



Painted Skies

by Carolyn Mallory • illustrated by Amei Zhao

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To my parents, Florence and Dale Herman, for inspiring me with their love of books.

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Leslie leapt off the steps, all arms and legs like a young caribou trying to keep up with the herd. *Whump!* The snow was hard packed, with only a light layer of fluff. Oolipika landed beside her, laughing. The girls lay on their backs, their breath forming small, frosty clouds.

A close-up, artistic illustration of a child's hand reaching out towards a vast, snowy landscape. The hand is wearing a purple glove and is positioned on the right side of the frame. The background is a soft, painterly depiction of snow-covered ground and distant hills under a pale blue sky. The overall mood is serene and wintry.

They swept their arms and legs up and down as if they were ptarmigans trying to get off the ground and fly away.

“I didn’t think there would be so much snow here in October,” Leslie said. “I’m glad my mom bought me new winter clothes before we moved.”







A velvety darkness, blacker than the blackest raven, wrapped itself around them.

“Look,” Leslie said, pointing. “The sky is green!”

She closed her eyes tight and opened them again. Then she looked at Oolipika. Her friend’s dark brown eyes opened wide.





Holding hands, the girls rose. Pink swirls now flashed with the lime green. Leslie moved closer to Oolipika.

Huge ribbons waved in the wind. Leslie shivered. The colours consumed more of the sky and glided closer like a silent snowy owl.

When Leslie was afraid, her mother had taught her to whistle. Squeezing Oolipika's hand, Leslie took a deep breath, pursed her lips, and started to blow.

"Stop whistling," Oolipika said. "They'll hear you." She took off her mitts and quickly moved the fingernails of one hand back and forth across the fingernails of her other hand, making a clicking noise.







“What will hear me?” Leslie asked.

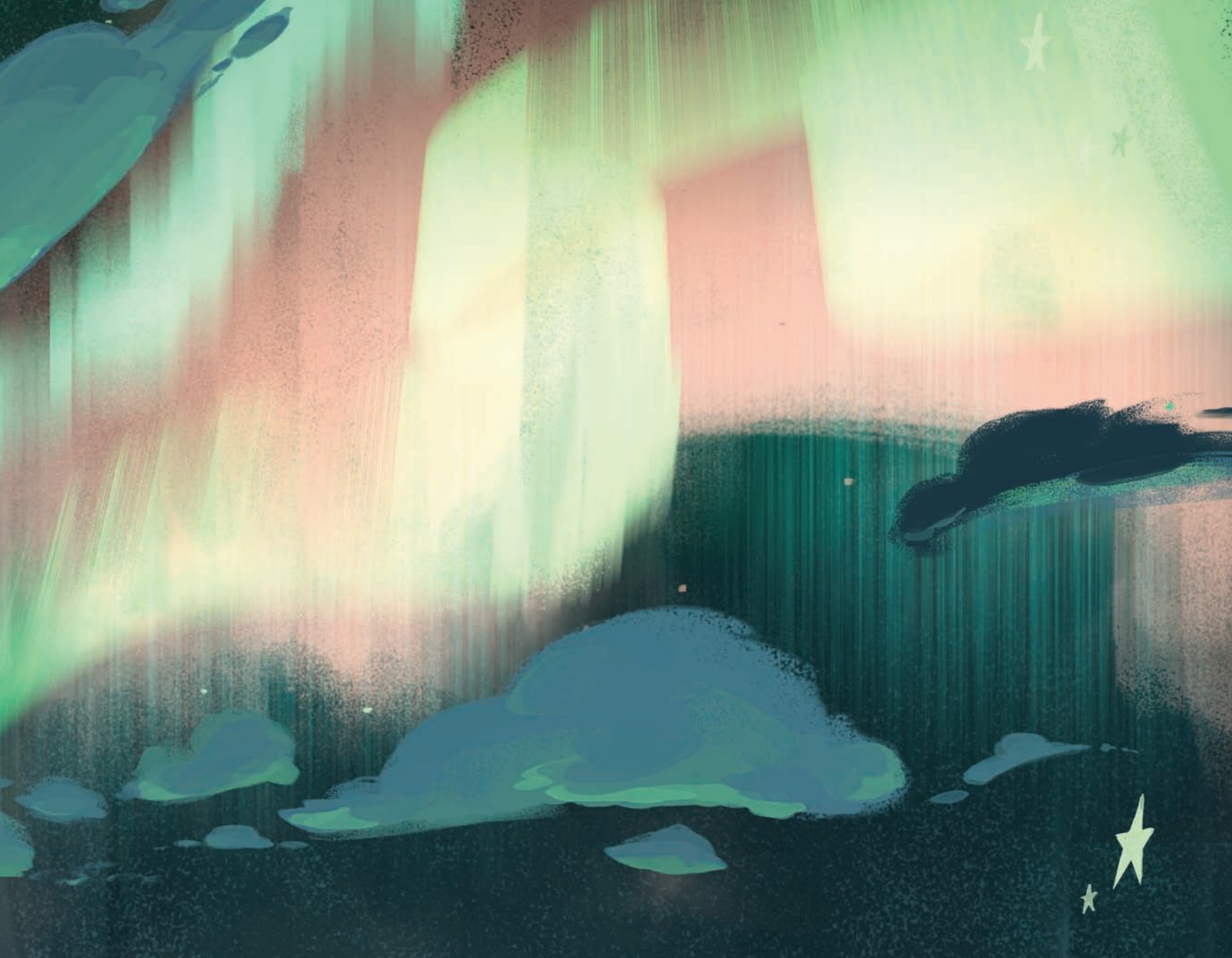
Oolipika kept rhythmically moving one set of fingernails over the other.

