"Why didn't he just ask?" Ruth said.

Mara looked at her. "Have you ever tried getting an answer out of one of these men?"

The View from the Bench

On Thursday afternoon Ellen had stopped to catch her breath on the bench above the harbor. One of the men came up and sat at the far end. They watched a lobster boat work its way in against the chop.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Ellen said.

He looked at her, then out at the water, and nodded.

“Did you come for the birds?”

He looked down at the binoculars in his lap. Ellen thought for a moment he might laugh. Instead he stood up and offered her his hand. She took it. He pulled her gently to her feet, tipped his head, and went down the road.

It was the nicest thing any of them had done all week, and Ellen was reluctant to spoil it by reporting it as suspicious. She managed to keep it to herself until Ruth suggested the men might be there to find out what people had in their houses.

“If he was after your silver,” Ellen said, “he could’ve waited until you sat down on that bench. By the time you got up, he’d have been back on the mainland.”

Ruth said she could get up from a bench perfectly well. Ellen said she’d be delighted to see it.

The First Boat Out

Ruth decided the men were tax assessors. One of them had plainly been looking at her new kitchen.

“You had a new kitchen in 1987,” Ellen said.

“And I’ve kept it very nice.”

Ben took what he knew to the Professor’s cottage. Lumen was shelling peas. The Professor was opening his mail with a butter knife.

“They looked at the wharf, they looked at Manana, and one of them had a good long look at Ruth’s house,” Ben said. “What would you make of that?”

The Professor put the opened envelope down beside the unopened one. Lumen slid the bowl toward Ben and made room for his elbows.

He stayed long enough to finish the peas.

On Friday the men left on the first boat out. Ben helped the taller one with a case that had a strip of red tape across the handle.

“See anything good?” Ben asked.

The man shook his head. Then he took the case from Ben with both hands.

A Name for the List

Just before the boat pulled away, Nora came down with the shop's bird list under her arm. She held it out to the shorter man in black.

"Anything you'd like to add?" she asked. "You can put the location beside it if you don't mind sharing."

The man took the pad. He studied the first page long enough for Ben to think he might actually write something. Then he handed it back, tapped the sketch of the warbler once with his finger, and went aboard.

"At least he looked at a bird," Ben said.

"He looked at a drawing of a bird," Nora said. "I'm inclined to give him half credit."

As the boat came clear of the wharf, somebody on the upper deck called that there was a bird following in the wake. Half the passengers went to the stern. The man with the red-taped case stayed where he was. He had a clear view of the landing from his seat. Ben watched him watch it until the boat turned, and then there was nothing left to see but the wake and the bird.

The Empty Rooms

Dot found her guest's room as clean as she'd left it. The wastebasket was empty. He'd folded the spare blanket into a square and left the window open an inch.

"What was he doing with the window open?" Ruth asked.

"Breathing, I expect," Dot said.

There was a discrepancy in the number of nights. Ruth's man had booked four. Ellen's had booked three. Dot's had booked two. Ellen's had paid for a night he hadn't even spent on the island. On paper they all finished on the same day. In practice they all left early.

"That's organization," Ruth said.

"Or the first boat that suited them," Dot said. "It's how most people get off an island."

Ben asked if any of them had left a forwarding address. Ruth said the booking book had a phone number, but she was saving it in case something turned up missing. Ellen offered to call on the pretext of finding a glove. Dot wanted to know where she planned to get a glove in May.

Nobody made the call. By Saturday morning, the fact that none of the men could be reached had become one of the strongest pieces of evidence against them.

Reinforcements

Ruth said the men had probably gone for reinforcements. Ellen asked what a reinforcement was supposed to look like, so she could recognize one.

“Like anybody,” Ruth said. “That’s the point.”

On Saturday a visitor asked Mara if she’d seen anything unusual. She told him three men in suits had gone up the road without seeing a bald eagle.

“Which way was it headed?” he asked.

“Which way was what headed?”

“The eagle.”

Mara pointed. The man thanked her and set off in that direction. She watched him go with considerable relief. It was the first conversation she’d had all week in which anybody had followed up on the eagle.

