

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



The
Eagle
Mother

Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Natasha Donovan



For Xsiwis (Dr. M. Jane Smith), who always told
me I would be a writer, and to this day, works hard
to preserve Gitxsan stories.

—H.G./B.D.H.

For the friends and family who helped lift me up this year—
with love and immense gratitude.

—N.D.

THE EAGLE MOTHER

By Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Illustrated by Natasha Donovan



UNEXPECTED STORM

A strong wind blows through the valleys of Xsan, River of Mists. The land feels chilled and moisture carries the cold into every imaginable nook and cranny. The sun, which was cresting over the mountain during the early morning rain, now struggles to peek through an unexpected winter flurry. The Gitxsan would say “gal ‘nakwhl maadim,” the winter is too long. This is the time of Lasa Ya’a, the Spring Salmon’s Returning Moon, the moon we see during the month of April.



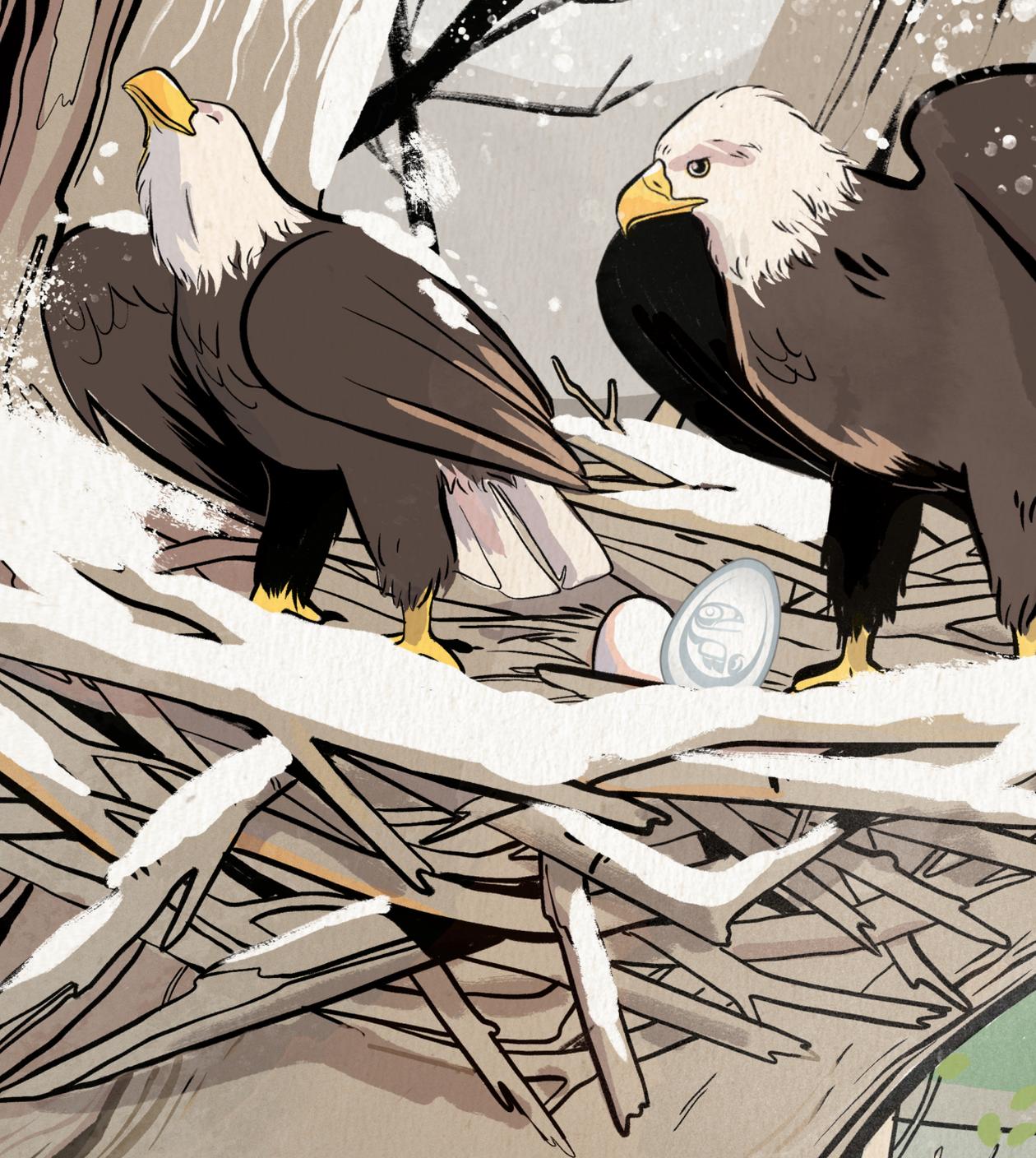


Flurry – a light, brief, shower of snow.

