

NISH

Northern Lights

Isabelle Picard

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LEON

The walls of my bedroom are pink. Not a soft pastel pink! A bright, hot pink that hurts my eyes. I know we're going to repaint, but in the meantime it's a bit disturbing. It's not conducive to sleep, let's say. Elo and I both wanted the basement bedroom, so we tossed a coin and I won. But that was before we saw the house . . . and the room. In the end, she's the one who won. Her room is twice as big as mine. It also has a big window and a walk-in closet. My room is dark, with a tiny window, and the floor is still concrete. My Aunt Emilie brought in a huge rug to keep the floor from getting too cold, but it's still very basic. And the rug has flowers on it! It looks fifty years old.

"It's just for the time being," my father said as he unrolled it, seeing my reaction at the sight of it.

The rest of the basement isn't much better. It's more storage than anything else. I'm hoping my father will fix it up soon, but I don't dare ask him. His health is still fragile. Still, it would be cool to expand my room and make a teen lounge in the basement, a

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bit like the one back in Mati. But we'd need friends to fill it. Even though it's only been two days since we arrived, it's weird not seeing Joce anymore, not hearing Ati's laughter in the house, not watching Meli run down the stairs like she's doing a sprint. I'll even miss Elliott. I thought of him when I realized that in our new house, there's a door in the basement that leads directly outside. I think that he would have seen the potential for joining friends late at night.

The house we're renting used to house a couple and their two daughters. The family moved to Ottawa for at least three years, but my father got permission to make a few changes to the basement even though it's just rented. Much larger than our house in Matimekush, our new house is also much more modern. The lot is pretty big too. And the grass is green. Aside from a small hedge between us and the neighbour on the right, there are no trees. How odd! There'd be room for a pool for sure! It's so hot!

"This was the sewing room," says my Aunt Emilie, startling me.

"Was it? Is that why it's small and hot pink?"

"I suppose so. It's dark in here, so Julie probably wanted to brighten up the room. Customers used to

come in through the basement door via the side staircase. The closet next to your bedroom was the fitting room.”

“Ah, so that’s why the door doesn’t open into my room,” I say, a little disappointed.

“Yes, but your father will fix that easily. You’ll see. You’ll be fine,” my aunt reassures me, looking at every nook and cranny. “You know your mother’s pretty good at decorating too. And the girls are going to paint your room,” she jokes.

“I don’t think so,” I say.

“Are you coming for pizza? We’ve got the best pizza in Quebec here,” she adds confidently.

“Okay, yeah,” I say, heading for the wooden staircase, thinking wistfully of Matimekush’s Blabla restaurant, where I used to eat my pizza.

On the first floor, I notice that things have progressed well this afternoon. My mother has put all the dishes in the cupboards and the dining room is less cluttered. My father has put together our new dining set and we’re finally going to be able to eat a meal all seated around the table.

“Leon, we’ll go and buy you some paint after lunch. We’re going to start painting your walls tomorrow.

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What shade would you like?" asks my father, serving us generous portions of pizza.

"Not too dark," says my mother.

"I was thinking forest green," I say, taking my first huge bite.

"Well, that's fine with me," replies my father, watching my mother out of the corner of his eye for her reaction, which doesn't come.

"Not too dark a green?" she adds at last.

"No, I promise. Something nice," I say, shoving the rest of my pepperoni pizza slice in my mouth.

"Not so fast, big guy, you'll choke!" says my Aunt Emilie, looking at the little ones with amused eyes while Alice tries to imitate me.

"I'm not hungry anymore!" says Jeanne after three bites.

"With all the ice cream you've eaten, it's no surprise," says my mother, tickling her tummy.

"Auntie, can we sleep here?" asks Alice for the third day in a row.

"Not yet, sweetie," replies my mother. "We've still got a lot to do. But before school starts, I promise."

"Ew, school!" comments Jeanne.

That's right . . . school. With all the moving, I

hadn't had much time to think about it. Or I didn't want to. My sister and I had to take some tests at the beginning of the summer and we'll be starting the year . . . IN SECONDARY 2!!! Again!!! My mother explained to us that this is often the case with kids who come from other provinces or from far up north. They start their year all over again, even if they've passed. She says it's not repeating a year, that it's a necessary adjustment to follow the curriculum of a good school. But my sister and I agree — they're making us repeat a year. We're not starting off too well. My sister threw a tantrum at my mother when she found out she'd have to repeat Secondary 2. She didn't speak to her for at least two days. My mother tried to console her by telling her about our older cousin who had to go back two grades, not just one, but nothing helped.

My sister said, "We're not talking about Laurie, we're talking about us!"

I've tried to take it more maturely. One year is not the end of the world. And actually, I did find their test difficult, even though that's not what I said. Besides, it doesn't change anything for hockey. The AA camp starts next week and I'm very excited. I've been training every day, either running or practising my stick

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handling on our asphalt driveway. I trained over the summer in Mati, too, but in a different way — in the basement or in the woods. And carrying boxes.

I'm a bit nervous, if I'm being honest. I was good on our team, but here, I don't know. There are a lot of unknowns. I'm going to play my best. That's all I can do, as my father would say. I would have liked to go to a school where they have hockey, but everything was full long before my parents decided to move. Tough luck!

"Leon, I'm talking to you!"

My sister stares at me, looking rather annoyed.

"Huh?"

"Come on, where are you? I'm asking you if you knew there was a skate park here," repeats my sister, looking even more annoyed.

"Uh, no. Where?"

"At the back of the school."

"I didn't see it," I say, taking another slice of pizza.

"And? Is our pizza good?" asks my aunt.

"Yes, but it's not the same as at home," says my sister, turning to my mother.

"You have pizza at the North Pole?" marvels Jeanne.

“Well, it’s not exactly the North Pole, you know,” replies my sister, bringing her face up close to hers with a big smile.

My sister is undeniably good with children. Me, not so much. Maybe if they were boys . . . I could show them how to play hockey?

“Are you going to come and watch my soccer game tonight, Elo?” asks Alice, ignoring me completely.

“Can I go too? You know, I’m the jock of the family,” I ask, just to feel included.

“Yes, you can come,” replies Jeanne for her sister. “You can sit next to me and watch.”

“Well, that’s perfect! We’ll clean up a bit, go back to our place so Alice can change while the guys go and buy the paint, and then we’ll be off. Good plan?” asks my aunt with her legendary enthusiasm.

No one answers her. We’re too busy finishing our food. Only Alice gives her a big nod of approval.