

Manabozho, the Mischief-Maker

Cornelius Mathews

Native Americannorth American

Intermediate
48 min read

There was never in the whole world a more mischievous busy-body than that notorious giant Manabozho. He was every where, in season and out of season, running about, and putting his hand in whatever was going forward. To carry on his game, he could take almost any shape he pleased; he could be very foolish or very wise; very weak or very strong; very poor or very rich—just as happened to suit his humor best. Whatever any one else could do, he would attempt without a moment's reflection. He was a match for any man he met, and there were few manitoes that could get the better of him. By turns he would be very kind, or very cruel; an animal or a bird; a man or a spirit; and yet, in spite of all these gifts, Manabozho was always getting himself involved in all sorts of troubles; and more than once, in the course of his busy adventures, was this great maker of mischief driven to his wits' ends to come off with his life.

To begin at the beginning, Manabozho, while yet a youngster, was living with his grandmother, near the edge of a wide prairie. It was on this prairie that he first saw animals and birds of every kind; he also there made first acquaintance with thunder and lightning; he would sit by the hour watching the clouds as they rolled, and musing on the shades of light and darkness as the day rose and fell.

For a stripling, Manabozho was uncommonly wide-awake. Every new sight he beheld in the heavens was a subject of remark; every new animal or bird, an object of deep interest; and every sound that came from the bosom of nature, was like a new lesson which he was expected to learn. He often trembled at what he heard and saw.

To the scene of the wide open prairie his grandmother sent him at an early age to watch. The first sound he heard was that of the owl, at which he was greatly terrified, and, quickly descending the tree he had climbed, he ran with alarm to the lodge. "Noko! noko! grandmother!" he cried. "I have heard a monedo."

She laughed at his fears, and asked him what kind of noise his reverence made. He answered, "It makes a noise like this: ko-ko-ko-ho."

His grandmother told him he was young and foolish; that what he heard was only a bird which derived its name from the peculiar noise it made.

He returned to the prairie and continued his watch. As he stood there looking at the clouds, he thought to himself, "It is singular that I am so simple and my grandmother so wise; and that I have neither father nor mother. I have never heard a word about them. I must ask and find out."

He went home and sat down, silent and dejected. Finding that this did not attract the notice of his grandmother, he began a loud lamentation, which he kept increasing, louder and louder, till it shook the lodge, and nearly deafened the old grandmother. She at length said, "Manabozho, what is the matter with you? You are making a great deal of noise."

Manabozho started off again with his doleful hubbub; but succeeded in jerking out between his big sobs, "I have n't got any father nor mother; I have n't;" and he set out again lamenting more boisterously than ever.

Knowing that he was of a wicked and revengeful temper, his grandmother dreaded to tell him the story of his parentage; as she knew he would make trouble of it.

Manabozho renewed his cries, and managed to throw out, for a third or fourth time, his sorrowful lament that he was a poor unfortunate, who had no parents and no relations.

She at last said to him, "Yes, you have a father and three brothers living. Your mother is dead. She was taken for a wife by your father, the West, without the consent of her parents. Your brothers are the North, East, and South; and being older than yourself, your father has given them great power with the winds, according to their names. You are the youngest of his children. I have nursed you from your infancy; for your mother, owing to the ill-treatment of your father, died in giving you birth. I have no relations beside you this side of the planet in which I was born, and from which I was precipitated by female jealousy. Your mother was my only child, and you are my only hope."

"I am glad my father is living," said Manabozho. "I shall set out in the morning to visit him."

His grandmother would have discouraged him; saying it was a long distance to the place where his father, Ningabiun, or the West, lived.

This information seemed rather to please than to disconcert Manabozho; for by this time he had grown to such a size and strength that he had been compelled to leave the narrow shelter of his grandmother's lodge and to live out of doors. He was so tall that, if he had been so disposed, he could have snapped off the heads of the birds roosting in the topmost branches of the highest trees, as he stood up, without being at the trouble to climb. And if he had at any time taken a fancy to one of the same trees for a walking-stick, he would have had no more to do than to pluck it up with his thumb and finger, and strip down the leaves and twigs with the palm of his hand.

Bidding good-by to his venerable old grandmother, who pulled a very long face over his departure, Manabozho set out at great headway, for he was able to stride from one side of a prairie to the other at a single step.

