

KIJU—A STORY ABOUT NETUKULIMK

An original story by Melody Martin-Googoo

Angie skips along the road, stopping every so often to kick pebbles down the street. It's late in April and Angie listens to the sound of a chickadee in the distance, "cheeeseburrrgerrr." Angie stops, smiles to herself and closes her eyes to imagine the morning sun shining on her face. After a few days of rain, spring is here, the grass is beginning to green and she is off to her **Kiju's** house for the day. "Sssweet!" Angie declares and picks up speed, her little feet running as fast as they can as she dodges puddles and tries not to get her new sneakers wet. Angie's mom smiles as she observes her little girl run along to her grandmother's a few houses down the road. Angie's mom has an important meeting in the city for work today and thankfully, Angie's **Kiju** was more than happy to have her youngest granddaughter all to herself for the entire day.

The little yellow house stands out from the rest of the houses on the street. It is tiny and its front porch is filled with clay pots and soil and all kinds of other treasures a grandmother might collect in her lifetime. Angie stops to catch her breath at the bottom of **Kiju's** front step. Just as she's about to turn and wave to her mother, the front door flies open! "Oh hello, **Tu's! Kla'pis pekisin, sa'q eskma'lul** Angie Baby!" Angie's heart warms with the sight of her little grandmother—her warm brown eyes (just like her own!), the deep wrinkles on the side of her face, and her soft dimples when she smiles. **Kiju** makes her way down the step and grabs Angie's little nose with her hands. Angie pretends to play the game with her grandmother, "I've

got your nose!" **Kiju's** thumb peeks through her fingers as if Angie's nose is caught in her hand. Angie playfully grabs "her nose" back, puts it back onto her face and embraces her **Kiju** in a big snuggly hug. Angie squeezes tight as **Kiju** kisses the top of her head.

"Angie Baby! We've got a big day ahead of us!" **Kiju** looks down at Angie's new white sneakers and frowns. "Hmmpf, the first thing you've got to do is change those new sneakers and put on some boots, your **tepots** are in the closet, go put them on and grab my sweater too." Angie listens to her grandmother and grabs her boots out of the closet. As she hands **Kiju** her sweater she asks: "Are we going to town today? Are we going on a taxi cab? Are we going to get groceries?" "No, no, no...But! First, I want you to guess what I saw lighting up the yard last night?" Angie thinks for a while. "Fireflies?" **Kiju** says, "And do you know what that means my little Angie Baby? The thin birchbark is ready for cutting and we can make mayflower cones today." Angie's face lights up and her smile is so big



TRANSLATIONS

Kiju Grandmother

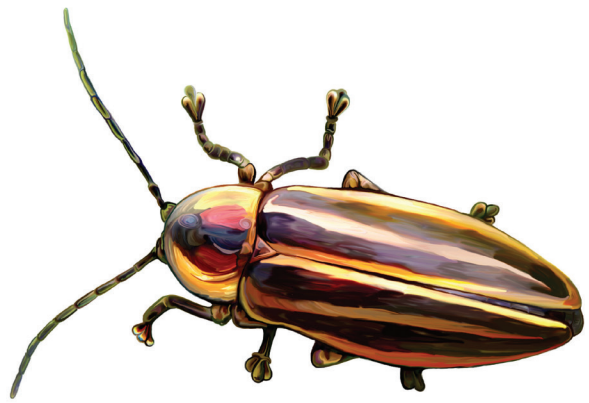
Kla'pis pekisin, sa'q eskma'lul You're finally here! I've been waiting for you!

Tepots Boots **Tu's** Term of affection for a girl

that all of her teeth can be seen. Angie's older cousin **Pi'kun** always got to help **Kiju** with mayflowers and now it is Angie's turn! She just knew that turning seven would be awesome. It feels so good being a BIG girl now! Angie does a little dance and joins her **Kiju** at the bottom of the step. **Kiju** wears her rain boots and carries a big hand-woven basket. "Cross your fingers Angie, these mayflowers are getting more difficult to find as I get older." Angie takes the big basket from her grandmother and gives her **Kiju** a look of curiosity, "Why?" "The world is changing and, with it, the places where mayflowers grow. They don't like the change, my dear." The two walk along the side of the house to a worn pathway that crosses the yard and leads into the woods.

