



WHAT'S IN A BEAD?

WRITTEN BY
KELSEY BORGFORD

ILLUSTRATED BY
TESSA PIZZALE

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Kohkom always smells of campfire stories when I wrap my arms around her.

Mom explains, "It is because her hands sew colorful beads all day long onto smoked hides."



“I want to bead too,” I tell Mom.

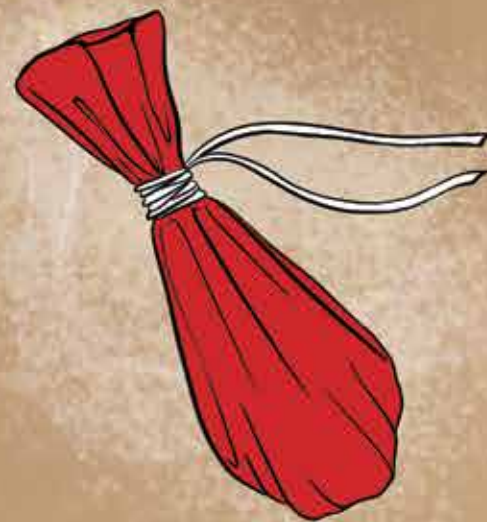
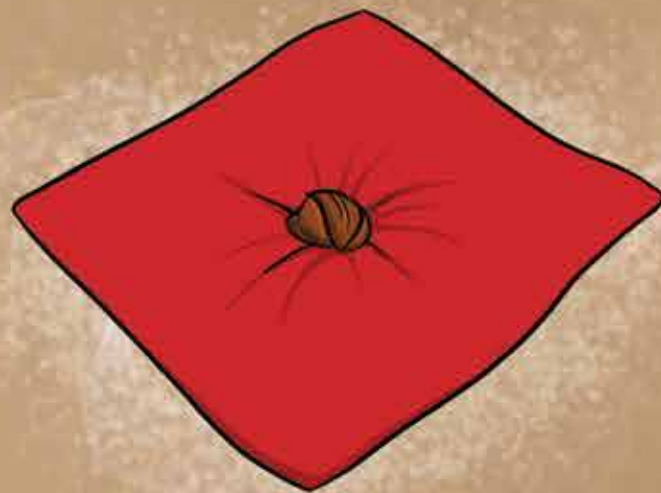
“Kohkom will teach you, but there are some things you must know before she does,” Mom says. “You need to know the stories about beading first.”

“You should always offer tobacco
before asking for something
from our Elders,” Mom tells me.

