

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



# The Bee Mother

Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Natasha Donovan







For those who still fight for the land... For those who lend  
their voice to the ones who can't speak.

— H.G. / B.D.H.

For my family, with love.

— N.D.

# THE BEE MOTHER

By Hetxw'ms Gyetxw (Brett D. Huson)

Illustrated by Natasha Donovan





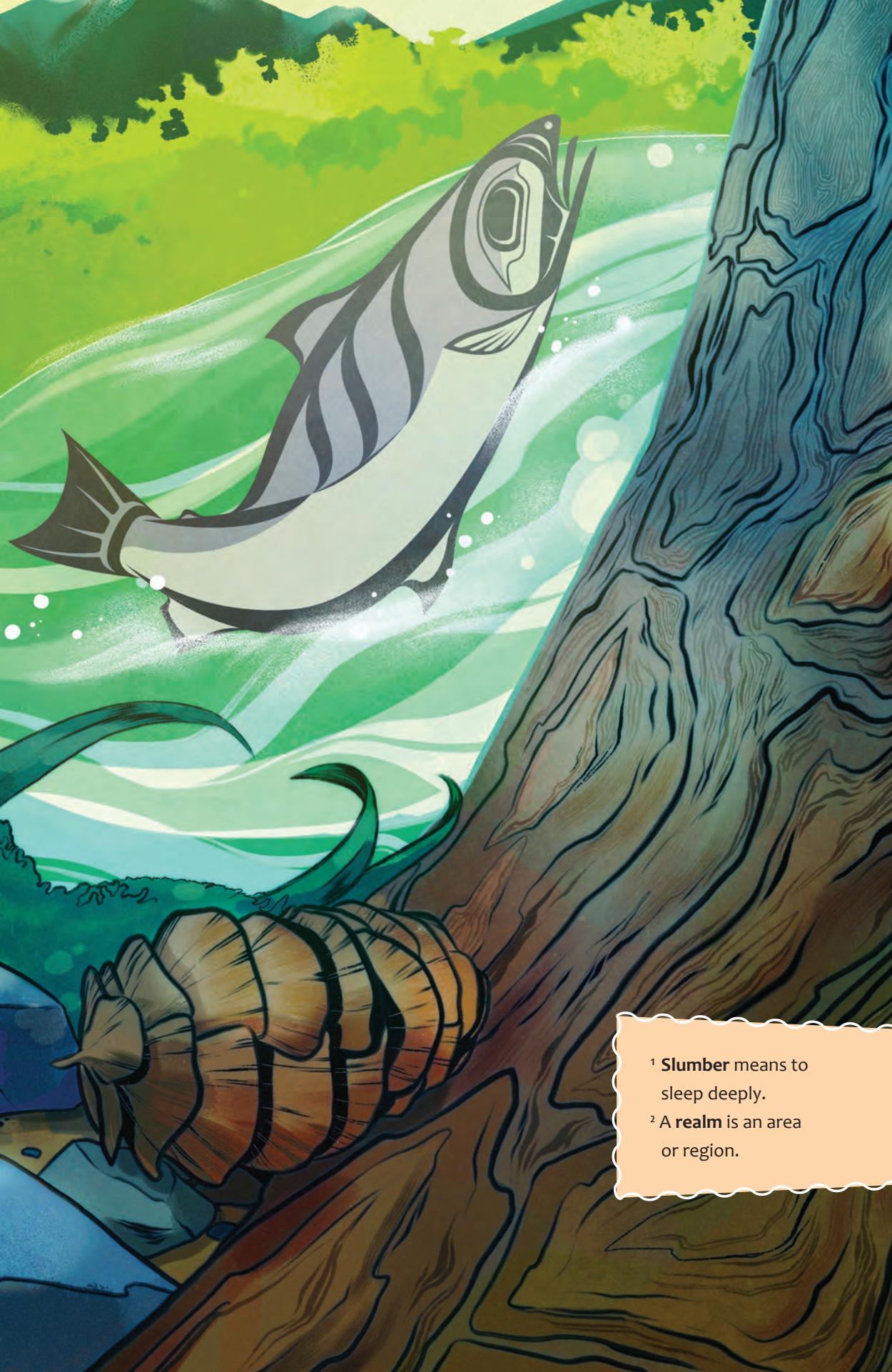
# A NEW QUEEN

Winter's chill recedes, and the spring salmon return to the fishing holes. It is an exciting time for the Gitxsan as life returns to the lax yip, the territory, and soon the majagalee, flowers, will bloom.

