

ACT 1, SCENE 1

SETTING: NEW YORK CITY, SEAPORT

GRANDDAD HERMAN

Eleanor, come sit down. I smell pines, do you smell them?

(ELEANOR looks confused.)

ELEANOR

I smell damp salt air, Granddad. We're at the Seaport. I see ships, not trees.

GRANDDAD HERMAN

(smiling; pointing upward, to the tall masts of the ships.)

I know my dear. The masts of these ships remind me of pines. I planted pine trees at Arrowhead in the Berkshires. I planted them when your mother was just a baby. Let's see, it's 1890 now, so that was more than thirty years ago. Oh, your grandmother fumed when she saw me planting pines on the lawn instead of apple or pear. 'Useless!' she said. I said, 'Have you never smelled the scent of pine?' I suppose she had not, being from the city. I spent my boyhood in Pittsfield and played in those woods every day.

(He takes a breath, closes his eyes and imagines the tall pines.)

ELEANOR

Where's Pittsfield, Granddad?

GRANDDAD HERMAN

In the Berkshires, which is in Massachusetts. That's my heart's home. The woods, the hills, the birdsong. Looking out my fairy window.

ELEANOR

What's a fairy window?

GRANDDAD HERMAN

Have you never looked out a fairy window?

(She shakes her head.)

It's a special portal. When you look through it at just the right angle, you see magic. It can take you out of yourself and bring you around the world. In my study, looking out that window, I found myself on many shores.

ELEANOR

Isn't that your imagination? I know about that. I imagine many things.

GRANDDAD HERMAN

I suppose you might say that, and I'm sure if one were to close their eyes and look inward they might see the things I saw, but it's so pleasant looking out over the hills and suddenly finding yourself on the rolling ocean aboard a sailing ship or tramping through an ancient forest.

ELEANOR

Is there a fairy window in your house on 26th street that I could look out of, Granddad?

GRANDDAD HERMAN

None that I have found on 26th street or anywhere in New York City for that matter, but you can go through the house and look out all the windows, and see what you can see.

ELEANOR

I think I will.

GRANDDAD HERMAN

(looking wistful)

You do that.

(He brightens)

One day, dear Eleanor, I will bring you to the Berkshires and I will let you look out of my fairy window for yourself.

(He pats her on the head.)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

SETTING: ORANGE, NEW JERSEY, ELEANOR'S HOUSE

ELEANOR

Mama!

(ELEANOR gives her mother a hug.)

MAMA

Eleanor, how was your trip to your grandparents?

ELEANOR

It was incredible! Granddad told me all kinds of exciting stories.

MAMA

What sort of stories did he tell you this time?

ELEANOR

He was telling me about the books he's written. I even asked Granddad if he'd read one to me, the one about the whale.

MAMA

And did he?

ELEANOR

He laughed and said, '*Now why would you want to hear that? No one else did.*' And then just walked away. Mama, the books he wrote are difficult for me to read and I'm a great reader.

MAMA

I know, dear, but Granddad's books are too mature for you to read right now. You have to wait until you're a little bit older.

ELEANOR

Alright. One day, I hope to read all the books he's written. Is Granddad famous?

MAMA

Famous? Why do you ask?

ELEANOR

When I was visiting, a student came to the door and asked to see the great author, Herman Melville. When Granddad came out, the young man looked like he was going to faint.

MAMA

So did you ask him if he was famous?

ELEANOR

I did. He just laughed and didn't answer. Oh, he also told me a story about a time he planted pine trees in the Berkshires when you were just a baby. He said that Arrowhead was his favorite place in the whole world. He even promised to bring me there.

MAMA

Well, I don't want you to get your hopes up too much. Pittsfield is far away from New York City. It's all the way in Massachusetts and Granddad is an old man. He can't go on too many long adventures like he used to.

ELEANOR

I know, Mama. I just love to hear his stories. I want to know everything I can about him.

MAMA

You're a very curious girl, sometimes too curious.

ELEANOR

But how can anyone be too curious? Doesn't everyone want to know everything they can?

MAMA

(smiling)

Eleanor, here, this is for you. I think it might help you.

(She hands ELEANOR a magnifying glass. It's round and encased in silver with a wooden handle. She puts it up to her eye and looks around.)

ELEANOR

Thank you Mama, but what is it for?

MAMA

It's so you can be just like Miss Green's girl sleuth, Violet Strange. She's a detective, and asks as many questions as you do. You seem to have mysteries to solve.

ELEANOR

How did you guess? I didn't know you liked mystery stories too.

MAMA

(teasing)

There's a lot you don't know about me. Now, go investigate something and see if your sister wants to be your assistant.

(MAMA exits with a cagy smile. FRANCES enters.)

ELEANOR

I knew Granddad was hiding something, but Mama too?

FRANCES

(tugging on her sleeve)

Ellie, I want to spy!

ELEANOR

I'm not spying, I'm detecting. There's a big difference.

FRANCES

(trying to reach into her pocket to get it)

Can I look through the glass Mama gave you?

ELEANOR

No, you're too young. You'll break it!

FRANCES

I won't! I promise!

(ELEANOR hands FRANCES the glass, but keeps her hand on the handle)

ELEANOR

You can have a peek, that's all. Here, look and tell me what you see.

FRANCES

I see everything big.

ELEANOR

All right, now give it back. I'll let you help me on my next case.

FRANCES

What's your next case?

ELEANOR

Granddad has a secret and I'm trying to find out what it is.

FRANCES

A secret?

ELEANOR

Yes, he keeps it hidden from everyone.

FRANCES

What's his secret?

ELEANOR

I wonder if it has something to do with the books he writes.

FRANCES

I thought mama said he doesn't write books any more. He only writes poems.

ELEANOR

That's what he tells everyone. But just the other night I saw him writing in his study. When he saw me, he quickly put his papers away.

FRANCES

How are you going to find out what his secret is?

ELEANOR

Well, I can't ask him directly. Maybe the only way to discover this secret is to get him to talk. Granddad is a storyteller and if I'm too young to read his stories then I want to hear them from him.

FRANCES

I want to help. Can I be your assistant, Ellie? Please!

ELEANOR

You can, but remember we can't let Granddad know we're trying to figure out his secret. Who knows what it actually could be? We wouldn't want to upset him.

FRANCES

I promise I won't! When do we start?

ELEANOR

The next time we visit Granddad and Grandmamma's house in a couple of weeks.