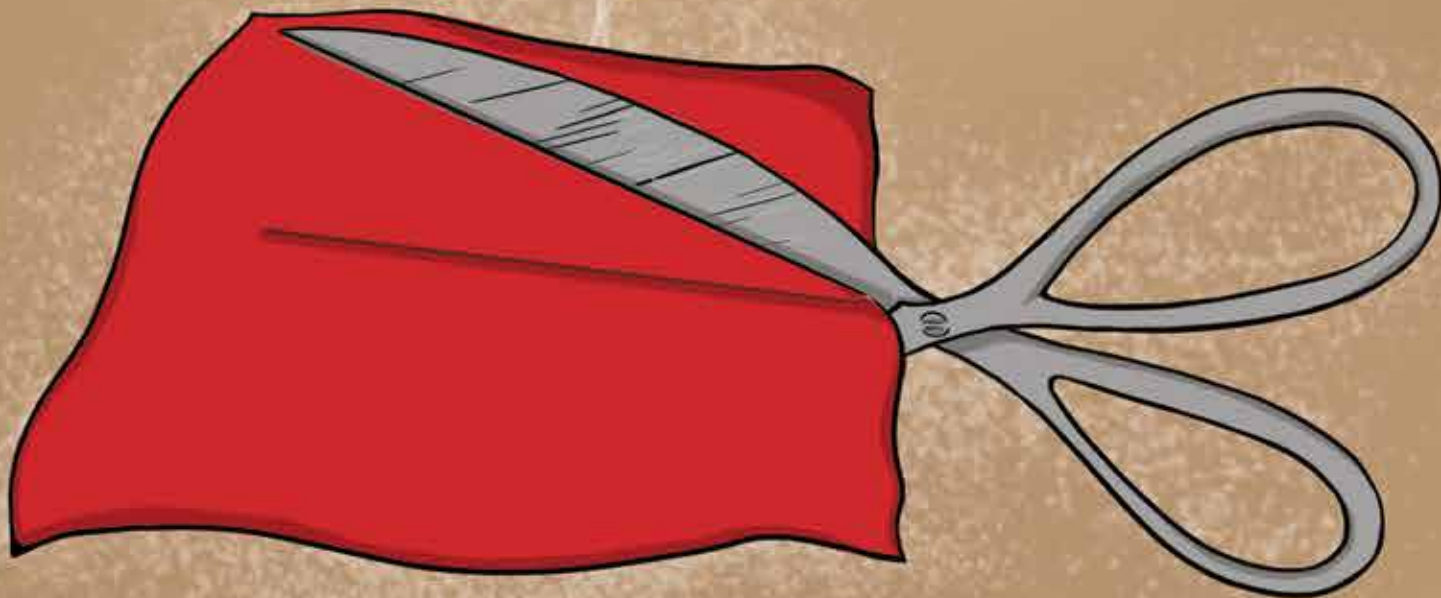
She helps me make a tobacco tie.



We cut up a soft red piece of fabric, put the tobacco in the center, and while Nii-gahwee helps me tie it up with a white piece of yarn, I pray.



