

Glooscap, the Great Chief

WHEN THE Indian storytellers speak of the Old Time, they mean long ago, long before the White Man knew their country, when at first there was only the forest, the sky, and the sea—no living creatures. Then, so legend says, Glooscap came. He came from the Sky in a stone canoe with Malsum, his twin brother.

The two were giants twelve feet tall and both could make themselves larger at will. By means of magic belts, they could transform nature and bear the hottest heat, the coldest cold. Glooscap was a manlike, but Malsum had the head of a wolf. In other more important ways, they were different. Glooscap, the good and powerful Chief, had come to people the land with men and animals. Malsum, banished from Skyland for his evil ways, had been sent to redeem himself in Glooscap's service. Yet, alas, he was jealous of his brother and meant, if he could, to kill Glooscap and become Chief in his place.

Down out of the sky floated the great stone canoe bearing the giants. Landing and anchoring where the sun rises, the canoe turned into an isle which today we call Newfoundland. Its woods and lakes and lovely rivers were peaceful and this was Glooscap's home for a long while.

He set to work. First, out of the rocks he made the small, halfway people—the *little people*—and sent them to dwell in the rocky caves. From among them, he chose Marten to be his servant and friend, and the world was suddenly a brighter place. The Great Chief smiled with the joy of creation, but Malsum's heart was bitter at not having his brother's power to make things good. Next, Glooscap made men by shooting arrows into the trunks of ash trees. Out of the trees stepped men and women with shining black hair, and he named them Wabanaki—those who live in the dawn, or where the sun rises. He chose one to keep in his lodge and he gave her a name, Noogumee, ever after a Wabanaki name of respect for elderly women. Gazing on his handiwork, Glooscap's shout of triumph shook to the topknots of the tallest pines—but Malsum scowled.

Finally, out of clay, Glooscap made the animals. He had made Miko the squirrel, then the moose, then Moin the bear, and many, many others when, secretly, Malsum touched his belt and whispered an evil charm. The last of the clay in Glooscap's hands twisted of itself and fell to the ground, where it came to life as a strange animal—not a badger, not a beaver, not a wolverine, but something of all three. a creature as restless and wild as its maker.

"His name is Lox!" said Malsum. "I made him!"

"So be it," said the Great Chief. "Let Lox live with us in peace."

But Malsum said to Lox privately, "You must stir up trouble for Glooscap wherever you can."

Now the Great Chief had made all the animals very large, much larger and stronger than men, and in Lox he saw his opportunity. He went in his beaver shape to the Abenaki, he went to the mouse as well, who was in those days the size of a bear, and said, "What great teeth you have. If you met a man, you could kill him with one bite."

"So I could!" and he looked about for a man to bite.

"No," said the Great Chief, touching his belt, he caused the mouse to become as tiny as he is today, able only to gnaw and nibble.

Then Lox went in his badger shape to the fox, who was as big as a tiger, with a hard uplifted tail. "What a magnificent tail. With that you could knock down trees."

"I certainly could!" said fox, and went to the trees, but suddenly Glooscap was there, stroking his back, and the fox became the size he is today, with a soft bushy tail streaming out behind him.

Next, as a wolverine, Lox went to Kobit the beaver, who was a giant in those days, and said, "Kobit, you work all day damming up ponds for the benefit of others. Why don't you enjoy yourself for a change?"

"I will!" said beaver. Diving and swimming about in the brooks, he stirred up the water and made it into muddy mess. Glooscap, seeing what had happened, cleared the water and made Kobit his present size.

And so it went—Lox stirring up the animals to make mischief, the Great Chief reducing them in size and power—until at last, losing patience, Glooscap summoned all the animals and warned them. "I have made you man's equal, but it seems you wish to become his master. Take care, or he may become yours."

The animals muttered angrily among themselves. "It is clear that as long as Glooscap is master, we can do nothing. Malsum would let us do as we please. If we had the Indians to help us, we could overthrow Glooscap!" But the Wabanaki were too busy fishing and gathering food to join in the troublemaking.

So Lox had to think of something else. He knew that both giants bore charmed lives and that neither could be killed except in one certain way. What that way was, each kept secret from all but the Stars, who were their brothers. Lox soon noticed how each of the giants talked at times, privately, to the people of the Sky.

