

M O T H E R S O F X S A N



# The Grizzly Mother

Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Natasha Donovan





For my father, Xsii Lig'i'nsxw, and my mother,  
Sa'anx gwanks, who shared much about survival, love,  
culture, and life with me.

—H.G. / B.D.H.

For my family

—N.D.

# THE GRIZZLY MOTHER

By Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

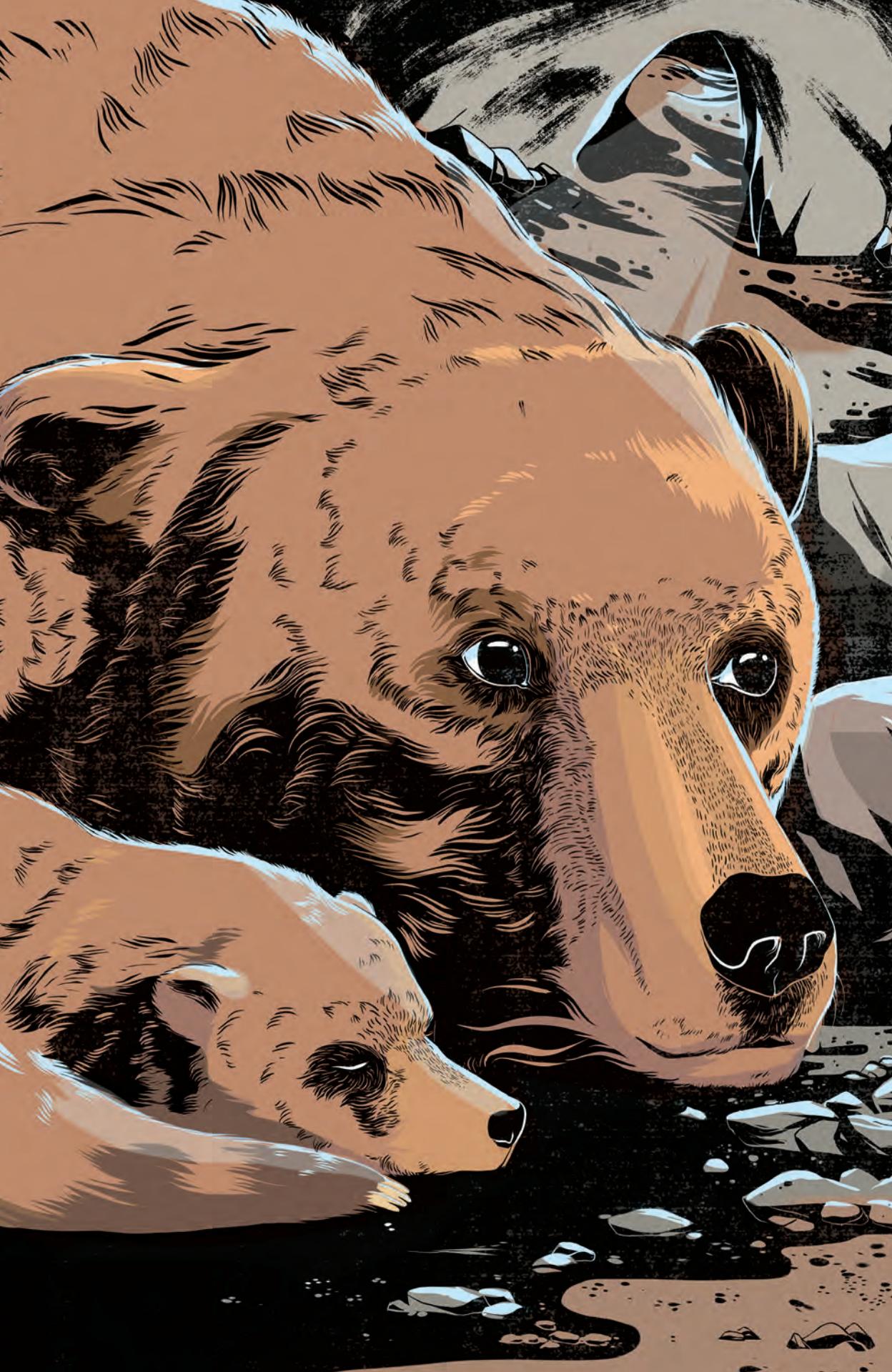
Illustrated by Natasha Donovan



# AWAKENING

A warm breeze breaks the cool, dark silence. It carries the scent of moistened soil. A slow heartbeat begins to pulse a little faster. Nox Lik’i’nsxw, the grizzly mother, awakens from torpor.<sup>1</sup> Her first-born cubs gnaw and scratch at her, impatient to explore outside of their den. The little bears only know darkness and scent.