He found his father on a high mountain-ground, far in the west. His father espied his approach at a great distance, and bounded down the mountain-side several miles to give him welcome, and, side-by-side, apparently delighted with each other, they reached in two or three of their giant paces the lodge of the West, which stood high up near the clouds.

They spent some days in talking with each other—for these two great persons did nothing on a small scale, and a whole day to deliver a single sentence, such was the immensity of their discourse, was quite an ordinary affair.

One evening, Manabozho asked his father what he was most afraid of on earth.

He replied—“Nothing.”

“But is there nothing you dread, here—nothing that would hurt you if you took too much of it? Come, tell me.”

Manabozho was very urgent; at last his father said:

“Yes, there is a black stone to be found a couple of hundred miles from here, over that way,” pointing as he spoke. “It is the only thing earthly that I am afraid of, for if it should happen to hit me on any part of my body it would hurt me very much.”

The West made this important circumstance known to Manabozho in the strictest confidence.

“Now you will not tell any one, Manabozho, that the black stone is bad medicine for your father, will you?” he added. “You are a good son, and I know will keep it to yourself. Now tell me, my darling boy, is there not something that you don’t like?”

Manabozho answered promptly—“Nothing.”

His father, who was of a very steady and persevering temper, put the same question to him seventeen times, and each time Manabozho made the same answer—“Nothing.”

But the West insisted—“There must be something you are afraid of.”

“Well, I will tell you,” says Manabozho, “what it is.”

He made an effort to speak, but it seemed to be too much for him.

“Out with it,” said Ningabiun, or the West, fetching Manabozho such a blow on the back as shook the mountain with its echo.

“Je-ee, je-ee—it is,” said Manabozho, apparently in great pain. “Yeo, yeo! I can not name it, I tremble so.”

The West told him to banish his fears, and to speak up; no one would hurt him.

Manabozho began again, and he would have gone over the same make-believe of anguish, had not his father, whose strength he knew was more than a match for his own, threatened to pitch him into a river about five miles off. At last he cried out:

“Father, since you will know, it is the root of the bulrush.”

He who could with perfect ease spin a sentence a whole day long, seemed to be exhausted by the effort of pronouncing that one word, “bulrush.”

Some time after, Manabozho observed:

“I will get some of the black rock, merely to see how it looks.”

“Well,” said the father, “I will also get a little of the bulrush-root, to learn how it tastes.”

They were both double-dealing with each other, and in their hearts getting ready for some desperate work.

They had no sooner separated for the evening than Manabozho was striding off the couple of hundred miles necessary to bring him to the place where black rock was to be procured, while down the other side of the mountain hurried Ningabiun.

At the break of day they each appeared at the great level on the mountain-top, Manabozho with twenty loads, at least, of the black stone, on one side, and on the other the West, with a whole meadow of bulrush in his arms.

Manabozho was the first to strike—hurling a great piece of the black rock, which struck the West directly between the eyes, who returned the favor with a blow of bulrush, that rung over the shoulders of Manabozho, far and wide, like the whip-thong of the lightning among the clouds.

And now either rallied, and Manabozho poured in a tempest of black rock, while Ningabiun discharged a shower of bulrush. Blow upon blow, thwack upon thwack—they fought hand to hand until black rock and bulrush were all gone. Then they betook themselves to hurling crags at each other, cudgeling with huge oak-trees, and defying each other from one mountain-top to another; while at times they shot enormous boulders of granite across at each other's heads, as though they had been mere jack-stones. The battle, which had commenced on the mountains, had extended far west. The West was forced to give ground. Manabozho pressing on, drove him across rivers and mountains, ridges and lakes, till at last he got him to the very brink of the world.

“Hold!” cried the West. “My son, you know my power, and although I allow that I am now fairly out of breath, it is impossible to kill me. Stop where you are, and I will also portion you out with as much power as your brothers. The four quarters of the globe are already occupied, but you can go and do a great deal of good to the people of the earth, which is beset with serpents, beasts and monsters, who make great havoc of human life. Go and do good, and if you put forth half the strength you have to-day, you will acquire a name that will last forever. When you have finished your work I will have a place provided for you. You will then go and sit with your brother, Kabinocca, in the North.”

Manabozho gave his father his hand upon this agreement. And parting from him, he returned to his own grounds, where he lay for some time sore of his wounds.