March is the time of Wihlaxs, Black Bear's Walking Moon. Nox Ap, the bee mother, awakens from her winter slumber<sup>1</sup> along the realm<sup>2</sup> of Xsan, the River of Mists. Nox Ap seems to appear from the great beyond as the bumblebee queen crawls out of her warm hiding space.







<sup>1</sup> **Slumber** means to sleep deeply.

<sup>2</sup> A **realm** is an area or region.





<sup>1</sup> A **burrow** is a hole or tunnel dug by a small animal or an insect.

<sup>2</sup> **Decaying** means rotting or decomposing.





Nox Ap is looking for a new home. She searches for a small underground burrow<sup>1</sup> or a hollow decaying<sup>2</sup> tree. Like Nox Ap, a yellow jacket wasp also seeks a new home. The yellow jacket queen needs space to hang her paper hive. Honeybees, more recently introduced to Gitxsan lands by settlers, have found their way into the wild. A swarm of honeybees and their queen have left an overcrowded hive to start a new one.





The yellow jackets build their a paper hive—called Anda Ap, bee pouch—on a sturdy tree branch, while the honeybees make a bigger home in the hollow of an old tree trunk. Although their homes look different, the process to build them is similar. They start by creating a series of small cells that will later make up the giant hive. The worker bees' will take over as the queen focuses on laying more eggs and growing the hive.

<sup>1</sup> **Worker bees** are female bees that build the hive and collect pollen and nectar to bring back to the hive.







Unlike wasps and honeybees, bumblebees don't build big hives, looking instead for places to build smaller nests. Nox Ap has found a place to lay her first eggs—in the hollow of a crumbling pine tree close to the pillowy moss floor. In her new nest she weaves her eggs in a cocoon<sup>1</sup> of food and wax. They will pupate<sup>2</sup> and eventually emerge from the cocoon as full-grown worker bees.








<sup>1</sup> A **cocoon** is a pouch or sack that protects insect pupae.

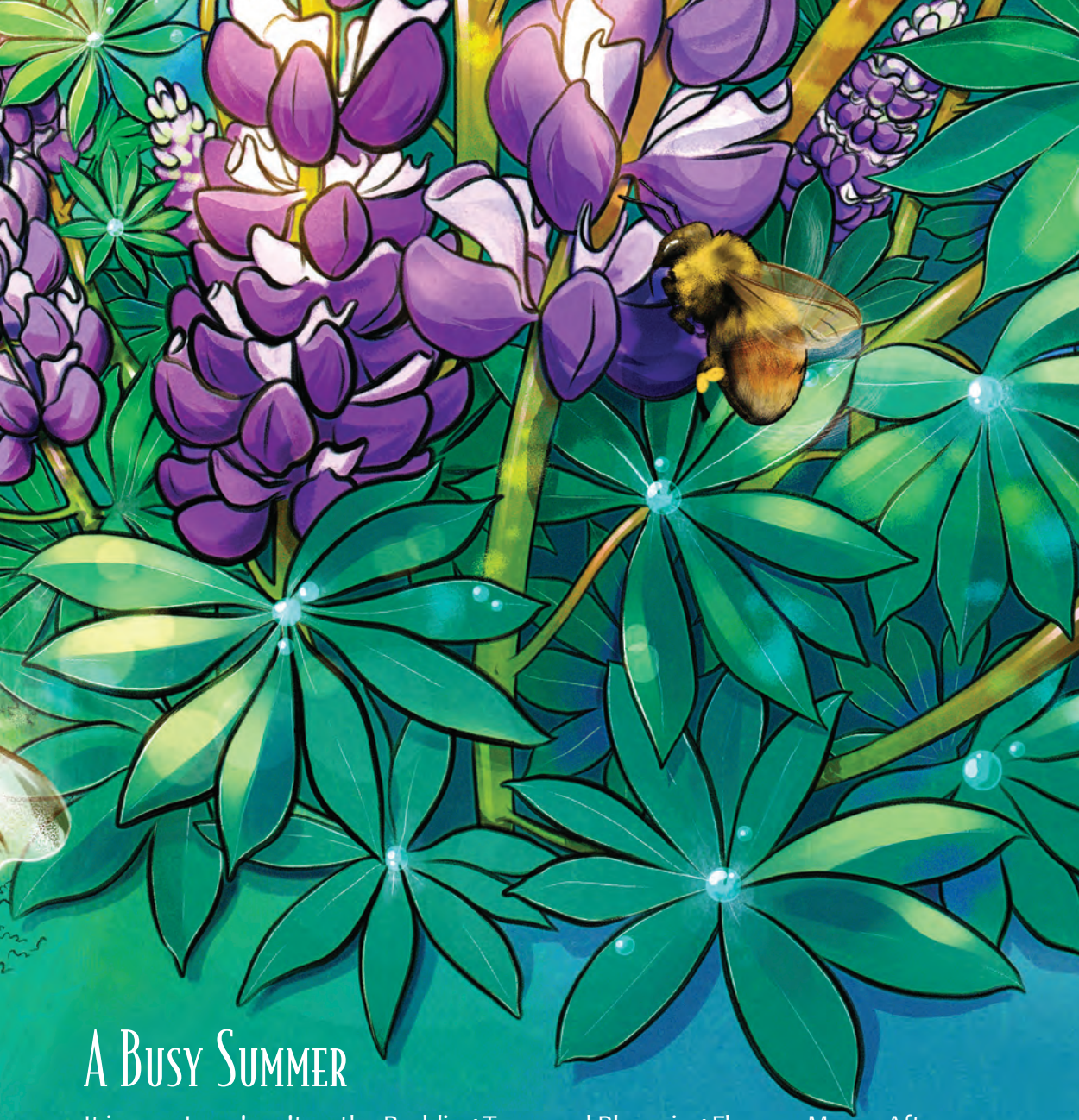
<sup>2</sup> To **pupate** means to grow from larva to an adult insect.