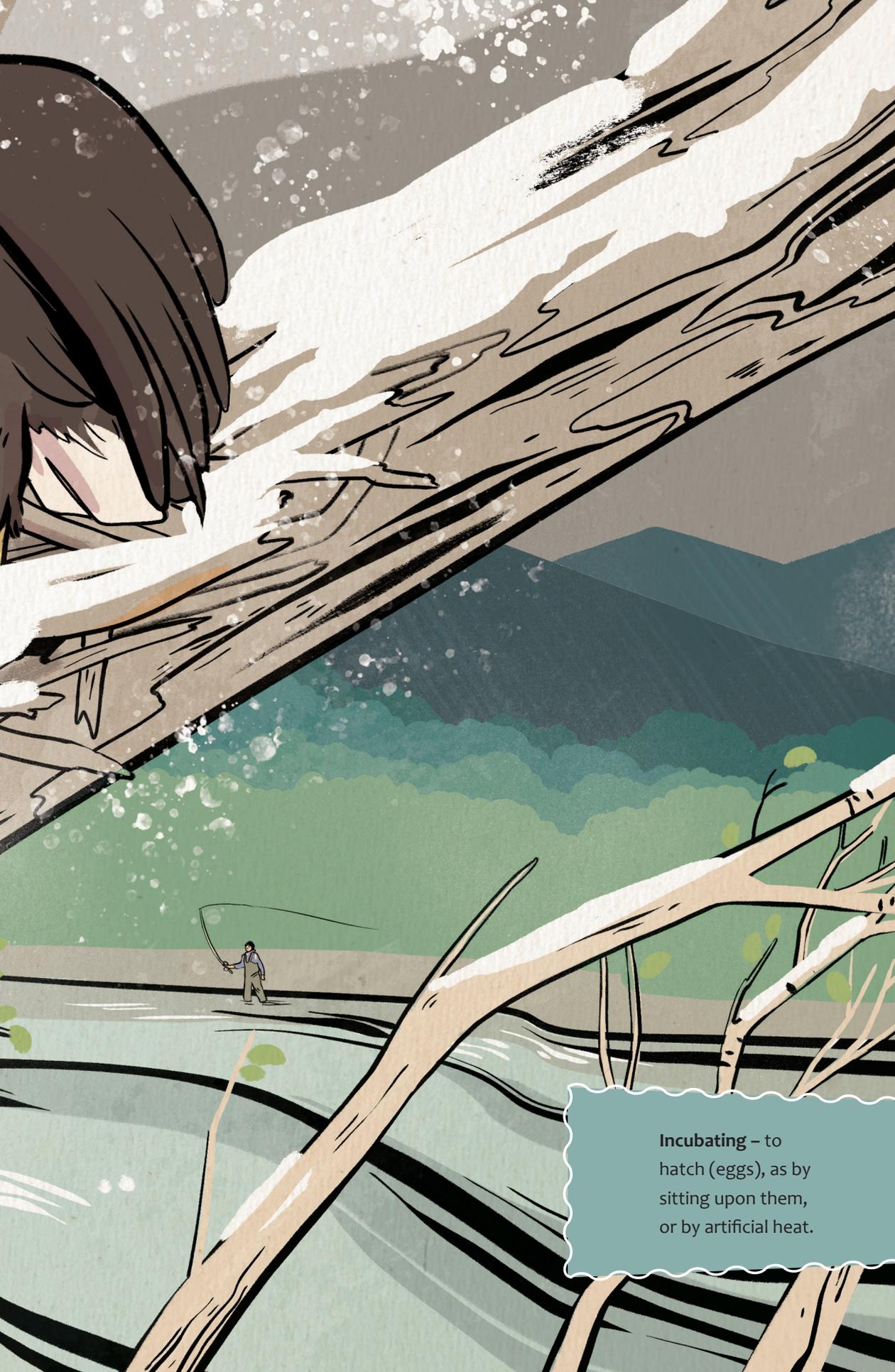




Standing out amongst the thick brush of the riverbank, t'uutsxw am'mal, a black cottonwood, stretches high above the other trees. Woven into the fork of its strongest branches is the nest of Nox Xsgyaak, the eagle mother. She appears frozen to the tree, but she is protecting an important treasure.