"Little does Malsum know," said Glooscap, thinking himself alone in the starlight, "that I can never die, unless struck in the heart by a flowering rush." And not so far off, the wolf-headed Malsum muttered, "I am safe for nothing, nothing can harm me except the fern root piercing my throat, and this Glooscap does not know."

Overhearing, Lox saw how he could turn things to his own ends. He went to Malsum in the beaver form and asked what he would give to know Glooscap's life secret.

"Anything!" cried Malsum. "What is it?"

The traitor told him. "Now give me a pair of wings that I may fly." But Malsum laughed scornfully.

"What good are wings to a beaver?" And kicking Lox out of his way, he sped to find a flowering rush. Furious, Lox hurried to Glooscap.

"Master, Malsum knows your secret and is about to kill you. He will die only if his throat is pierced by a fern root!"

Glooscap had barely torn the root from the ground, when Malsum appeared, flowering rush in hand. Touching their belts, both grew in a flash so tall their heads touched the clouds. Ah, what a battle that was! The sight of it was like flashing lightning, the sound of it like rolling thunder. Each blow made the earth tremble and the pine trees shake at their roots. So huge were the giants, they fought both in Newfoundland and the Gaspé, a foot in either country, the Gulf of St. Lawrence a mere puddle between them! At last Malsum risked all in a mighty thrust but, stubbing his toe on an island, he lost his balance. Swift as light, Glooscap's fern root pierced the wolflike throat, and Malsum died—turning, as he fell to the mountain on the coast called the Gaspé.

Then the Indians shouted for joy, but the animals slunk off—all but Lox who came to Glooscap and said, "I'll have my reward now, Master, a pair of wings!"

"Faithless creature!" the Great Chief thundered. "I made no such bargain. Now be gone!" And he hurled the stone after stone at the fleeing Lox, and where the stones fell in the water they turned into islands which are there to this day. The banished Lox, however, still roams the world stirring up trouble wherever he goes.

Now even though he had won the battle, Glooscap was sad. He had killed a brother, and he knew that every act both good and bad, for whatever reason, had good and bad consequences. As the mountain rose in Malsum's place, a rocky passage opened therein, letting in from Outer World all manner of strange beings—the giants, both evil and good; wizards and sorcerers; great birds strong enough to carry off whole families of men to their nests in the sky; the terrible *Chenoos* who were cannibals with hearts of ice; horned dragons such as the the witches, demons and serpents, and the spirits of Wind and Famine and Frost and Storm. Rushing in all directions, they hid themselves until it would be their whim to fall on man. The world was no longer an empty and peaceful place.

Glooscap saw with sadness that he could not return to his brothers in Skyland, but must remain and protect the Wabanaki, at least until they were able to defend themselves. He called his people around him and promised that if they would face their future trials with courage and energy, he would be their Chief and help them all he could.

Now he showed the people how to make bows and arrows and stone-tipped spears, and how to use them. "I made the animals to be man's friends, but they have acted with treachery. Hereafter they will be your servants." He showed the women how to scrape hides and make them into warm clothing, taught them how to make birchbark wigwams and canoes, to construct weirs to catch fish, and how to identify plants useful for medicine. "You have the power now even over the largest wild creatures. Yet I charge you to use this power gently. If you take more game than you need, or kill for the love of killing, you will be visited by the giant Famine, by whose hand you will surely die."

He called the loon and appointed him his messenger. He took two wolves—one white for Day, one black for Night—and trained them to be his dogs. Finally, he called to Marten to launch his canoe, and signed to Noogumee to bring food for the journey. The people, seeing he was about to leave them, cried out with dismay.

"I am not going far," he reassured them. "I must dwell in a separate lodge, in a high place from which I may watch over you no matter where you go." He stepped into the canoe. "Whoever seeks me diligently in time of need will find me."

And waving farewell, Glooscap and his companions sailed west to the mainland into the Bay of Fundy, which lies between the Maine-New Brunswick coast and the peninsula of Nova Scotia. There on a red and green headland known today as Blomidon, Glooscap built his lodge.

And while he dwelt there, many of his Indians also crossed into the mainland, peopling the eastern woodlands from Gaspé to Cape Cod, and forming themselves into many tribes—Micmacs, Malicetes, Passamaquoddies, Penobscots, and others—and during that time the Great Chief did many wonderful things for his people, of which you will hear .

For the present, however, this story ends.