<sup>1</sup> Pollinators are animals or insects that move pollen between flowers.





## A BUSY SUMMER

It is now Lasa 'yan'tsa, the Budding Trees and Blooming Flowers Moon. After spending the better part of springtime building up her nest, Nox Ap will lay many eggs throughout the summer, including those that may become next year's queens. She sends worker bees out to collect the pollen and nectar needed to sustain the nest.

As pollinators, bumblebees and honeybees are vital to the land. The people along the River of Mists know them as nature's gardeners, while their relatives, the yellow jackets, are nature's pest control. Though the yellow jackets are pollinators too, they are known for being predators, hunting among the flowers and plants for flies and other pests to bring back to their hives for food.

With the help of Nox Ap and her bee relatives, the fruits and vegetables that the Gitxsan depend on will thrive.



# THE GITXSAN

The Gitxsan Nation are Indigenous Peoples from their unceded territories of the Northwest Interior of British Columbia. These 35,000 square kilometres of land cradle the headwaters of Xsan, the River of Mists, also known by its colonial name, the Skeena River. The land defines who the Gitxsan are.

The Nation follows a matrilineal line, and all rights, privileges, names, and stories come from the mothers. 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

<b>K'uholxs</b>	Stories and Feasting Moon	January
<b>Lasa hu'mal</b>	Cracking Cottonwood and Opening Trails Moon	February
<b>Wihlaxs</b>	Black Bear's Walking Moon	March
<b>Lasa ya'a</b>	Spring Salmon's Returning Home Moon	April
<b>Lasa 'yan'tsa</b>	Budding Trees and Blooming Flowers Moon	May
<b>Lasa maa'y</b>	Gathering and Preparing Berries Moon	June
<b>Lasa 'wiihun</b>	Fisherman's Moon	July
<b>Lasa lik'i'nxsw</b>	Grizzly Bear's Moon	August
<b>Lasa gangwiikw</b>	Groundhog Hunting Moon	September
<b>Lasa xsin laaxw</b>	Catching-Lots-of-Trout Moon	October
<b>Lasa gwineekxw</b>	Getting-Used-to-Cold Moon	November
<b>Lasa 'wiigwiineekxw or Lasa gunkw' ats</b>	Severe Snowstorms and Sharp Cold Moon	December
<b>Ax wa</b>	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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—Debbie Reese and Jean Mendoza (AICL)



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