The Saturday boat brought no truck. It did bring a crate of outboard parts for Arthur. He said he knew perfectly well what was in it. He was only pointing out that anybody could write anything on the side of a crate.

By late afternoon a notice had gone up on the shop door. **EMERGENCY MEETING. SUNDAY AT SEVEN. OLD SCHOOL HOUSE. ONE ITEM.**

Underneath, somebody had written, **WHICH ONE?**

A Census of Shoes

Nora said the proper way to count anything was to write down where and when you saw it. Otherwise a person could spend an afternoon counting the same bird moving up a hedge.

Ruth liked this so much that she started a list for the meeting. The first entry was *Tuesday. One. Black shoes.*

Ellen said she'd seen a man in black shoes Thursday, but they were wet. Did that make him the same man after rain or a different man with wet shoes?

"Did it rain?" Ruth asked.

"No."

"Then put him down separately."

Dot remembered brown shoes on one of them. Ruth asked whether they were brown all over or just dusty. Dot went for her magnifying glass and got down on the hall floor. There was one good print by the door.



“Well,” Ben said, “we know at least one of them had a left foot.”

Ben asked to see the list. In the margin next to *Friday. Two black, possibly one brown*, somebody had written *left in a hurry*. He pointed out that the men had been first in line and that the boat left at the ordinary time.

Ruth took her pencil back. “Well, they got there in a hurry.”

The Watch

On Saturday evening Ruth decided somebody ought to keep an eye on the harbor. She chose her own front window because the chair was comfortable and she already knew how much of the kitchen could be seen from the road.

At nine she called Ellen. A light had come on across the water.

“What color?” Ellen asked.

“White.”

“Is it moving?”

“It’s a light, Ellen. It’s hard to tell what it’s doing when it’s dark everywhere else.”

Ben happened to be in Ellen’s kitchen borrowing a wrench. Ellen handed him the phone. He looked out the window and told Ruth the light was on his boat. He’d left it on to see by when he came back down to finish a job.

Ruth thanked him. Then she asked why he’d left the light on for so long.

“Because I’m up here talking to you,” he said.

By ten there were two reports of a signal in the harbor. One was that it had been answered from shore. The other was that the man answering it had borrowed a wrench.

The Committee

By Sunday afternoon the notice on the shop door had acquired a second sheet. Someone wanted the meeting to elect a committee to find out who had the authority to investigate suspicious visitors. Arthur wanted to know if the committee could investigate the road while it was at it.

“Would we have to talk to the men?” Dot asked.

“If we could find them,” Arthur said.

“And if we can’t?”

“Then we’d report back.”

“On what?”

“On our efforts to find them.”

Dot, who had three beds to make and all the work she wanted, went home without putting her name down.

Mara took the extra sheet off the door. She told Arthur there’d be time enough to appoint somebody once they knew what they were appointing them to do.

“Isn’t that what we’re meeting to find out?” he said.

Mara handed him the sheet. “Take this up to the School House and help me with the chairs. We know what those are for.”

By the time they got there, a dozen people were already waiting on the steps. One asked if they'd heard anything definite. Arthur said they were expecting a full house.

The Emergency Meeting



By seven on Sunday, sixty islanders were trying to get into the old Monhegan School House. The people on the steps urged the people inside to move forward. The people inside would have been glad to, if the people in front of them would stop taking off their coats.

“Anybody in there know what this is about?” a man called from the bottom step.

“The men in black,” somebody called back.

“I know that. What did they do?”

The question traveled to the front of the room. No answer came back, although by the time it reached the steps again, somebody had added, “Something to do with the dock.”

Arthur spread a map across two school desks. Ben had the passenger lists. Ruth had a photograph. Mara had a pencil, which was how she came to be taking the minutes. Lumen and the Professor gave their chairs to two people standing in the aisle and took a place along the back wall.

“The first thing we need to establish,” Arthur said, “is how many there were.”