These being, however, greatly allayed, and soon after cured by his grandmother's skill in medicines, Manabozho, as big and sturdy as ever, was ripe for new adventures. He set his thoughts immediately upon a war excursion against the Pearl Feather, a wicked old manito, living on the other side of the great lake, who had killed his grandfather. He begun his preparations by making huge bows and arrows without number; but he had no heads for his shafts. At last Noko told him that an old man, who lived at some distance, could furnish him with such as he needed. He sent her to get some. She soon returned with her wrapper full. Manabozho told her that he had not enough, and sent her again. She came back with as many more. He thought to himself, “I must find out the way of making these heads.”

Instead of directly asking how it was done, he preferred—just like Manabozho—to deceive his grandmother to come at the knowledge he desired, by a trick. “Noko,” said he, “while I take my drum and rattle, and sing my

war-songs, do you go and try to get me some larger heads, for these you have brought me are all of the same size. Go and see whether the old man is not willing to make some a little larger.”

He followed her at a distance as she went, having left his drum at the lodge, with a great bird tied at the top, whose fluttering should keep up the drumbeat, the same as if he were tarrying at home. He saw the old workman busy, and learned how he prepared the heads; he also beheld the old man's daughter, who was very beautiful; and Manabozho now discovered for the first time that he had a heart of his own, and the sigh he heaved passed through the arrow-maker's lodge like a gale of wind.

“How it blows!” said the old man.

“It must be from the south,” said the daughter; “for it is very fragrant.”

Manabozho slipped away, and in two strides he was at home, shouting forth his songs as though he had never left the lodge. He had just time to free the bird which had been beating the drum, when his grandmother came in and delivered to him the big arrow-heads.

In the evening the grandmother said, “My son, you ought to fast before you go to war, as your brothers do, to find out whether you will be successful or not.”

He said he had no objection; and having privately stored away, in a shady place in the forest, two or three dozen juicy bears, a moose, and twenty strings of the tenderest birds, he would retire from the lodge so far as to be entirely out of view of his grandmother, fall to and enjoy himself heartily, and at night-fall, having just dispatched a dozen birds and half a bear or so, he would return, tottering and wo-begone, as if quite famished, so as to move deeply the sympathies of his wise old grand-dame.

The place of his fast had been chosen by the Noko, and she had told him it must be so far as to be beyond the sound of her voice or it would be unlucky.

After a time Manabozho, who was always spying out mischief, said to himself, “I must find out why my grandmother is so anxious to have me fast at this spot.”

The next day he went but a short distance. She cried out, “A little further off;” but he came nearer to the lodge, the rogue that he was, and cried out in a low, counterfeited voice, to make it appear that he was going away

instead of approaching. He had now got so near that he could see all that passed in the lodge.

He had not been long in ambush when an old magician crept into the lodge. This old magician had very long hair, which hung across his shoulders and down his back, like a bush or foot-mat. They commenced talking about him, and in doing so, they put their two old heads so very close together that Manabozho was satisfied they were kissing each other. He was indignant that any one should take such a liberty with his venerable grandmother, and to mark his sense of the outrage, he touched the bushy hair of the old magician with a live coal which he had blown upon. The old magician had not time to kiss the old grandmother more than once again before he felt the flame; and jumping out into the air, it burned only the fiercer, and he ran, blazing like a fire-ball, across the prairie.

Manabozho who had, meanwhile, stolen off to his fasting-place, cried out, in a heart-broken tone, and as if on the very point of starvation, "Noko! Noko! is it time for me to come home?"

"Yes," she cried. And when he came in she asked him, "Did you see any thing?"

"Nothing," he answered, with an air of childish candor; looking as much like a big simpleton as he could. The grandmother looked at him very closely and said no more.

Manabozho finished his term of fasting; in the course of which he slyly dispatched twenty fat bears, six dozen birds, and two fine moose; sung his war-song, and embarked in his canoe, fully prepared for war. Beside weapons of battle, he had stowed in a large supply of oil.

He traveled rapidly night and day, for he had only to will or speak, and the canoe went. At length he arrived in sight of the fiery serpents. He paused to view them; he observed that they were some distance apart, and that the flames which they constantly belched forth reached across the pass. He gave them a good morning, and began talking with them in a very friendly way; but they answered, "We know you, Manabozho; you can not pass."