It is warm out and Angie and **Kiju** walk for some time. Just then, Angie spots a pussy-willow tree and runs over to it. She pulls the branch down and pops a little bud off of the tree. She gently brushes the soft bud along her hand and then her face. Angie giggles to herself when she remembers how she once thought a little kitten lived inside the bud of a pussywillow tree. **Kiju** walks over to Angie and reminds her, "Now don't you pull that branch off of that tree. That tree is life and if you pull that branch off, it won't be the same." Angie turns to her grandmother and replies, "I know **Kiju**, I remember what Granddad told me and I won't forget to respect the tree's what...um, that..." (Angie pauses to remember). "The Creator?" replies **Kiju** with a gentle reminder. "Yeah, I won't forget to respect what the Creator has shared with us." **Kiju** nods her head and smiles, "**Kewisin?**" Angie's tummy growls, "My tummy's talking!" The two laugh as they prepare their picnic.

Kiju sets out a large piece of oil cloth on the



wasoqetesinktew (firefly)

grass. She carefully removes a little jar of homemade gooseberry jam, some tea biscuits, and a thermos of hot tea. Angie tries to hide her disappointment when she sees the thermos of tea, but **Kiju** pulls out a grape juice pack and some bolognaie and hands it to Angie, "**Na**" **Kiju** says. Angie's frown disappears. The two eat their lunch, chat about things and enjoy the peaceful, warm and sunny afternoon. Angie helps **Kiju** clean up their picnic. **Kiju** folds up the oil cloth and places it into the basket. Angie asks her grandmother, "**Kiju**, why do we have to walk all this way for mayflowers?" "**Tu's**, my mother used to take me into the woods to find mayflowers. Me and my brothers and sisters would follow our parents and we would find just the right spot. They can be very hard to find, you have to know just where to find them. Your mother never wanted to learn how to find mayflowers. **Pi'kun** helped me for some time, but now it's your turn. Your **Kiju** is getting old and there are things that you need to know of the old ways." Angie listens and they begin to walk.

The two walk past trees of oak and pine until a slight aroma fills the air. **Kiju** stops and pushes some foliage out of the way until she sees a little patch of tiny white flowers tinged with hints of pink. Angie kneels down beside

TRANSLATIONS

Kewisin Are you hungry? **Pi'kun** Feather **Na** Here, as in "here, take this"

her grandmother and breathes in the sweet smell of early spring. "See this?" **Kiju** says. "It's the first flower of spring. It's been a long cold winter and the Creator has blessed us with the beauty of spring. My parents used to pick these flowers and we would make little cone baskets out of birchbark. We would spend all day making them and getting them ready to sell on the train and in the city." **Kiju** stops and looks off into the distance and smiles. "My parents would buy us each a piece of hard candy once all of the cones were sold. What a treat that was..." Angie listens and **Kiju** directs her to some moss under a tree. "Angie Baby, you can help me gather the moss to keep the flowers moist, but first we need to make the cones." Angie helps her grandmother get up off of her knees. She struggles to stand to her feet and wipes the sweat from her forehead, "Phew! I'm not as young as I used to be!" The two share a laugh. **Kiju** takes Angie's hand and directs her towards some birch trees.

Angie and her grandmother stand in front of a birch tree. "You see this tree? It's a birch tree. Our ancestors used birchbark for many things, but there's one thing you should know." **Kiju** looks at Angie and points to the tree. "Don't ever take birchbark off of a tree, unless you know it's safe for the tree." "Why are we doing it now? How will I know, **Kiju**?" replies Angie. "Spring is here, the days are warm... You see those **tepots** you've got on? The ground is muddy because the earth has thawed and the frost is coming out of the ground." Angie is listening carefully; she wants to remember all of what **Kiju** is telling her. **Kiju** goes on to explain, "Now, when these buds on the tree begin to bloom, the leaves will need moisture. Do you know how a tree gets moisture?" Angie thinks to herself and says, "Doesn't the tree drink water from the ground? And the water travels into the roots and up the trunk and into the leaves?" "Yes!" replies **Kiju**. She squeezes Angie's hand and kisses her on her forehead. "Angie, you're so smart for a seven

year old!" **Kiju** goes on to say, "So, before the leaves on the tree begin to drink the water, all of the moisture is in the bark. The bark is full of water. If we take the bark now, we won't kill the tree. Each layer of bark is protected by the water." **Kiju** begins to peel a piece of bark off of the tree. "See? Like this..." Angie steps forward and tries the same. The bark peels off of the tree, it curls up and looks like a tube of bark.

