

NISH

North Stars

Isabelle Picard

English translation by Kateri Aubin Dubois
Cover illustration by Tara Miller

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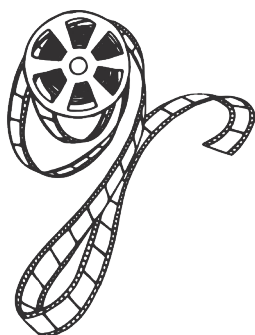
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Chapter 1

Let's Go!

LEON

I don't think I've ever been so excited to be anywhere. This summer is going to be just perfect.

Joce and I have lots planned. We're going fishing, riding ATVs, playing street hockey so we don't lose our touch, and tackling the latest video game together.

It was such a long way to Matimekush! First we drove eight hours to Sept-Îles, and after a night at my uncle's, we took the famous Tshiuetin, or North Wind, train for a thirteen-hour journey to Schefferville. My mother kept saying how beautiful this river is, or this landscape, or right here, the view . . . I think she missed our territory during her last year in Wendake. At least, I did!

My sister Eloise and I take seats near the front, but not too far in front, with our sleeping bags and pillows. Elo stares out the window most of the time, as does my father. His complexion changes colour as we head north. I suspect he's feeling sick. He presses his cheek against the window like we used to do when we were kids and felt like throwing up after



hours and hours on the train. It's his trick, after all!

We know lots of people on the train. It's really nice! Councillor Ariel, his sister and children, among others. He talked to my parents for a long time, but then my father turned grey-green on a tight curve. Something about the mine. I'm not sure. Something about a movie too. I thought my sister might have been interested, but she had her headphones on.

All I know is that I can't wait to get there. I'm sure Joce, Meli and Ati will be waiting for us at the station. Kukum Francine too. I'll pretend to be surprised, but I know they'll all be there.

I've read the two comics I brought and ate all my sandwiches. Four hours to go. I've taken twenty-two steps up the middle aisle of the train already. But all this waiting isn't too high a price to pay for the summer we're about to have.

I wonder if people will recognize me.



ELOISE

Leon is really annoying. He's always talking and jumping around. He's like a six-year-old. Me, I bury myself in my pillow or turn up the music on my iPhone so as not to hear the baby who's been crying for an hour already. Or I look outside. It's so beautiful! I agree with my mother, but there's no way I'm showing it. She's been raving like a madwoman about this and that since we started out.

I write a little too — a sort of diary that I started a few months ago on the advice of Aunt Emilie. Today I'm making up a story called "A Long Journey by Train." I write about people and their funny habits — rich American tourists who dream of the Great North and get left somewhere along the way to go hunting or fishing, lost in the middle of nowhere. I wonder what they find on that kind of trip. There's nothing out here but woods and thousands of mosquitos. I'd rather spend my money in Hawaii, that's for sure.

Then my brother's voice breaks through to me.

"Are you going to eat all your sandwiches or can I have one?"

"All you think about is food," I say, handing him my ham sandwich.

"I'm still growing! If I'm going to reach six feet, I've got to eat!"

"I can't wait to see it. You've got quite a lot of crusts left to eat."

"Well, that's what I'm doing," says my brother, smiling proudly at his reply.

Sometimes I wonder if we're really the same age. I know he's my twin, but still . . . he looks like he's still thirteen.

I look at my father, who's facing the window. He looks like he's running out of oxygen. It's a good thing we didn't fly — he'd probably throw up in the little white paper bag made for that. He doesn't look well at all. My mother says it's possible that, with his medication, he's more sensitive to motion.

So how will this summer unfold? I'll make a list:

- Chill with Meli and Ati
- Canoeing
- Camping on the beach
- A lot of four-wheeling
- Fires at Ati's or Joce's (!)



- Go to at least two parties
- Shoot videos for Oli and Fred
- Eat caribou and bannock with red seed jam
- . . .

I wonder what Fred'll be doing this summer. She told me before I left that she might start working. I feel bad leaving her like this with her parents divorcing. She's got Ali and the others, but I live next door and that's really handy sometimes! I'm definitely going to send her some funny videos. It'll take her mind off things. Anyway, Oli made me promise to send him some too. He says I need to improve my technique. We'll see what happens.

Three hours to go before we arrive. The train has already stopped four times to drop people off. Only a few mine workers and locals remain. There's also the owner of the convenience store. It's so rare for her to take a vacation! I wonder where she went . . . Ah! What's with that camera at the back of the train car?