“Sixty,” said a woman by the door. “And if you want me to shut this, two of them are going to have to come in sideways.”

The Other Men in Black

“I meant the men in suits,” Arthur said.

“Oh. I only saw one.”

“Which one?” somebody asked from the steps.

Then a man near the door asked whether anybody had considered that they might be the Men in Black.

“We’ve been calling them that all week,” Ruth said.

“I mean the ones that come around when somebody sees a flying saucer.”

“Who saw a flying saucer?”

“Nobody. I think that’s why they like it here.”

This took a moment to go around the room.

“Suppose they’re looking for a home base,” he said. “They could land on Manana after dark. By the time we found out, we’d all be slaves.”

“Doing what?” asked Ruth.

He looked around the room for help. “Whatever they need done.”

“What if they like lobsters?” she asked.

“Then why don’t they just buy some?”

Ruth looked at Ben. “Have you seen what you charge?”

Mara put her pencil down. “Do you want this in the minutes?”

“Of course,” Ruth said. “Imagine how foolish we’d look if it happened and there was no record we’d discussed it.”



By the time Mara picked up her pencil again, the saucer had a gangplank.

The Price of an Invasion

Once Ruth brought up the price of lobsters, the room got interested in details. Arthur wanted to know whether the saucer would tie up at the wharf or hover offshore. If it tied up, it would need to move for the mailboat. If it hovered, he wanted to know who was responsible if it blew the shingles off the fish shed.

Nora asked whether anybody had actually seen anything in the sky that they couldn't identify.

"I saw one thing," somebody said.

Heads turned.

"It was a bird. That's as far as I got."

Nora asked how big it was. The man held his hands a foot apart. Another man suggested it might have looked small because it was farther away than he thought. The first man said that was certainly possible, as he'd been looking at it through the wrong end of his grandson's binoculars.

Mara stopped writing. "Is this still the same motion?"

"What motion?" Arthur asked.

"The one I'm waiting for somebody to make."

Nobody made it. There was a brief lull while several people tried to think how to word a motion against something they couldn't agree had happened.

A Year in the Making

Ruth opened her booking book to last spring. Ellen and Dot supplied the other two dates. Mara read them back for the minutes. Same day. Same request for a view. Three different houses.

“Which of us did they call first?” Ruth asked.

Dot looked at her book. “Does it matter?”

“It might tell us where they meant to start.”

They spent five minutes trying to reconstruct the order. Ellen remembered answering the phone before a loaf came out of the oven. Dot was sure she’d taken her call while hanging up the washing. Ruth remembered she’d been about to make tea, which narrowed her call to any of about six times that afternoon.

“They’ve been planning this for a year,” Arthur said.

“Planning what?” Nora asked from the second row.

Nobody answered for a while. They had established when it began, where the men had slept, and how many of them might have left. Each answer seemed to make the remaining question bigger.

Somebody on the steps called in to ask if they’d decided how many there were. Arthur looked down at the booking books.

“We’re still on that,” he called back.

The Case for the Foghorn

Ruth passed her photograph along the first row. By the time it reached Ben, he'd heard three people say it showed a man looking through the window at her kitchen. Ben could see a man with binoculars and a good deal of hydrangea. For all he could tell, the man was looking straight past the house toward the water.

Arthur put a square of red tape on the map. "Found this on a post by the wharf."

"Red tape on the case, too," Ben said. He wished he'd kept it to himself.

"That's what they've been planning for a year," Ruth said. Nobody argued with her.

Arthur drew a line from the wharf to the landing on Manana. A truck could go down one end of that line and come up the other, provided there was a boat to carry it. Ben asked what anyone could possibly want a truck on Manana for.

"To move the foghorn," Ellen said.

The room went quiet. It was heavy. It was on Manana. And it was the first thing anyone had come up with that they could all picture.

"Who'd want it?" Arthur asked.

"I don't know who'd want it," Ellen said. "I know who'd miss it."

Within ten minutes, they'd agreed to write a letter asking that the foghorn be kept where it was. Arthur proposed that any heavy equipment brought over to remove it should be made available for road repairs. Ruth objected. If they gave the men work, she said, they might stay.