Before Angie and her grandmother begin their task of collecting the birchbark, **Kiju** takes out a little pouch of tobacco from her front pocket. She turns to Angie and the little girl carefully removes a small handful of the moist, soft tobacco from its pouch. **Kiju** does the same and the two girls sprinkle the sacred medicine onto the ground before them. **Kiju** closes her eyes and touches her heart, she whispers words that Angie has heard before and she knows that she too must close her eyes and give thanks to the Creator for the gifts they are about to receive. When **Kiju** is finished she looks up into the branches of the birch tree and begins to speak, "Angie Baby, you must always remember to think carefully before taking anything from the earth. We all have a spirit, more than living things have spirits. Do you see that rock over there?" **Kiju** points to a large rock in the distance. "That rock has been here for many, many years. The rocks are our grandfathers. Listen, look around, close your eyes and breathe the air, feel the spirits around you. You and I are only a small part of this world. We respect what the Creator has shared with us." Angie's heart is in awe, she loves to listen to her grandmother's stories.

After some time, Angie and **Kiju** collect their bark and move on to another area. **Kiju** takes Angie to a spruce tree, **Kiju** kneels down and feels the earth with her hands. She gently pulls and cuts some spruce root from the ground and the two work for some time until they have finished collecting what they need.

Kiju pulls the oil cloth and some tools out of the basket and takes a seat. Angie joins her. **Kiju** takes a piece of triangle-shaped birchbark and shapes it into a cone. She takes her tool and pokes holes along the side. Angie hands her some spruce root and **Kiju** threads it into the holes and ties it. **Kiju** then takes some moss and pushes it down into the cone and hands it to Angie. Angie carefully places some mayflowers into the cone and holds it up for the two to admire. Angie watches **Kiju** for a little bit and tries to make one herself.

It is getting late in the afternoon and the two mayflower-cone-makers are exhausted. It is time to end their adventure and head home. Angie lets her grandmother rest against a tree as she offers to pack up their flowers, cones and basket of tools. **Kiju** pours herself tea from an old thermos container. The tea is a few hours old, just the way she likes it. Angie is busy, but she stops for a moment and looks at her **Kiju** with a puzzled face. “**Kiju!** Why are we picking mayflowers and it’s not even May?!” **Kiju** laughs, her granddaughter is so smart. “Angie, years ago, mayflowers did blossom in early May...but it seems that they blossom earlier and earlier each year. It’s sad, **Tu’s**. But we don’t treat the earth the same way that we did when I was a young girl either.” “**Kiju**, is that why mayflowers are getting harder to find?” “**E’e**.” **Kiju** takes a flower and pops it into her mouth. Angie knows that mayflowers can be eaten and so she pops one into her mouth too. Angie thinks she knows what **Kiju** is talking about and is satisfied with the answer.

Kiju and Angie hold hands and walk along the path back to the tiny yellow house, the late afternoon sun shining on them. **Kiju** carries the basket filled with the mayflower cones that she and her young granddaughter made. **Kiju** walks with a little limp because it was

such a tiring day. She’s getting old and her body doesn’t know how to keep up with all that she wishes she could do. She looks down at her granddaughter and her granddaughter smiles back at her. Her heart fills with pride and her heart is warmed at the sight of her granddaughter, her warm brown eyes (just like hers!), the little freckles on her nose and deep dimples when she smiles. She worries sometimes that her ways will be lost, the ways of the ancestors, that all of what she needs to teach in this world won’t get done. She squeezes Angie’s hand. Angie looks up at her grandmother, her boots muddy from the adventures they had today, “**Kiju...kesalul.**” She squeezes her grandmother’s soft worn hands. **Kiju** squeezes right back and replies, “**Aq ni’n, kesalul.**”

Kiju thinks to herself, I think it’ll be just fine...



TRANSLATIONS

Aq ni’n, kesalul And I love you **E’e** Yes **Kesalul** I love you