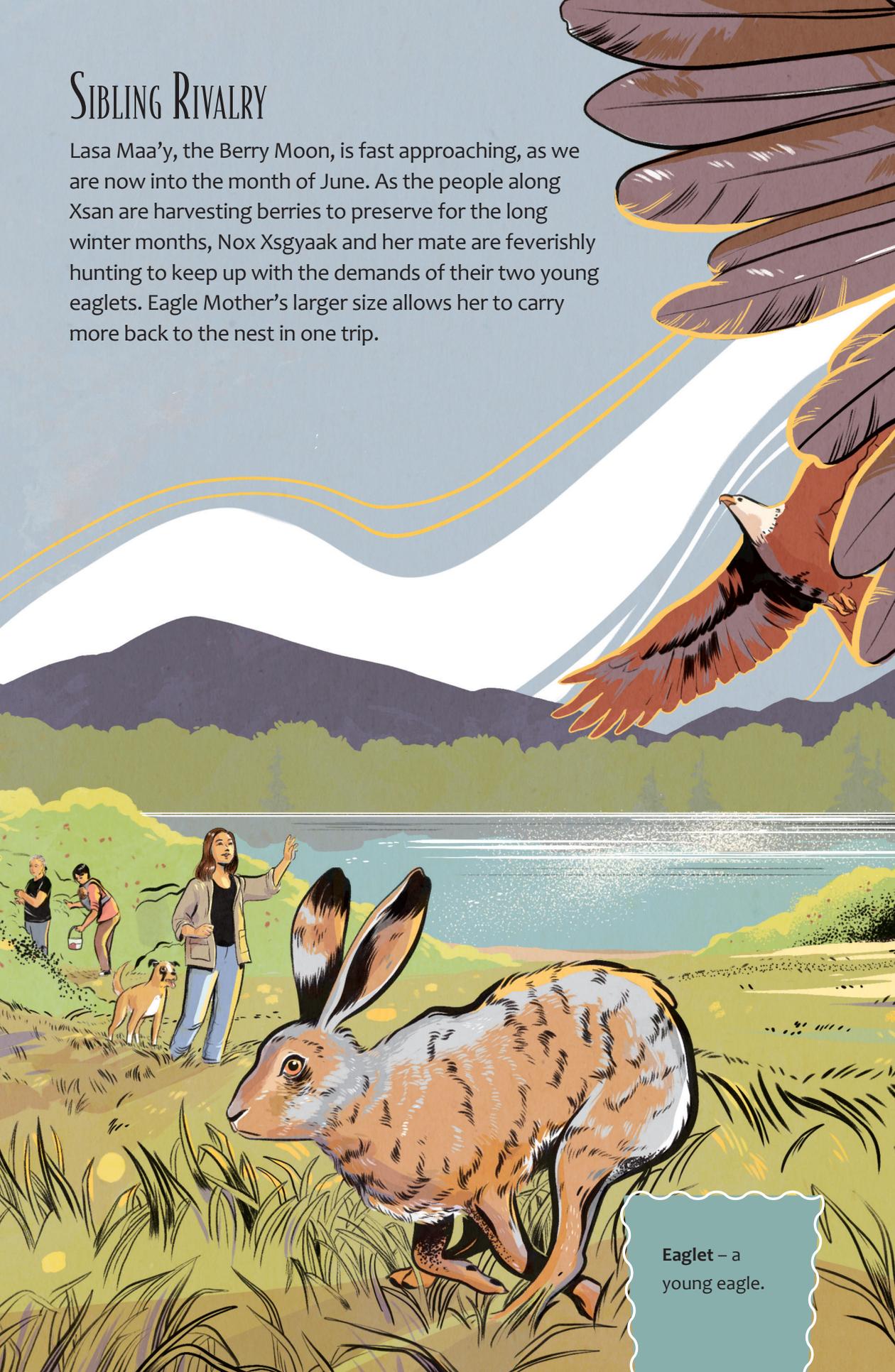
As her mate arrives, she moves to the edge of the nest where she can finally shake the snow from her feathers. Two large eggs are now exposed to light and cold. The father hastily moves to take his turn at incubating. The eggs are almost two weeks away from hatching. This mother and father will pair for life, and they have been together now for three breeding seasons. The spring storm hasn't dampened their spirits, nor is it stopping the Gitksan from fishing along the riverbanks below.



Incubating – to hatch (eggs), as by sitting upon them, or by artificial heat.

SIBLING RIVALRY

Lasa Maa'y, the Berry Moon, is fast approaching, as we are now into the month of June. As the people along Xsan are harvesting berries to preserve for the long winter months, Nox Xsgyaak and her mate are feverishly hunting to keep up with the demands of their two young eaglets. Eagle Mother's larger size allows her to carry more back to the nest in one trip.



Eaglet – a young eagle.



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’i’nxsw	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 ‘wiigwiineekxw 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

Stekyodin

Bulkley
River

Skeena River

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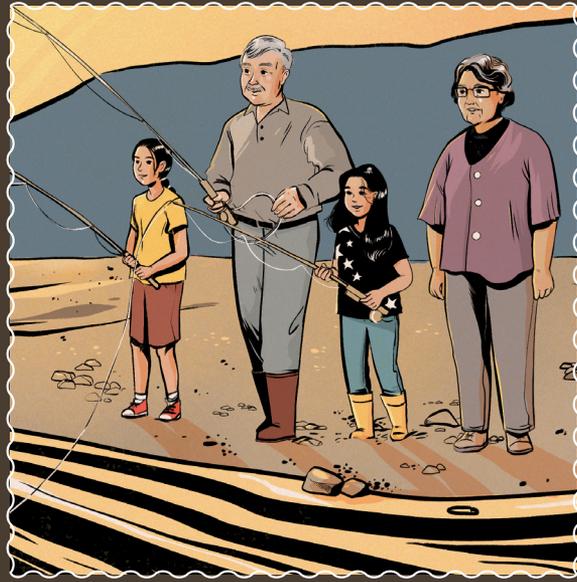
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