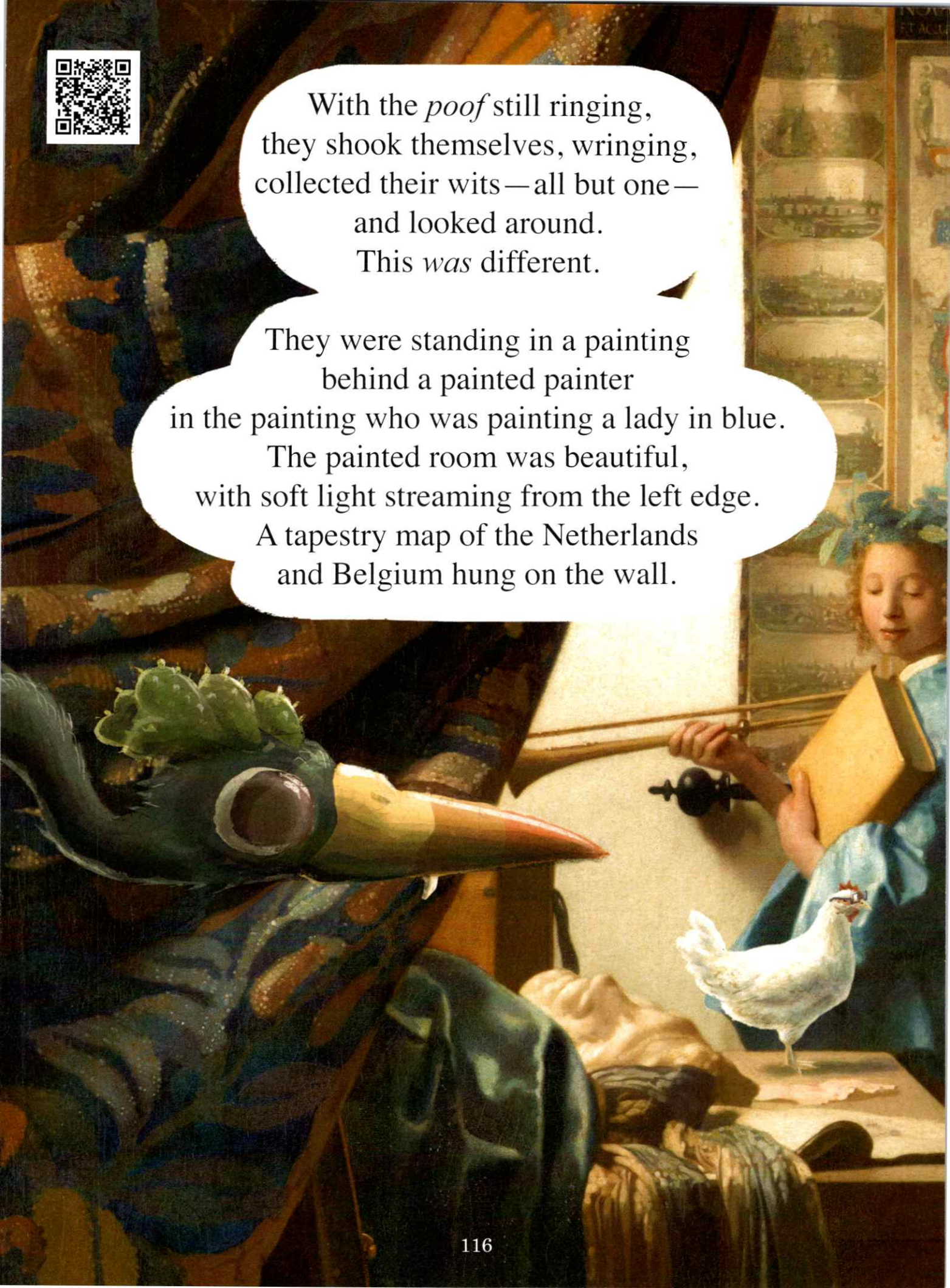




With the *poof* still ringing,  
they shook themselves, wringing,  
collected their wits — all but one —  
and looked around.  
This *was* different.

They were standing in a painting  
behind a painted painter  
in the painting who was painting a lady in blue.  
The painted room was beautiful,  
with soft light streaming from the left edge.  
A tapestry map of the Netherlands  
and Belgium hung on the wall.



The background is a painting of a painter with a long beard and a black beret, wearing a striped shirt and a dark vest, painting a woman. On the table in front of him are a white dog and a purple snail. The scene is set in a room with a large painting on the wall and a chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

“But wait,” Poodle thought,  
“this is a painting of the painter painting.  
It’s not a painting of the woman.”

Yes, the painter with his back to them  
was a painted painter painting a painted woman,  
painted by the painter who painted him painting her.

What?  
(Not the dog, just the question.)



“Where are we?” whispered Sidney.  
She didn’t want to interrupt the painter—  
the painted one.  
He was so intense.

“I know this,” said Poodle.  
“We’re in a Vermeer.  
See those bubbles of light?”

“Vermeer?” asked Dickinson.

“Yes,” Poodle said. “A Dutch painter.  
We must be in 1666 Holland.  
I remember this painting.  
It’s called *The Art of Painting*.”

“Why did you put the painting title  
in italics?” asked Gawk.

“That’s what you do,” Poodle told him.