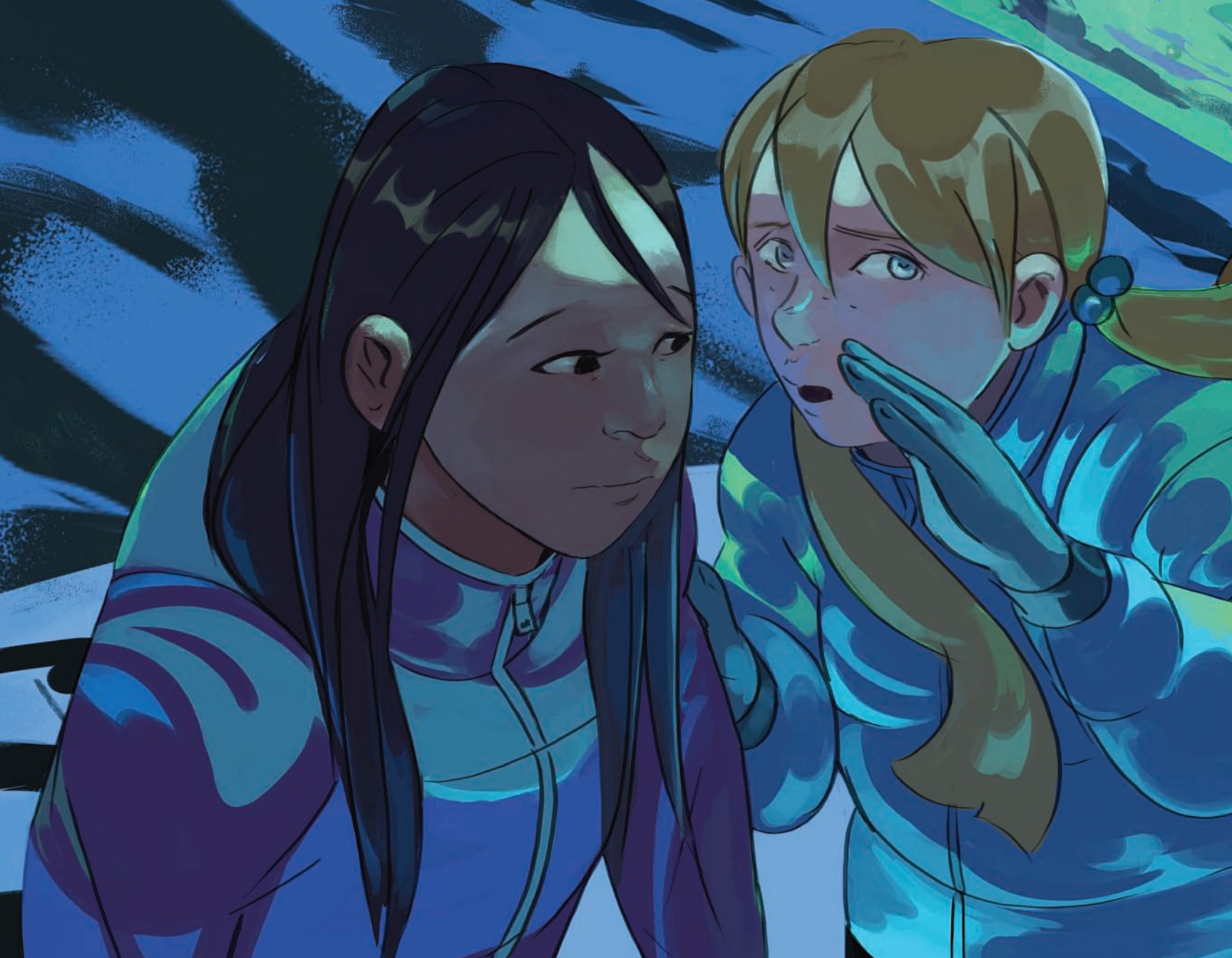
Leslie inched steadily back to the house with Oolipika behind her. *If we move slowly, she thought, whatever’s in the sky won’t notice us.*





The stars twinkled through the green and pink silky sheet that rippled overhead. Leslie felt her heart beat a little faster. Could the sky-colours hear her? Would they get close enough to touch her?







“Spirits?” Leslie whispered to her friend.

Oolipika nodded her head. “*Anirniit*—spirits,” she said.

Leslie held her breath and stared as the streaks of colour changed, painted more of the sky, and drifted closer.



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Leslie is new to the Arctic, and no one told her there would be so much snow, and so many interesting things to see. Along with her new friend Oolipika, Leslie soon discovers one of the Arctic's most unique and breathtaking natural wonders, the northern lights.

This contemporary narrative introduces young readers to an Inuit legend about the northern lights, followed by an epilogue that explains the science behind this amazing phenomenon.

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