"I want to know what Kohkom knows, please help her teach me."





We put on our coats and mukluks, walk to Kohkom's house, and knock on the wooden door.



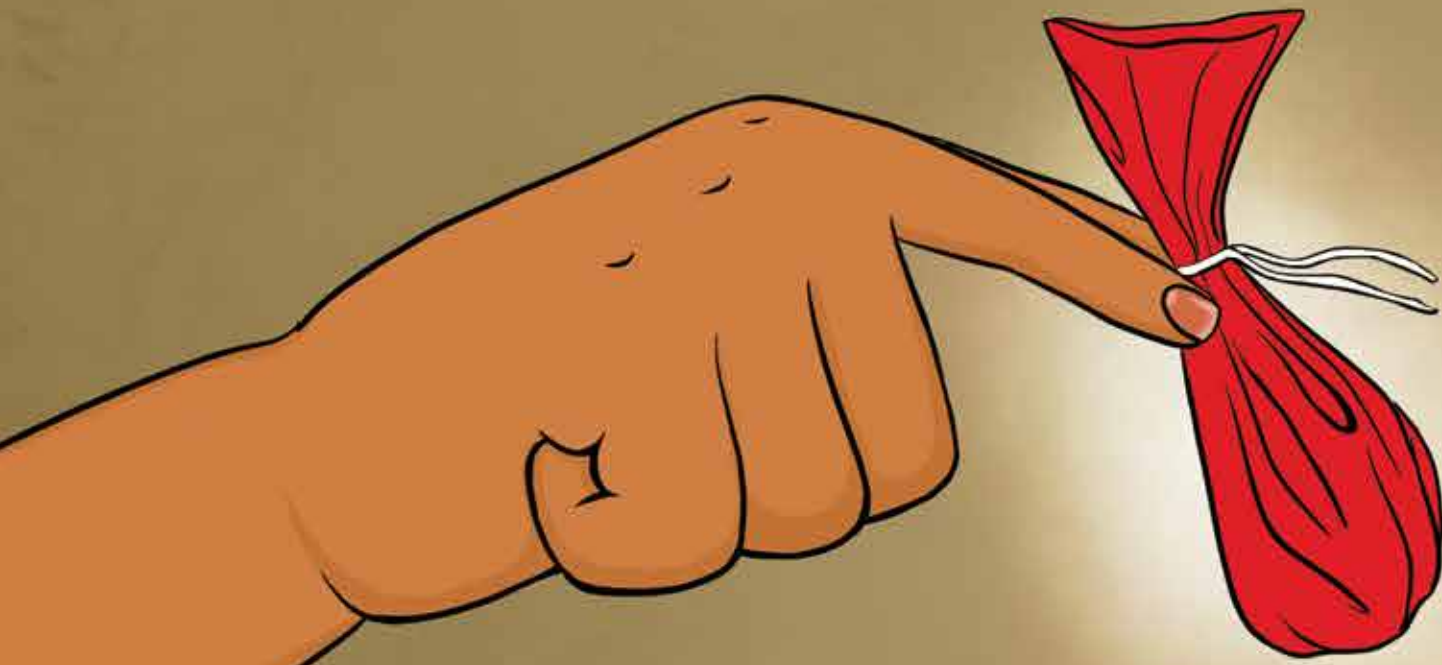
Kohkom smiles as she lets us in, greeting us in Cree. "wâciye! Hello!"



