

The Year Summer Was Stolen

the wabanaki always remember the year summer was stolen. It was all, of course, the fault of Badger!

Badger lived mostly in the Micmac country, traveling a good deal with his small brother. Both lived mostly on the labor of others and spent the rest of their time amusing themselves. One winter, however, Little Brother fell ill. Badger, to do him justice, was truly devoted to the boy (though he cared not a chokecherry-berry for any other person in the world) nursed his brother with great tenderness and saw him through the worst of the sickness. As the winter dragged on, however, Little Brother still lay all day looking wan, refusing food. Badger coaxed him to try all the tidbits he had begged or stolen for him, but it was no use. The boy just sighed and said weakly, "I shall be right when Summer comes." Which was all very well, but Summer was still three or four months away and Little Brother might die in the meantime.

So it was Badger that decided to steal Summer from her home in the South and bring her to the Wabanaki land ahead of time. Now Badger knew, as did everyone, that Glooscap had given Winter, the Ice King, the right to spend six months of every year in the land of the Wabanaki. Then he had to move to the far North, leaving the other six months to Summer. That was the rule, but Badger could care less for rules! He had made up his mind and that was that.

He knew it would not be easy. Summer lived south of the Passamaquoddy in a large airy wigwam on a lake. The wigwam was carefully guarded by strong men, two by day and two by night. To Badger, however, the risk simply added to the fun.

Leaving Little Brother to the care of a kindly neighbor, he set off in his canoe to find and capture Summer. On the first day of his journey he met the muskrat, Keewasu.

"Keewasu," said Badger, "if you will help me bring Summer to the Wabanaki land, I shall give you on our return a hundred cattails." This was muskrat's favorite food and the wrong time of year for them to be growing, so naturally he agreed to accompany Badger on the expedition.

On the second day, they he met the porcupine, Madooes.

"Madooes," said Badger, "I will give you all the salt you want as soon as you have helped me capture Summer."

The porcupine licked his lips, for there is nothing he likes better than salt, and he hadn't had a lick since last summer. He agreed to go with them.

On the third day, they met the fox.

"Fox," said Badger, "I know you are fond of rabbits. I promise that if you help me bring Summer to the Wabanaki before the next full moon, you will have all the rabbit dinners you can eat."

"How delicious!" said the fox, and joined them at once.

As they traveled on, the air grew warmer and was filled with sunlight and fragrances of flowers. Finally they came to a large lake dotted with water lilies. On the shore of this lake stood Summer's lodge. Badger sent his three scouts to spy out the land.

Creeping close, the animals saw Summer swimming in the lake. Presently she came out of the water and went into the wigwam and closed the door-flap behind her. The braves took up their positions outside, spears in hand, and the animals went back to report to Badger.

"She's there all right," said Fox.

"We'll never get her away though. Those guards are too much for us."

"Here's what we'll do," said the indomitable Badger, and he whispered his plan.

That night, shortly after moonrise, Muskrat slipped into the water on the far side of the lake and began to make a noise like a moose pulling up water lilies—a sort of "swish-crunch" kind of noise—while Porcupine was busy eating holes in the guards' canoe and nibbling the paddles halfway through. At a signal from Badger, the fox began to bark with all his might.

"What's that!" cried the guards, hearing as they thought the sound of moose feeding. Then, as Fox began to bark—"That fox is excited! The game must be close. Perhaps Team has come to feed on the water lilies!" Forgetting everything except the wonderful taste of good venison, they rushed to the canoe and shoved it into the water. When they were halfway across the lake, the paddles broke and the canoe began to fill, and the next thing they knew they were floundering in the water. Meanwhile Badger was at the wigwam door.

"Summer! I've come to take you to the land of the Wabanaki."

"But it's much too early," said the surprised Summer.

"You must come all the same," said Badger firmly, "or my brother will die!"

Now Summer was soft-hearted and soon let Badger persuade her, thinking she could make a short visit and then return. So she ran with Badger to his canoe and they set off for the North. Muskrat, Beaver and Fox rushed to the lake's edge, calling to Badger to wait for them, but the impatient Mischief Maker paid no heed. The three were left stranded on shore.