For the Record

Mara read back what she'd put in the minutes. "'The meeting agreed that the visitors may have been looking into moving the foghorn.'"

"*Were* looking into it," Ruth said. "We've just spent an hour establishing that."

Mara put the pencil to the paper. Ben could have let her write it. He'd let worse things go that evening, including a report about a boat *believed to be local* even after he'd told them his cousin owned it.

"Wait," he said. "We've got a landing and a question about what the dock could hold. The foghorn was our idea."

"And the tape?" Arthur asked.

"I was the one who put the two bits together. I saw red tape on a case. You saw some on a post. That's as far as I can take it."

Ruth looked at the photograph in her lap. "Well, what am I supposed to put my silver back out on the strength of?"

"I'd start with supper," said Ellen.

Mara left *may have been* in the minutes. The room took a little longer to settle than it had when she'd read it the first time.

A Letter to Whom

The foghorn letter took longer to settle than the foghorn theory. Ruth thought it should begin *Dear Sir*. Ellen pointed out that they still hadn't established who might be taking it.

"Dear Whoever Has Jurisdiction," Arthur suggested.

"Who has jurisdiction?" Ruth said.

"That's why I said whoever."

Nora asked whether anyone had checked to see if the foghorn was still there. Everybody turned to Ben, as if he might be able to see through the School House wall and across the harbor.

"It was there this afternoon," he said.

Ruth was relieved. Arthur asked Mara to put *still in place as of Sunday afternoon* in the minutes. It was the first statement of the evening nobody wanted to amend.

At the back of the room the Professor set two coats on a desk while their owners untangled themselves from the folding chairs. Lumen held the door. Ben could see the two of them making themselves useful in every way except the one he'd counted on.

Mara folded the letter and left the envelope blank. "We can address it when we know who it's for."

Ruth said that was reasonable. She asked to take it home anyway, in case a name came to her in the night.

Three Things on a Desk



While the room emptied, Ben looked at what was left on the school desks. Ruth's photograph. The red tape. Arthur's map.

He took the photograph to the window and held it so the light fell on it. From the angle the picture had been taken, the end of the man's binoculars overlapped Ruth's window. If you kept going in the same direction, the next thing in view was Manana.

Ben went back to the map. He'd helped carry that case himself. A stripe of red tape on its handle made it easy to tell which end to pick up. A stripe on a post might mean something altogether different. He knew two fishermen who marked their gear with red tape and one who used it to stop his glove unraveling.

As he put the photograph back, he noticed that Arthur's line ended a little short of the foghorn. Ellen had drawn an arrow from the landing to the horn to finish the journey. Without her arrow, all Arthur had drawn was a way across the water.

Ben ran a finger along the line. He could see how little it took to send it somewhere else.

What the Man Asked

Ben had counted on the Professor to ask who owned the foghorn. He'd counted on Lumen to ask why anybody would need binoculars to find it. Now they were folding chairs and leaning them against the wall.

Outside, Ben caught up with Mara. "What were the man's exact words about the dock?"

She tucked the minutes under her arm. "He wrote down how much weight it *used to* take. I remember because I told him the rotten boards were the new ones."

"Used to," Ben said.

Through the window he could see Arthur showing Ellen where the truck would go. From where Ben stood, Arthur's pencil line looked very much like a bridge.

A Cup of Tea

Ben found the Professor coiling a line on the wharf the next morning.

“Did you ever talk to one of those men?” he asked.

“One was standing outside my gate trying to fold a map in the wind. I invited him in.”

“What did he want to know?”

“Whether people would sell if the price was right. I told him he’d get a better answer if he asked what people stayed here for.”

“Did he?”

“He asked for another cup of tea. We got along rather well after that.”

Ben looked across the harbor. He could still see Arthur’s pencil line stopping just short of the foghorn.

“Were they looking for a place to put a bridge?”

The Professor set the coil down. “Yes. I saw a drawing. A bridge to Manana, and a golf course where most of the village stands.”

