Story 2: Limited Autonomy

Background: In this future scenario, natural resources have become scarce globally, which creates great geopolitical tensions. Some major countries have stopped the export of many strategic materials and goods. Canada, like many others, must rely on its own production capacity to meet the needs of its population. Each neighbourhood, city and region are assigned a role and everyone must contribute to this national autonomy in one way or another.

The following story is about Heather, a biologist who works in the processing of marine products.

March 4, 2050

Heather bursts into her apartment. She finished her day later than expected. There is a lot of work for Fourchette de la Baie, the company she works for, an innovative business specializing in the cultivation of fish, algae and molluscs. Located by the wharf, Fourchette de la Baie works with self-employed workers and small businesses to push for a second and third processing of its products. No resources are lost in the process! However, it takes a lot of creativity to find qualified staff in the context of workforce shortages.

Despite the fall in fish stocks, which has changed the industry drastically, fishing and aquaculture are among the productive functions assigned to the Gaspé Peninsula to meet the needs of all of Quebec. Harvesting, processing and recycling of wood and production of wind energy are the other functions of the peninsula.

Her Quebec-Connected portable digital device vibrates in her pocket. She glances at the screen: her travel optimization app reminds her that her autonomous electric shuttle will stop around the corner in 10 minutes. Heather grabs a frozen meal for her and her daughter Emily, as they will eat at school tonight and steps out. On her way, Heather meets her neighbour.

(Heather) Hello Christophe! Cold today, huh?

(Christophe) You're right, but it would take more cold for us to skate on the bay. Ice doesn't stay long these days.

(Heather) It's true that we don't have the winters we used to have! Say, it's my daughter's science fair tonight. Would you like to come with me? I'm sure she'd be happy to show you her invention!

Heather is proud of her 14-year-old daughter. Emily loves her Reuse, Recovery and Repair course. The project she is presenting tonight involves recovering and processing rare metals from old waste that is dug up from the Saint-Alphonse landfill. This is a new practice, initiated by a small social economy enterprise that complies with the strictest environmental and health standards.

As her school supports entrepreneurship, many students, motivated by the changes to be made, come up with various interesting projects. Who knows what Emily's project could become!

(Christophe) Ah! How kind of you to invite me! I would have gladly accepted, but tonight I will meet with the Immigrants Welcoming Committee. Filling labour shortages is all well and good, but it's humans we are welcoming, not robots! So, we are getting things organized for a Saturday night cultural potluck dinner. Are you still planning to come?

Heather and Christophe exchange a few more words and Heather smiles as she thinks of how lucky she is to have found a close-knit community, just like the Magdalen Islands where she used to live. She had to leave the islands 10 years ago, when her house was swept away by a storm. When she arrived in Gaspésie, she found an apartment for her and Emily in the village old church. In the early 2030s, due to the housing crisis, programs were created to target energy efficiency and building conversion. This country-wide project had made it possible to transform the church into six modern apartments with a common living room and workshop. But the residents weren't ready to share the common areas and wanted to convert them into individual storage spaces. However, according to artificial intelligence calculations, this use of space for private purposes was not optimal. The unused living room and workshop were eventually converted into new apartments.

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The shuttle rides the 132, which is now dotted with newly built sections, as artificial intelligence (AI) has calculated that sea flooding risks induced by climate change are too high. This has led to the relocation of several houses to land requisitioned for that purpose. The whole process has been very difficult, as both the displaced homeowners and landowners dispossessed of their land showed strong opposition. Another controversy raised by AI decisions has been the construction of a wind farm behind the neighbouring village 5 years ago. Although environmental groups and dozens of citizens have protested for months, the government went ahead. AI was clear. This was the most optimal place for wind energy production.

Lost in thought, Heather reflects on the past and her lost comfort… back then she owned a car, a large plot of land and a luxury camper. She tries to chase away this nostalgia by contemplating the sun setting over the Bay of Chaleur, setting the sky ablaze with a thousand pastel colours.