The moment Badger arrived with Summer in the land of the Wabanaki, the ice began to melt, the snow to run in the brooks, and the buds to burst on the trees. Badger hurried Summer to his lodge and Little Brothe. Seeing her, he sat up and smiled. "Stay with me," he begged. So Summer stayed.

Soon everything in the country was topsy-turvey!

The skunk cabbage came rushing up through the earth expecting to find herself in a snowbank. Instead, the land was brown, with green shoots popping everywhere—she was furious to think that other plants had got ahead of her. The flies, smelling the skunk cabbage, started to scramble their way out of the trees. The raccoons, smelling *them*, scampered up the trees to investigate. The woodchuck, or groundhog, emerged from his burrow rubbing his eyes, surprised that it was time to get up. Mooin the bear, waking as he often did to go for a short walk on the snow, felt his feet sink in pools of water and was outraged. Mooin hated getting his feet wet. Bats woke and flew around in a daze. A butterfly struggled out of its cocoon before it really wanted to, and the rabbit was alarmed to find himself in a brown and green world still wearing his white winter coat. What if the fox happened by? Bucks and fawns who congregate all winter in places where food and shelter were available suddenly went their separate ways, while Team the moose hurried down from the high country, afraid all the water lilies in the lakes would be gone before he got there. Some creatures made themselves ill on unexpected feasts of buds and insects, while others looked frantically for mates, wondering why they had overslept. The wildcat yowled, the red fox yipped, and the rabbit thumped his hind feet. Summer had come too soon. Spring hadn't come at all. The whole Wabanaki world was upside down.

Returning from a hunting trip in the North, the Great Chief Glooscap heard the news and strode down from the hills. The land was hot and wet and everyone was rushing about in a frenzy. Knowing at once who was to blame, Glooscap went straight to Badger's wigwam and there, sure enough, he found Summer feeding Little Brother his supper.

Seeing the Master, Badger jumped up.

"I had to bring Summer ahead of time," he said without the least shame in the world. "Little Brother needed her. As soon as he is well, I shall take her back."

"You will take her south at once!" thundered Glooscap. "And I shall want a word with you, Badger, when you return. As for you, Little Brother, stop being lazy and get up."

Glooscap's word was law. Up got Little Brother and off went Badger to take Summer home.

The sun slipped behind a cloud and the cold breath of the Ice King blew down on Badger's neck as he paddled from shore. When the canoe with Summer in it was quite out of sight, pools and lakes and brooks skimmed over with ice and it began to snow.

The animals stopped their howling and yipping and thumping and looked around in amazement all the changed landscape. The moose sheepishly climbed back up the hill. The deer began looking about for their husbands, rounding up fawns that had gone astray, while the rabbit relaxed, knowing he was at present as safe as he'd ever be from predators like the wolf. Moin shook his big feet to dry them and crept back to his den where his wife woke up and complained of his cold feet, while the flies burrowed back into the bark and the skunk cabbage sank into the ground to wait for a warmer day. Winter was back. All was normal once more.

Meanwhile Badger delivered Summer safely to her home. When he returned to go down to his canoe, however, he was confronted by three scowling animals.

"Where are my cattails?" growled the muskrat.

"Cattails don't grow in winter," said Badger, not liking the look of muskra's sharp teeth. "There would have been plenty if Glooscap had let Summer stay."

"Where is my salt?" demanded the porcupine.

"There would have been all you wanted," grinned Badger, edging away from Porcupine's sharp quills, "if the summer sun had had time to evaporate it from the ocean!"

"And what about the rabbits you promised me?" howled the fox.

"If you'd been there, Fox, you'd have seen plenty about," said Badger. "It wasn't my fault that Glooscap chose to bring the snow back."

This was too much for the three and with one accord they jumped at Badger and pushed him into the lake. Then they threw rocks at his canoe and broke it.

"Now get home the best way you can!" they shouted.

"You won't move fast on promises!" And off they went, three sadder and wiser woodland creatures.

"Oh well," said Badger, standing up with water streaming off him and water lilies in his hair, and thinking of Glooscap's face the last time he had seen it—"I'm in no hurry to get back!"

And there the story ends.