



The Night the House Grows

Ages 9-12



Chapter 1: Three Suitcases

The first thing Adina sees is her cousin's suitcase on her pillow.

The second is another suitcase beneath her desk.

The third is Mama carrying the mattress Adina uses when a friend stays over.

"What's happening?"

"A pipe burst in Aunt Suri's building," Mama says. Her green tichel covers her hair completely. "The adults are arranging repairs. Their apartment isn't safe to stay in tonight. They are staying here."

"All of them?"

Mama lowers the mattress. "All four."

From downstairs comes her little cousin's voice.

"Where do we put the fish?"

Adina looks at the suitcase on her pillow.

Tomorrow is the day she brings her model courtyard to school. She needs to finish its paper trees, put everything in the carrier, and sleep without someone asking where to put a fish.

"How long?"

Mama pauses.

"We don't know yet."



Chapter 2: The Owner of the Pillow

Her cousin Baila comes upstairs holding a bag of clothes.

"Your room looks different," she says.

"It is different. There are suitcases in it."

Baila sets down the bag.

Adina hears her own voice. She doesn't like it. She doesn't quite want to take it back either.

"I need my desk."

"I'll move it."

Baila lifts the small case, bumps the chair, and sets it down again. Adina moves the chair out of the way. The case can stay on the rug for now.

Baila is eleven, like Adina. Usually they can spend an hour arguing about which paper doll gets the good shoes and enjoy every minute.

Tonight, Baila's shoes stand beside the door in a plastic bag. They are wet.

"Where is your brother sleeping?" Adina asks.

"With yours. I think. I don't know."

Baila sits beside the suitcase but doesn't open it.

Adina moves a paper tree away from the edge of her desk.

She wishes everyone would stop needing space.



Chapter 3: At the Bottom Step

After supper, Adina finds Mama on the bottom stair.

"Can I tell you something without everybody hearing?"

Mama comes into the little hallway.

"I know it's not their fault," Adina says quickly. "I know we should help. I know all of it."

Mama waits.

"But I want my room back."

The words feel enormous once she says them.

Mama doesn't tell her how lucky she is to have a dry pillow. Adina is grateful for the dry pillow. That doesn't make the suitcase less heavy on it.

"What part is hardest tonight?" Mama asks.

"The project. And I don't know what's mine anymore. And nobody asks."

"The emergency arrived before we could make a good plan," Mama says.

"We still need to make one."

Adina glances toward the dining room, where Aunt Suri is speaking quietly with Tatty.

"I don't want Baila to think I don't want her."

"I'll handle the sleeping arrangement with the grownups. You can tell Baila what you need without blaming her for the pipe."



Adina nods.

That sounds possible.

Not easy. Possible.

Chapter 4: The New Rules of the Room

Mama and Aunt Suri come upstairs together.

Aunt Suri's brown tichel is tied firmly, with all her hair covered. She looks tired in a way Adina doesn't usually see.

"For tonight," Mama says, "Adina keeps her bed. Baila uses the spare mattress. We can fit it along this wall if the suitcases go downstairs."

The two mothers move the heavy things. Adina and Baila carry the light bags.

"This shelf is free," Adina says. "But not the drawer. My project pieces are in there."

Baila puts her folded clothes on the shelf.

"May I use the little lamp?"

"Yes. I need the desk until half past eight."

"I can read downstairs."

Adina takes a breath.



"I'm sorry about what I said before. I'm upset about the room changing. Not about you having to leave your apartment."

Baila sits on the mattress.

"I'm upset about the room changing too," she says. "Mine."

Adina doesn't have an answer that makes that better.

She picks a suitcase strap off the floor so nobody trips.

"Do you want to put your book here?"

Baila does.

Chapter 5: The Missing Green

At twenty past eight, Adina still needs six paper leaves.

Her green pencil is missing. Her scissors are under the model. Every tree leans a different way.

She hears Baila coming upstairs and almost says, Not yet.

Baila stops at the door.

"How's the courtyard?"

"It looks like a windstorm."

Baila comes closer without touching it.

"These two trees could go beside the wall. Then they don't have to stand by themselves."



Adina considers them.

"Maybe."

"Do you want help?"

The question changes the room a little.

Adina wants help. She also wants Baila not to take over her project.

"Can you hold the carrier while I put it in? That's the part that keeps tipping."

"Yes."

They ask Mama to check the carrier before moving it. Mama makes room on a high shelf downstairs, beyond the little children's reach.

At half past eight, the desk is clear.

Baila sits at it to write in her own notebook.

Adina gets into her bed.

The room sounds wrong: a pencil moving, a different person breathing, the mattress creaking when Baila kneels.

Adina pulls the blanket up.

"What's in the notebook?"

"Things we need tomorrow. My slippers aren't in any of the bags."

Adina pushes her spare pair across the rug with one foot.

"They're too big," Baila says.



"They're slippers. They're allowed."

Baila tries them.

Her laugh is small, but it reaches the bed.

Chapter 6: Before Another Night

In the morning, the courtyard reaches school with all its trees upright.

Adina wants to tell the class the heroic version: overnight guests, lost pencil, model rescued at the last minute.

Then she remembers Baila's wet shoes.

She tells them about the courtyard.

After school, Mama gathers the family before supper. The repair isn't finished. The guests need another night.

Adina's stomach tightens.

Mama puts a sheet of paper on the table.

"We will review the arrangement after supper each day. Adina's desk time stays hers. Ask before borrowing things. Tatty and I handle changes in where people sleep."

Adina asks if she can have twenty quiet minutes in her room after school before the younger cousins come upstairs.

Mama and Aunt Suri agree.



Baila asks for a place to keep her unpacked things without packing them again every morning.

They find a second shelf.

Nobody knows the exact leaving day. Nobody writes one down to make the children feel better.

That evening, the suitcases stay downstairs.

Adina puts a fresh paper tree on her desk. Baila puts a notebook on her shelf.

"Want to play something?" Baila asks.

"After my quiet time."

"All right."

Adina closes the door. For twenty minutes, the room belongs to her usual afternoon.

Then she opens it herself.