<sup>1</sup> **Torpor** is a state of lowered bodily activity in response to cold.







The grizzly mother is exhausted from six months of living in their mountainside den. She has been without food and water for the duration, while also nursing her two cubs since the new year began.



It is early spring, the time of Wihlaxs, the Black Bear Walking Moon. Hlapl maaxws, the deep snow that covers the opening to the grizzly mother's den, is melting from the inside. The cold no longer pierces their door, and the earth is beginning to thaw. The air is different and even the grizzly mother now waits impatiently at the entrance, where she can smell the welcome scent of spring.



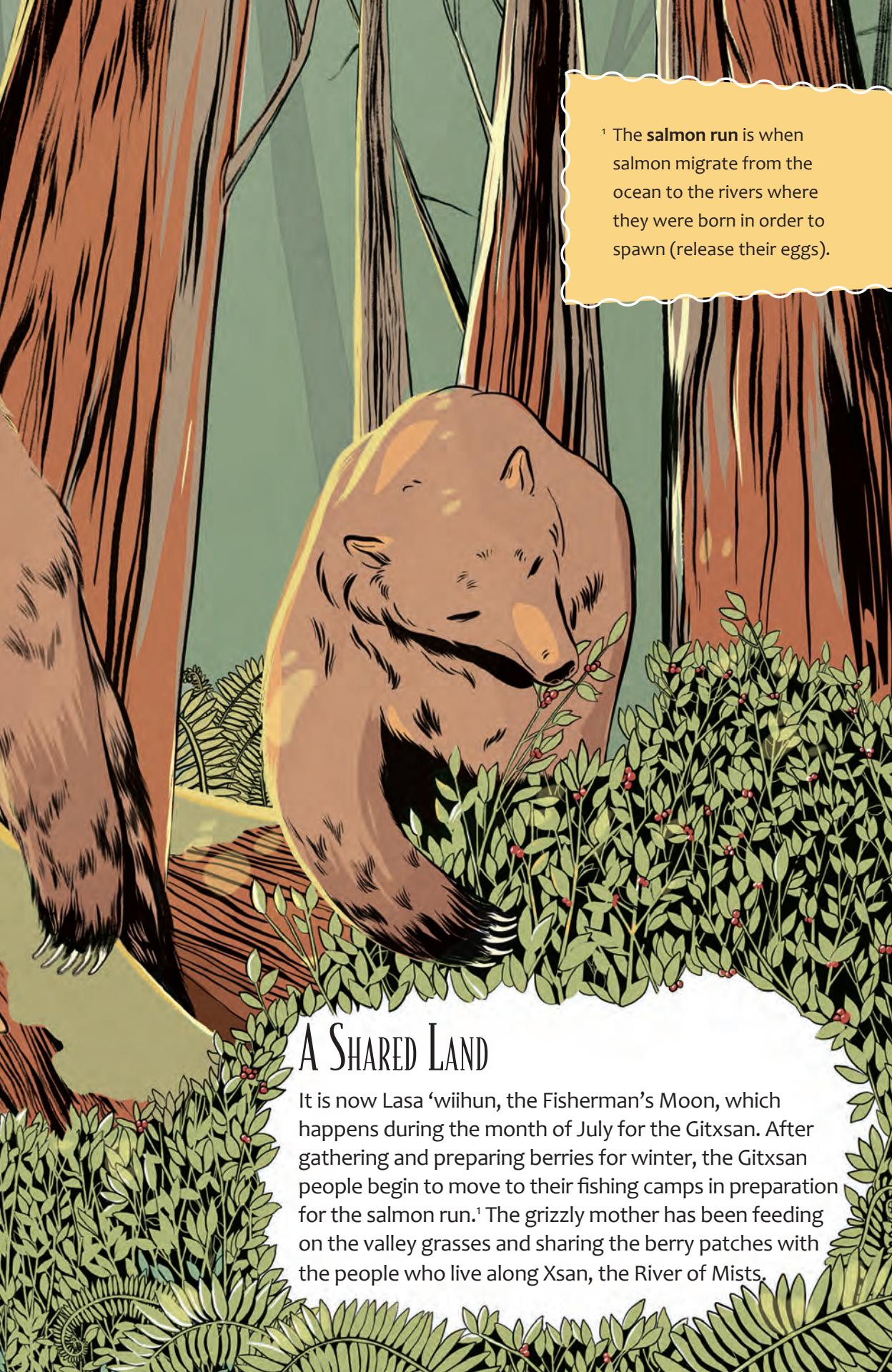


<sup>1</sup> Elevation refers to the height above sea level.



