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**A Touch
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a cranky but caring man, adamant about his work. Upon their entrance, the MAN turns and leaves.)

MEMORY MENDER. *(Calls out across the distance)* You there, sir—let me take a look at that coat! Sir, did you hear me? *(But the MAN is gone. The MEMORY MENDER remains at a distance, busying himself with the objects on his cart.)*

FLOWER PAINTER. Elmer, Hazel—are you finished with your chores?

HAZEL. We have a problem.

IRIS. The spots are missing.

ELMER. I didn't take them.

FLOWER PAINTER. Did you talk to the Spot Maker?

HAZEL. He sent them out, just like he always does.

FLOWER PAINTER. But, the world requires Ladybugs, and Ladybugs must have their spots—

IRIS. Maybe you could paint them on. *(ELMER holds the Ladybugs out to the FLOWER PAINTER.)*

FLOWER PAINTER. Out of the question. I'm a Flower Painter—nothing more. I wouldn't know the first thing about painting spots on bugs.

ELMER. *(happily)* I guess our chores are done—

FLOWER PAINTER. It's not that simple, Elmer. If I abandoned my work, the flowers of the world would look like this—*(He removes the magic flower cone, and as he pulls the long green stem out from the inside of the cone, the audience clearly sees through the empty cone. He places the cone back on the cart and lightly dips his brush into the cone.)* Instead of like this—*(A flourish of MUSIC as he makes several strokes with his paint brush and magically paints a large flower on top of the long green stem.)* Without us, the world would come to a standstill. *(He places the paintbrush and the newly painted flower inside of the empty cone and lifts the cone dramatically upwards as a bouquet of flowers magically appears.)* Now, you are Spotters and you must do your work. *(He places the magic flower cone into the bottom of the cart.)*

HAZEL. But we've looked everywhere—

FLOWER PAINTER. I'm sure Iris can find them. She's like her dad in that way. That man could find the moon on the blackest of nights.

ELMER. Then why has he never found his way back home?

HAZEL. *(a reprimand)* Elmer—

ELMER. He's been gone forever.

FLOWER PAINTER. No one knows why, Elmer, and I think it's better left—

IRIS. Would you tell me if you knew? *(The FLOWER PAINTER stares at her.)* I was only a baby, then. Even my mom won't tell me why he left.

FLOWER PAINTER. *(Calmly, definitively)* Because she *doesn't* know, Iris. No one does. It was the night of the Great Eclipse, and the moon was particularly hard to find. He went out to bring it in...and he's never returned.

IRIS. There's an eclipse tomorrow.

FLOWER PAINTER. The first one since that night. I doubt we'll get to enjoy it, though—

IRIS. Why not?

FLOWER PAINTER. The order just came and it's a big one.

HAZEL. An order for what?

FLOWER PAINTER. A storm.

ELMER. And it's a big one?

FLOWER PAINTER. Huge. *(He starts off with his cart, saying his farewell)* Now and again.

ELMER, HAZEL, IRIS. Now and again.

HAZEL. *(gently, to IRIS)* sorry about my brother. He says stupid things.

LEAF MONITOR. *(Her leaf begins to float and swirl through the air as she speaks.)* Once the storm comes and they start swirling—I'm afraid I'll never find it. *(She catches the leaf.)*

TWO. It's not the BEST leaf that's missing, I hope.

HAZEL. Why not?

LEAF MONITOR. The BEST leaf must be sent to the Great Goods. You know that.

ONE. Have Iris help you—if it's lost, she'll find it.

(The BOLT BENDER enters, rolling an electric coil on a cart. Lightning bolts poke out of a quiver he wears over his shoulder.)

ONE. *(greeting the BOLT BENDER)* Almost day.

BOLT BENDER. *(nods, greets them ALL)* Almost day, indeed—and I can't get the lightning right. *(He sets the quiver down and pulls a neon tube from it in the shape of a lightning bolt. His electric coil shoots sparks and he fills the lightning bolt with glowing light as he strokes it and causes the sparks to arc from the coil onto the lightning bolt.)* Even the best Bolt Bender gets tired of making the same old lightning bolt, over and over again.