Kohkom's home is filled by the smell of cedar tea boiling on the stove. She pours us each a cup and sits down at the table as we take off our coats.

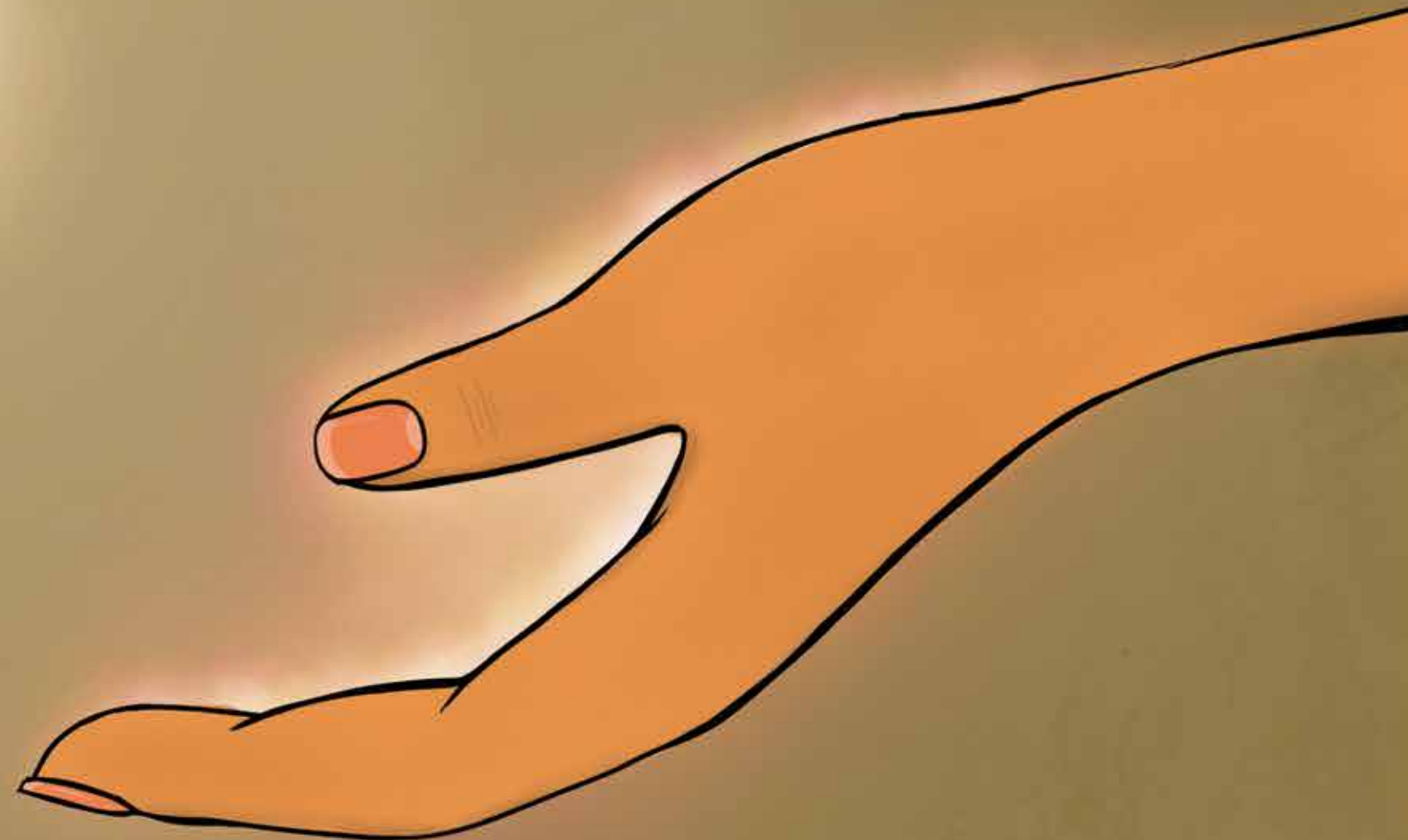
Mom speaks with pride when she says, "Tessa wants to ask you something."