He was not, however, to be put off so easily. Turning his canoe as if about to go back, he suddenly cried out with a loud and terrified voice:

“What is that behind you?”

The serpents, thrown off their guard, instantly turned their heads, and he in a moment glided past them.

“Well,” said he, quietly, after he had got by, “how do you like my movement?”

He then took up his bow and arrows, and with deliberate aim shot every one of them, easily, for the serpents were fixed to one spot, and could not even turn around. They were of an enormous length, and of a bright color.

Having thus escaped the sentinel serpents, Manabozho pushed on in his canoe until he came to a part of the lake called Pitch-water, as whatever touched it was sure to stick fast. But Manabozho was prepared with his oil, and rubbing his canoe freely from end to end, he slipped through with ease, and he was the first person who had ever succeeded in passing through the Pitch-water.

“There is nothing like a little oil to help one through pitch-water,” said Manabozho to himself.

Now in view of land, he could see the lodge of the Shining Manito, high upon a distant hill.

Putting his clubs and arrows in order, just at the dawn of day Manabozho began his attack, yelling and shouting, and beating his drum, and calling out in triple voices:

“Surround him! surround him! run up! run up!” making it appear that he had many followers. He advanced, shouting aloud:

“It was you that killed my grandfather,” and shot off a whole forest of arrows.

The Pearl Feather appeared on the height, blazing like the sun, and paid back the discharges of Manabozho with a tempest of bolts, which rattled like the hail.

All day long the fight was kept up, and Manabozho had fired all of his arrows but three, without effect; for the Shining Manito was clothed in pure wampum. It was only by immense leaps to right and left that Manabozho could save his head from the sturdy blows which fell about him on every side, like pine-trees, from the hands of the Manito. He was badly bruised, and at his very wit's end, when a large woodpecker flew past and lit on a tree. It was a bird he had known on the prairie, near his grandmother's lodge.

"Manabozho," called out the woodpecker, "your enemy has a weak point; shoot at the lock of hair on the crown of his head."

He shot his first arrow and only drew blood in a few drops. The Manito made one or two unsteady steps, but recovered himself. He began to parley, but Manabozho, now that he had discovered a way to reach him, was in no humor to trifle, and he let slip another arrow, which brought the Shining Manito to his knees. And now, having the crown of his head within good range, Manabozho sent in his third arrow, which laid the Manito out upon the ground, stark dead.

Manabozho lifted up a huge war-cry, beat his drum, took the scalp of the Manito as his trophy, and calling the woodpecker to come and receive a reward for the timely hint he had given him, he rubbed the blood of the Shining Manito on the woodpecker's head, the feathers of which are red to this day. Full of his victory, Manabozho returned home, beating his war-drum furiously, and shouting aloud his songs of triumph. His grandmother was on the shore ready to welcome him with the war-dance, which she performed with wonderful skill for one so far advanced in years.

The heart of Manabozho swelled within him. He was fairly on fire, and an unconquerable desire for further adventures seized upon him. He had destroyed the powerful Pearl Feather, killed his serpents, and escaped all his wiles and charms. He had prevailed in a great land fight, his next trophy should be from the water.

He tried his prowess as a fisherman, and with such success that he captured a fish so monstrous in size and so rich in fat that with the oil Manabozho was able to form a small lake. To this, being generously disposed, and having a cunning purpose of his own to answer, he invited all the birds and beasts of his acquaintance; and he made the order in which they partook of the banquet the measure of their fatness for all time to come. As fast as they arrived he told them to plunge in and help themselves.

The first to make his appearance was the bear, who took a long and steady draught; then came the deer, the opossum, and such others of the family as are noted for their comfortable case. The moose and bison were slack in their cups, and the partridge, always lean in flesh, looked on till the supply was nearly gone. There was not a drop left by the time the hare and the martin appeared on the shore of the lake, and they are, in consequence, the slenderest of all creatures.

When this ceremony was over, Manabozho suggested to his friends, the assembled birds and animals, that the occasion was proper for a little merrymaking; and taking up his drum, he cried out:

“New songs from the South, come, brothers, dance!”

He directed them, to make the sport more mirthful, that they should shut their eyes and pass around him in a circle. Again he beat his drum and cried out:

“New songs from the South, come, brothers, dance!”