He told Ben the men worked for a private company. The company had already decided against the site before the first suit stepped off the mailboat that Tuesday. As far as he could tell, the men had come back to finish their paperwork.

“Why didn’t you tell us last night?” Ben asked.

“I’d been told they’d dropped it. I thought that was the end of it.”

“So what changed their minds?” Ben asked.

“I don’t know.”

Ben tucked the end of the line under the coil so it would hold.

“What do I tell Ruth?”

“About her silver?”

“You knew about that?”

“Ellen asked if she could borrow six forks.”

The Bird They Missed

On Monday afternoon Ben found Nora on the wharf with her glasses trained on the far end of the harbor. He stood beside her until she lowered them.

“Did you see anything good?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “Do you want the short version?”

“How long is the short version?”

She showed him where to look. There was a bird standing so still on a strip of exposed ledge that Ben had taken it for a bit of the rock. Then it put one foot forward, lowered its head, and came up with something silver in its beak.

“Now you can tell me what it is,” Ben said.

Nora told him. She also told him what she thought it had caught, what else it might have caught, and where he could stand tomorrow if he wanted to see it again. Ben stayed through the long version.

On his way up the road he passed Ruth’s window. From the right spot he could see the harbor reflected in the glass. He stopped for a minute and watched a boat pass through her front room.

The Final Report

The envelope arrived on the Tuesday boat. It had the Professor's name on the front and no return address. There was no letter inside, just a report folded in thirds. He thought of the man at his kitchen table smoothing a map flat with the bottom of a teacup.

The Professor made a copy and pinned it to the noticeboard at Mara's shop.

> **FINAL REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**
>
> *Feasibility of a Golf Course Resort on Monhegan*
>
> The site is suitable in principle, provided the necessary land can be acquired. The proposal calls for leveling Manana for a tower and casino, a bridge across the harbor, and a golf course on Monhegan. A small number of local boats could continue supplying lobster to the resort restaurants.
>
> Several team members experienced severe discomfort during the initial survey, before the follow-up visit. The cause remains unknown. Ultrasound or infrasound is suspected, possibly generated by unusual wave action along the northern cliffs.
>
> Recurrence could make play unpleasant or impossible. We recommend that the Board consider another location for TRUMPLANDIA.

"What sound?" Ruth said. "We don't have a problem with an unknown sound."

"Would we know if we did?" asked Ellen.

"I'd know if I was uncomfortable."

"You generally do."

Arthur read the part about the cliffs twice. "People go out there to watch the waves flap in and flap out. My brother-in-law sat there three hours last August."

"Was he uncomfortable?" Ben asked.

"Only when we went to get him."

The Professor read the middle paragraph again and thought of the sharks. He glanced over at Lumen. She was examining an apple with a degree of care he'd never seen her bring to the purchase of fruit. He folded the report and slipped it into his pocket.

"Should I send the letter about the foghorn?" Mara asked.

Ruth was still reading. "'Provided the necessary land could be acquired.' Did they ask anybody?"

"Would you have sold?" Ben asked.

"Of course not. But I'd have liked the chance to say so."

The Way Home



That evening, Lumen went down to the water by herself.

She could still see the drawing the Professor had left open on his table. The foot of the bridge was a neat gray square on the Manana shore. It covered a gap between two ledges. She'd swum through that gap so many times she knew where to turn her shoulder even in the dark. On the other side was Wonderland. The men who'd drawn the bridge had no way of knowing what they'd close off. She did.

On that earlier survey visit, she'd waited in the water below the crew until all three men stood well back from the cliff edge. Then she gave them one short note, the

same one she'd used to drive the sharks away. One man sat down hard. Another reached for his companion. The tripod stood perfectly still. She stayed in the water until the man who'd fallen was back on his feet. They packed up before the tide turned.

Tonight she slipped between the ledges and rested her palm on the familiar stone. She could hear the water flap in and flap out. On the far side of the gap, the water was warmer. She'd been coming home this way for years.

There was no choice, but for her to act.

What's Next?