IRIS. But when there's thunder, people expect lightning to go with it.

BOLT BENDER. But why couldn't it be something else?

ELMER. Like what?

BOLT BENDER. Like this! *(The BOLT BENDER reaches into this quiver or the Thunder Cart and produces a bolt in the shape of a cactus—or some other incongruous object—and holds it near his coil which causes the sparks to arc from the coil onto the cactus. It lights up.)* What do you think?

ALL. NO!!

BOLT BENDER. Open up one of those thunders and let's experiment. Instead of a lightning bolt lighting up the sky, maybe it's—*(the BOLT BENDER puts the cactus back, pulls out a straight rod and dances it in the air and around his arms or head. He catches it and touches the end to the coil where it produces a steak of sparks and fire into the sky. As the fire happens, BOTTLER ONE opens up one of the sealed bottles of thunder and a huge, quick crack of thunder fills the theatre.)* –FIRE!

ONE. That's a possibility.

TWO. *(holding up the original lightning bolt)* The Great Goods would never approve. As long as they've been our rulers, the lightning has always looked like *this*. *(with seriousness)* And, believe me, you don't want to get on the bad side of the Great Goods.

HAZEL. What can happen to you?

ONE. *(to HAZEL)* if you disobey the Goods, your punishment is great.

HAZEL. Mom. *(HAZEL reaches into her PastCoat and brings out a large, beautiful autumn leaf.)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend the Goods. But it was so pretty.

ELMER. It's the best leaf of them all. *(the LEAF MONITOR holds out her hand, and—reluctantly—HAZEL hands her the leaf. The LEAF MONITOR gently brushes a strand of hair from HAZEL'S face)*

LEAF MONITOR. Someday, Hazel, when you're the Leaf Monitor—you'll understand. Now, finish up your chores. It's almost day. *(the LEAF MONITOR exits, as the BOLT BENDER lefts the lightning bolt, saying--)*

BOLT BENDER. *(as he leaves)* it's gonna be huge.

THUNDER BOTTLER ONE AND TWO. *(as they leave)* We gotta be ready. *(the BOTTLERS THUNDER INTO THEIR BOTTLES AND LEAVE, ALONG WITH THE BOLT BENDER.)*

ELMER. *(whispers to IRIS and HAZEL)* Come on, it's our last chance before the storm.

(the KIDS rush away and arrive at a very large rain barrel. It is wooden, with notches on its side [or a ladder] which enables it to be climbed. A large label on the

IRIS. But how will we get home?

DAD (*simply*). By remembering.

MOM (*quietly*). What do you see, Iris?

IRIS (*slowly, quietly*). I see an iris in a vase. And the vase is on a table.
And the table is in a house. And the house is—

(A flourish of MUSIC, as LIGHTS REVEAL the Land of Nocturno, once again—identical to the beginning of the play. The “WELCOME TO NOCTURNO” sign is there. The rain barrel is there—marked with the number of a new batch. And, approaching the table from a distance are HAZEL and ELMER—each holding a still-spotless Ladybug; and the FLOWER PAINTER—painting a rose.)

IRIS (*opens her eyes*). –in Nocturno, our home!

ELMER (*simultaneously*). Hazel, look—

HAZEL (*simultaneously*). Iris!

FLOWER PAINTER (*simultaneously*). Here they are!

(IRIS, MOM and DAD step away from the table as HAZEL and ELMER approach IRIS.)

IRIS. Does it look the same to you, Dad?

DAD (*looking around*). Some of it does...

FLOWER PAINTER. Welcome home, Rose. (*He causes his rose to float in the air.*) The wind's been silent without you. (*He catches his floating rose near MOM.*)

MOM (*smiles*). (*She magically pulls a light from the air and places into the rose.*) You'll hear it again in no time. (*The Flower Painter eventually puts this rose away unnoticed.*)

HAZEL (*to IRIS, like she never left*). Did you find the spots, Iris?

IRIS. The what?