They all fell in and commenced their rounds. Whenever Manabozho, as he stood in the circle, saw a fat fowl which he fancied, pass by him, he adroitly wrung its neck and slipped it in his girdle, at the same time beating his drum and singing at the top of his lungs, to drown the noise of the fluttering, and crying out in a tone of admiration:

“That’s the way, my brothers; that’s the way!”

At last a small duck, of the diver family, thinking there was something wrong, opened one eye and saw what Manabozho was doing. Giving a spring, and crying:

“Ha-ha-a! Manabozho is killing us!” he made for the water.

Manabozho, quite vexed that the creature should have played the spy upon his housekeeping, followed him, and just as the diver-duck was getting into the water, gave him a kick, which is the reason that the diver’s tail-feathers are few, his back flattened, and his legs straightened out, so that when he gets on land he makes a poor figure in walking.

Meantime, the other birds, having no ambition to be thrust in Manabozho’s girdle, flew off, and the animals scampered into the woods.

Manabozho stretching himself at ease in the shade along the side of the prairie, thought what he should do next. He concluded that he would travel and see new countries; and having once made up his mind, in less than three days, such was his length of limb and the immensity of his stride, he had walked over the entire continent, looked into every lodge by the way, and with such nicety of observation, that he was able to inform his good old grandmother what each family had for a dinner at a given hour.

By way of relief to these grand doings, Manabozho was disposed to vary his experiences by bestowing a little time upon the sports of the woods. He had heard reported great feats in hunting, and he had a desire to try his power in that way. Besides that, it was a slight consideration that he had devoured all the game within reach of the lodge; and so, one evening, as he was walking along the shore of the great lake, weary and hungry, he encountered a great magician in the form of an old wolf, with six young ones, coming toward him.

The wolf no sooner caught sight of him than he told his whelps, who were close about his side, to keep out of the way of Manabozho; “For I know,” he said, “that it is that mischievous fellow whom we see yonder.”

The young wolves were in the act of running off, when Manabozho cried out, “My grandchildren, where are you going? Stop and I will go with you. I wish to have a little chat with your excellent father.”

Saying which he advanced and greeted the old wolf, expressing himself as delighted at seeing him looking so well. “Whither do you journey?” he asked.

“We are looking for a good hunting-ground to pass the winter,” the old wolf answered. “What brings you here?”

"I was looking for you," said Manabozho. "For I have a passion for the chase, brother. I always admired your family; are you willing to change me into a wolf?"

The wolf gave him a favorable answer, and he was forthwith changed into a wolf.

"Well, that will do," said Manabozho; then looking at his tail, he added, "Oh! could you oblige me by making my tail a little longer and more bushy."

"Certainly," said the old wolf; and he gave Manabozho such a length and spread of tail, that it was constantly getting between his legs, and it was so heavy that it was as much as he could do to find strength to carry it. But having asked for it, he was ashamed to say a word; and they all started off in company, dashing up a ravine.

After getting into the woods for some distance, they fell in with the tracks of moose. The young ones scampered off in pursuit, the old wolf and Manabozho following at their leisure.

"Well," said the old wolf, by way of opening discourse, "who do you think is the fastest of the boys? Can you tell by the jumps they take?"

"Why," he replied, "that one that takes such long jumps, he is the fastest to be sure."

"Ha! ha! you are mistaken," said the old wolf. "He makes a good start, but he will be the first to tire out; this one, who appears to be behind, will be the one to kill the game."

By this time they had come to the spot where the boys had started in chase. One had dropped what seemed to be a small medicine-sack, which he carried for the use of the hunting-party.

"Take that, Manabozho," said the old wolf.

"Esa," he replied, "what will I do with a dirty dog-skin?"

The old wolf took it up; it was a beautiful robe.

"Oh, I will carry it now," cried Manabozho.

"Oh, no," said the old wolf, who had exerted his magical powers, "it is a robe of pearls. Come along!" And away

sped the old wolf at a great rate of speed.

“Not so fast,” called Manabozho after him; and then he added to himself as he panted after, “Oh, this tail!”

Coming to a place where the moose had lain down, they saw that the young wolves had made a fresh start after their prey.

“Why,” said the old wolf, “this moose is poor. I know by the traces; for I can always tell whether they are fat or not.”