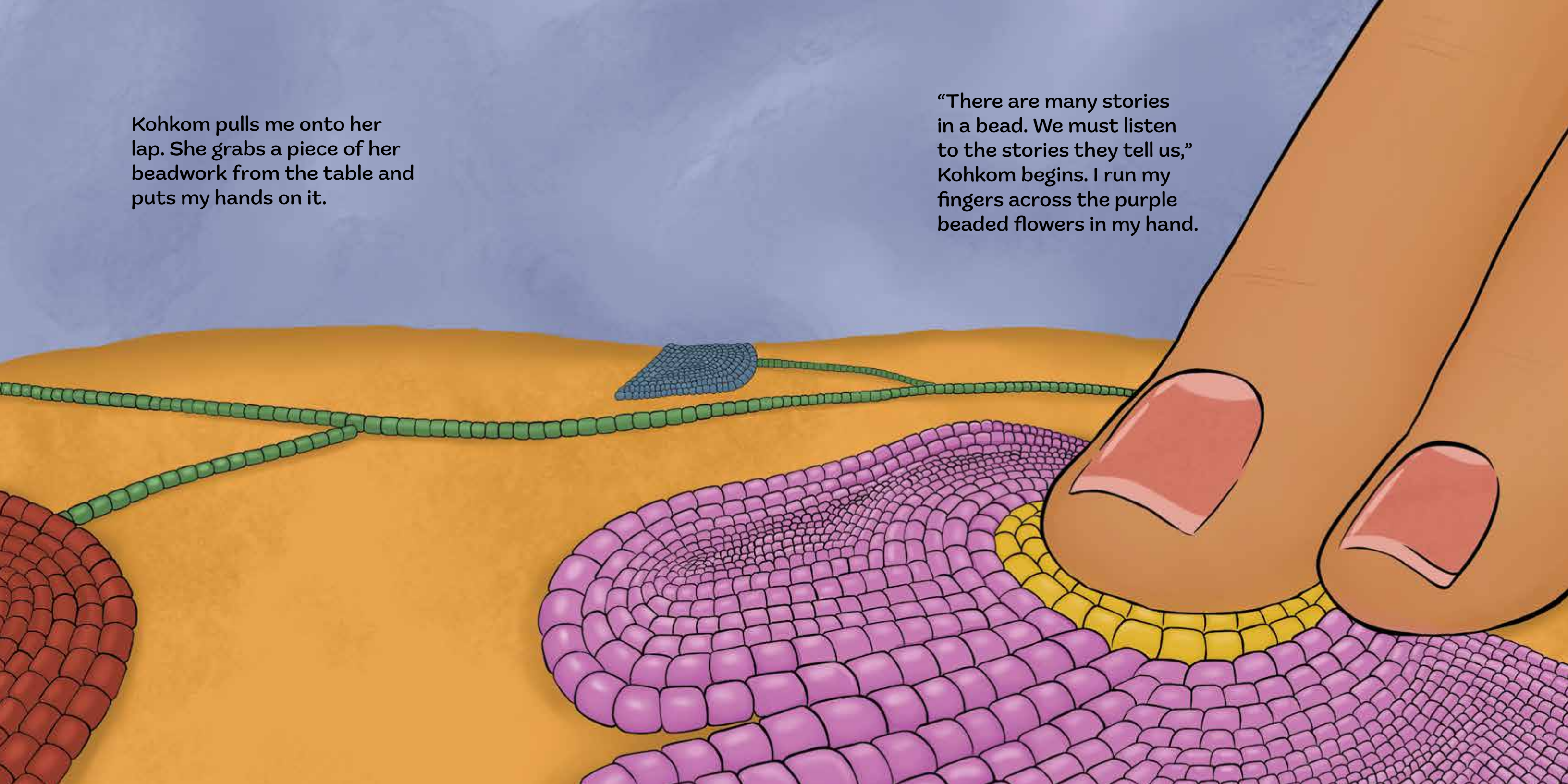
Mom urges me forward and I place the tobacco tie in Kohkom's gentle hands.