Once Nox Lik'i'nsxw is comfortable to leave, the journey to the food below will be a long one. Unlike the smax, black bears, who make their dens lower and closer to the valleys, the grizzly mother digs her den high on the mountainside. Of all the bears, grizzly mothers build their dens at the highest elevations.<sup>1</sup>





<sup>1</sup> The **salmon run** is when salmon migrate from the ocean to the rivers where they were born in order to spawn (release their eggs).

## A SHARED LAND

It is now Lasa ‘wiihun, the Fisherman’s Moon, which happens during the month of July for the Gitxsan. After gathering and preparing berries for winter, the Gitxsan people begin to move to their fishing camps in preparation for the salmon run.<sup>1</sup> The grizzly mother has been feeding on the valley grasses and sharing the berry patches with the people who live along Xsan, the River of Mists.

# THE GITXSAN

The Gitxsan Nation are Indigenous peoples from their unceded territories of the Northwest Interior of British Columbia. This 35,000 square kilometres of land cradles the headwaters of Xsan or “the River of Mist,” also known by its colonial name, the Skeena River. The land defines who they are.

The Nation follows a matrilineal line, and all rights, privileges, names, and stories come from the mothers. The Lax Seel (Frog), Lax Gibuu (Wolf), Lax Skiik (Eagle), and Gisghaast (Fireweed) are the four clans of the people. It is taboo to marry a fellow clan member, even when there are no blood ties.



The four clans are divided among the territories by way of the Wilp system. A Wilp, or “house group,” is a group comprising one or more families. Each Wilp has a head chief and wing chiefs, who are guided by Elders and members of their Wilp. Currently, there are 62 house groups, and each governs their portion of the Gitxsan Territories.

## THE GITXSAN MOONS

K'uholxs	Stories and Feasting Moon	January
Lasa hu'mal	Cracking Cottonwood and Opening Trails Moon	February
Wihlaxs	Black Bear's Walking Moon	March
Lasa ya'a	Spring Salmon's Returning Home Moon	April
Lasa 'yanja	Budding Trees and Blooming Flowers Moon	May
Lasa maa'y	Gathering and Preparing Berries Moon	June
Lasa 'wiihun	Fisherman's Moon	July
Lasa lik'lnxsw	Grizzly Bear's Moon	August
Lasa gangwiikw	Groundhog Hunting Moon	September
Lasa xsin laaxw	Catching-Lots-of-Trout Moon	October
Lasa gwineekxw	Getting-Used-to-Cold Moon	November
Lasa 'wiigwineekxw or Lasa gunkw' ats	Severe Snowstorms and Sharp Cold Moon	December
Ax wa	Shaman's Moon	a blue moon, which is a second full moon in a single month



Kispiox  
River

Bulkley  
River

Skeena River

Stekyodin

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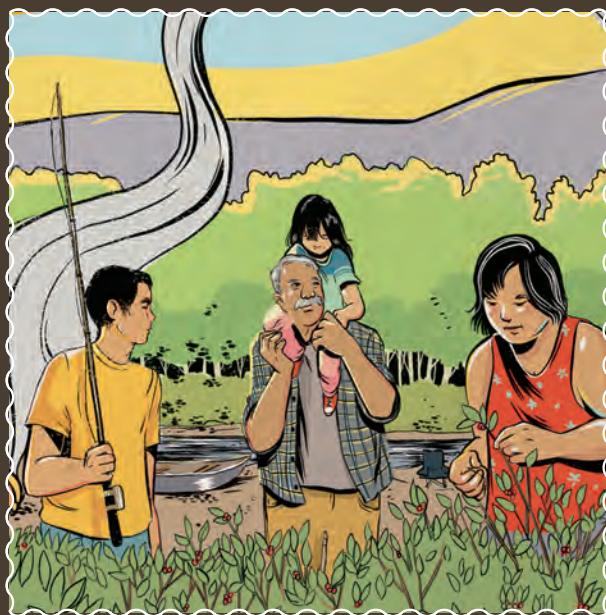






*With beautiful, clear words to match vivid illustrations, The Grizzly Mother functions both as a sequel to The Sockeye Mother, and as its own powerful story of love, traditional knowledge, and culture.*

—David A. Robertson, Governor General's Award-winner



## PRAISE FOR *THE SOCKEYE MOTHER*

*Huson eloquently conveys the fragile interconnectedness of the natural world and the moral imperative to protect it.*

— Publishers Weekly

*Accessible to fluent readers in the late primary and intermediate grades, this book is a rich source of information and fits well with the Social Studies and Science curriculum.*

—Canadian Teacher Magazine

*Highly Recommended.*

—Debbie Reese, AICL

*An excellent addition to curriculums that tie scientific principles to cultural practices; the work should be embraced by libraries to help educate readers about the Gitxsan.*

—Kirkus Reviews

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—Ontario School Library Journal