A little further on, one of the young wolves, in dashing at the moose, had broken a tooth on a tree.

“Manabozho,” said the old wolf, “one of your grandchildren has shot at the game. Take his arrow; there it is.”

“No,” replied Manabozho; “what will I do with a dirty dog’s tooth?”

The old wolf took it up, and behold it was a beautiful silver arrow.

When they at last overtook them, they found that the youngsters had killed a very fat moose. Manabozho was very hungry; but the old wolf just then again exerted his magical powers, and Manabozho saw nothing but the bones picked quite clean. He thought to himself, “Just as I expected; dirty, greedy fellows. If it had not been for this log at my back, I should have been in time to have got a mouthful.” and he cursed the bushy tail which he carried, to the bottom of his heart. He, however, sat down without saying a word.

At length the old wolf spoke to one of the young ones, saying:

“Give some meat to your grandfather.”

One of them obeyed, and coming near to Manabozho, he presented him the other end of his own bushy tail, which was nicely seasoned with burs, gathered in the course of the hunt.

Manabozho jumped up and called out:

“You dog, now that your stomach is full, do you think I am going to eat you to get at my dinner? Get you gone into some other place.”

Saying which Manabozho, in his anger, walked off by himself.

“Come back, brother,” cried the wolf. “You are losing your eyes.”

Manabozho turned back.

“You do the child injustice. Look there!” and behold, a heap of fresh, ruddy meat, was lying on the spot, already prepared.

Manabozho, at the view of so much good provision, put on a smiling face.

“Amazement!” he said; “how fine the meat is!”

“Yes,” replied the old wolf, “it is always so with us; we know our work, and always get the best. It is not a long tail that makes the hunter.”

Manabozho bit his lip.

They now fixed their winter quarters. The youngsters went out in search of game, and they soon brought in a large supply. One day, during the absence of the young hunters, the old wolf amused himself in cracking the large bones of a moose.

“Manabozho,” said he, “cover your head with the robe, and do not look at me while I am busy with these bones, for a piece may fly in your eye.”

He did as he was bid; but looking through a rent that was in the robe, he saw what the other was about. Just at that moment a piece flew off and hit him on the eye. He cried out:

“Tyau, why do you strike me, you old dog?”

The wolf answered—“You must have been looking at me.”

“No, no,” retorted Manabozho, “why should I want to look at you?”

“Manabozho,” said the old wolf, “you must have been looking or you would not have got hurt.”

“No, no,” he replied again, “I was not. I will repay the saucy wolf this mischief,” he thought to himself.

So the next day, taking up a bone to obtain the marrow, he said to the wolf:

“Brother, cover your head and do not look at me, for I very much fear a piece may fly in your eye.”

The wolf did so; and Manabozho, taking the large leg-bone of the moose, first looking to see if the wolf was well covered, hit him a blow with all his might. The wolf jumped up, cried out, and fell prostrate from the effects of the blow.

“Why,” said he, when he came to a little and was able to sit up, “why do you strike me so?”

“Strike you?” said Manabozho, with well-feigned surprise, “no; you must have been looking at me.”

“No,” answered the wolf, “I say I have not.”

But Manabozho insisted, and as the old wolf was no great master of tricky argument, he was obliged to give it up.

Shortly after this the old wolf suggested to Manabozho that he should go out and try his luck in hunting by himself.

When he chose to put his mind upon it he was quite expert, and this time he succeeded in killing a fine fat moose, which he thought he would take aside slyly, and devour alone, having prepared to tell the old wolf a pretty story on his return, to account for his failure to bring any thing with him.

He was very hungry, and he sat down to eat; but as he never could go to work in a straight-forward way, he immediately fell into great doubts as to the proper point at which to begin.

“Well,” said he, “I do not know where to commence. At the head? No. People will laugh, and say—’He ate him backward.’”

He went to the side. “No,” said he, “they will say I ate him sideways.”

He then went to the hind-quarter. “No, that will not do, either; they will say I ate him forward. I will begin

here, say what they will.”

He took a delicate piece from the small of the back, and was just on the point of putting it to his mouth, when a tree close by made a creaking noise. He seemed vexed at the sound. He raised the morsel to his mouth the second time, when the tree creaked again.