"Kohkom, will you teach me how to bead?" I ask. She closes her fingers around it and puts it into the pocket of her pants.



Kohkom pulls me onto her lap. She grabs a piece of her beadwork from the table and puts my hands on it.

“There are many stories in a bead. We must listen to the stories they tell us,” Kohkom begins. I run my fingers across the purple beaded flowers in my hand.





“Years ago, the ceremonies and gatherings where we would wear our traditional regalia were banned.” Kohkom speaks quietly. I can tell this makes her sad.

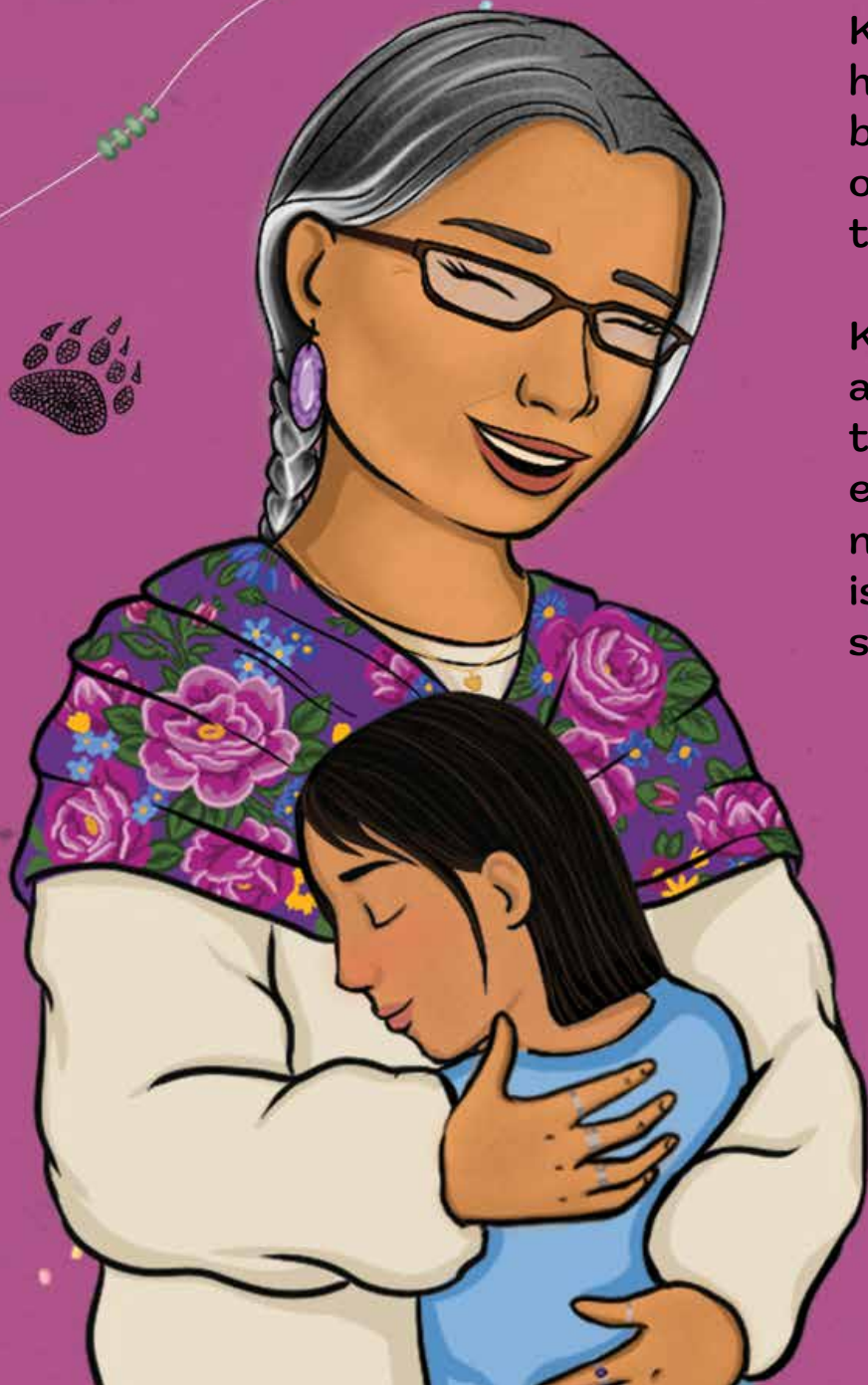
“We kept beading though to make sure our ways weren’t lost forever. Our beads wanted to be used. Their spirit called to us, and we listened,” she explains, pulling out a wooden chest of old beadwork.



“We listened because they helped us stay strong in our culture. They told stories about who we are.” Kohkom shows me a pair of moccasins with bright beads in the shape of flowers and plants on it. “You see these? These tell stories of the Anishinaabe people, these are their moccasins.”

I see what she means now because the florals beaded on Kohkom’s Cree moccasins look different from the Anishinaabe ones. I understand that the beads tell us stories, I can see them in the designs of the beadwork. Beads can show people who we are.





I snuggle against Kohkom's chest, hugging her tight and breathing in the smell of campfire stories that I love so much.

Kohkom hugs me back and pulls the beads towards me, and says excitedly, "My girl, now you know what is in a bead. Let's get started!"



Kelsey Borgford is Nbisiing Nishnaabe from the Marten clan and Couchie family. She currently resides in Nipissing First Nation, the traditional territory of her people, studying Indigenous Studies at Nipissing University. She previously graduated from both Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention at Canadore College and Native Community Worker, Traditional Healing Methods, at Anishinabek. Borgford writes both fiction and nonfiction and draws her inspiration to succeed from her culture and family.

Tessa Pizzale grew up in North Bay, Ontario. She is currently working on her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Nipissing University. She loves illustrating, painting, or creating different Indigenous crafts, like regalia leather belts, ribbon skirts, and beadwork. Pizzale learned a lot of her craftsmanship from her late kookum, who taught her how to bead, and her nikawiy, who taught her how to sew.

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"THERE ARE MANY STORIES IN A
BEAD. WE MUST LISTEN TO THE
STORIES THEY TELL US."

Tessa loves how her grandmother always smells of campfire stories. Mom says it's because Kohkom spends her days sewing beautiful beads onto smoked hides. Inspired, Tessa asks Kohkom to teach her beading, but first she must listen and learn the many stories held in a bead.

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