“Why,” he exclaimed, “I can not eat when I hear such a noise. Stop, stop!” he said to the tree. He put it down, exclaiming—“I can not eat with such a noise;” and starting away he climbed the tree, and was pulling at the limb which had offended him, when his fore-paw was caught between the branches so that he could not free himself.

While thus held fast, he saw a pack of wolves advancing through the wood in the direction of his meat. He suspected them to be the old wolf and his cubs, but night was coming on and he could not make them out.

“Go the other way, go the other way!” he cried out; “what would you come to get here?”

The wolves stopped for a while and talked among themselves, and said:

“Manabozho must have something there, or he would not tell us to go another way.”

“I begin to know him,” said an old wolf, “and all his tricks. Let us go forward and see.”

They came on; and finding the moose, they soon made away with it. Manabozho looked wistfully on to see them eat till they were fully satisfied, when they scampered off in high spirits.

A heavy blast of wind opened the branches and released Manabozho, who found that the wolves had left nothing but the bare bones. He made for home, where, when he related his mishap, the old wolf, taking him by the fore-paw, condoled with him deeply on his ill-luck. A tear even started to his eye as he added:

“My brother, this should teach us not to meddle with points of ceremony when we have good meat to eat.”

The winter having by this time drawn fairly to a close, on a bright morning in the early spring, the old wolf addressed Manabozho: "My brother, I am obliged to leave you; and although I have sometimes been merry at your expense, I will show that I care for your comfort. I shall leave one of the boys behind me to be your hunter, and to keep you company through the long summer afternoons."

The old wolf galloped off with his five young ones; and as they disappeared from view, Manabozho was disenchanted in a moment, and returned to his mortal shape.

Although he had been sometimes vexed and imposed upon, he had, altogether, passed a pleasant winter with the cunning old wolf, and now that he was gone, Manabozho was downcast and low in spirit. But as the days grew brighter he recovered by degrees his air of cheerful confidence, and was ready to try his hand upon any new adventure that might occur to him. The old spirit of mischief was still alive within him.

The young wolf who had been left with him was a good hunter, and never failed to keep the lodge well supplied with meat. One day Manabozho addressed him as follows:

"My grandson, I had a dream last night, and it does not portend good. It is of the large lake which lies in that direction. You must be careful to always go across it, whether the ice seem strong or not. Never go around it, for there are enemies on the further shore who lie in wait for you. The ice is always safe."

Now Manabozho knew well that the ice was thinning every day under the warm sun, but he could not stay himself from playing a trick upon the young wolf.

In the evening when he came to the lake, after a long day's travel in quest of game, the young wolf, confiding in his grandfather, said, "Hwooh! the ice does look thin, but Nesho says it is sound;" and he trotted upon the glassy plain.

He had not got half way across when the ice snapped, and with a mournful cry, the young wolf fell in and was immediately seized by the water-serpents, who knew that it was Manabozho's grandson, and were thirsting for revenge upon him for the death of their relations in the war upon Pearl Feather.

Manabozho heard the young wolf's cry as he sat in his lodge; he knew what had happened; and, from that moment, he was deprived of the greater part of his magical power.

He returned, scarcely more than an ordinary mortal, to his former place of dwelling, whence his grandmother had departed no one knew whither. He married the arrow-maker's daughter, and became the father of several children, and very poor. He was scarcely able to procure the means of living. His lodge was pitched in a remote part of the country, where he could get no game. It was winter, and he had not the common comforts of life. He said to his wife one day, "I will go out a walking and see if I can not find some lodges."

After walking some time he saw a lodge at a distance. The children were playing at the door. When they saw him approaching they ran in and told their parents that Manabozho was coming.

It was the residence of the large red-headed woodpecker. He came to the door and asked Manabozho to enter. This invitation was promptly accepted.

After some time, the woodpecker, who was a magician, said to his wife:

"Have you nothing to give Manabozho? he must be hungry."

She answered, "No."

"He ought not to go without his supper," said the woodpecker. "I will see what I can do."

In the center of the lodge stood a large tamarack-tree. Upon this the woodpecker flew, and commenced going up, turning his head on each side of the tree, and every now and then driving in his bill. At last he pulled something out of the tree and threw it down; when, behold, a fine fat raccoon lay on the ground. He drew out six or seven more. He then descended, and told his wife to prepare them.

"Manabozho," he said, "this is the only thing we eat; what else can we give you?"

"It is very good," replied Manabozho.

They smoked their pipes and conversed with each other.

After eating, Manabozho got ready to go home; when the woodpecker said to his wife, "Give him the other

raccoons to take home for his children.”

In the act of leaving the lodge, Manabozho, on purpose, dropped one of his mittens, which was soon after observed upon the ground.

“Run,” said the woodpecker to his eldest son, “and give it to him; but mind that you do not give it into his hand; throw it at him, for there is no knowing him, he acts so curiously.”

The boy did as he was directed.

“Grandfather,” said he to Manabozho, as he came up to him, “you have left one of your mittens; here it is.”

“Yes,” he said, affecting to be ignorant of the circumstance, “it is so; but don’t throw it, you will soil it on the snow.”

The lad, however, threw it, and was about to return, when Manabozho cried out, “Bakah! Bakah! stop—stop; is that all you eat? Do you eat nothing else with your raccoon? tell me!”

“Yes, that is all,” answered the young Woodpecker; “we have nothing else.”

“Tell your father,” continued Manabozho, “to come and visit me, and let him bring a sack. I will give him what he shall eat with his raccoon-meat.”

When the young one returned and reported this message to his father, the old woodpecker turned up his nose at the invitation. “I wonder,” he said, “what he thinks he has got, poor fellow!”

He was bound, however, to answer the proffer of hospitality, and he went accordingly, taking along a cedar-sack, to pay a visit to Manabozho.

Manabozho received the old red-headed woodpecker with great ceremony. He had stood at the door awaiting his arrival, and as soon as he came in sight Manabozho commenced, while he was yet far off, bowing and opening wide his arms, in token of welcome; all of which the woodpecker returned in due form, by ducking his bill, and hopping to right and left, upon the ground, extending his wings to their full length and fluttering them back to his breast.

When the woodpecker at last reached the lodge, Manabozho made various remarks upon the weather, the appearance of the country, and especially on the scarcity of game.

“But we,” he added, “we always have enough. Come in, and you shall not go away hungry, my noble bird!”

Manabozho had always prided himself on being able to give as good as he had received; and to be up with the woodpecker, he had shifted his lodge so as to inclose a large dry tamarack-tree.

“What can I give you,” said he to the woodpecker; “but as we eat so shall you eat.”

With this he hopped forward, and, jumping on the tamarack-tree, he attempted to climb it just as he had seen the woodpecker do in his own lodge. He turned his head first on one side, then on the other, in the manner of the bird, meanwhile striving to go up, and as often slipping down. Ever and anon he would strike the tree with his nose, as if it had been a bill, and draw back, but he pulled out no raccoons; and he dashed his nose so often against the trunk that at last the blood began to flow, and he tumbled down senseless upon the ground.

The woodpecker started up with his drum and rattle to restore him, and by beating them violently he succeeded in bringing him to.

As soon as he came to his senses, Manabozho began to lay the blame of his failure upon his wife, saying to his guest:

“Nemesho, it is this woman-relation of yours—she is the cause of my not succeeding. She has made me a worthless fellow. Before I took her I also could get raccoons.”

The woodpecker said nothing, but flying on the tree he drew out several fine raccoons.

“Here,” said he, “this is the way we do!” and left him in disdain, carrying his bill high in the air, and stepping over the door-sill as if it were not worthy to be touched by his toes.

After this visit, Manabozho was sitting in the lodge one day with his head down. He heard the wind whistling around it, and thought that by attentively listening he could hear the voice of some one speaking to him. It seemed to say to him:

“Great chief, why are you sorrowful? Am not I your friend—your guardian spirit?”

Manabozho immediately took up his rattle, and without rising from the ground where he was sitting, began to sing the chant which has at every close the refrain of, “Wha lay le aw.”

When he had dwelt for a long time on this peculiar chant, which he had been used to sing in all his times of trouble, he laid his rattle aside and determined to fast. For this purpose he went to a cave which faced the setting sun, and built a very small fire, near which he lay down, first telling his wife that neither she nor the children must come near him till he had finished his fast.

At the end of seven days he came back to the lodge, pale and thin, looking like a spirit himself, and as if he had seen spirits. His wife had in the meantime dug through the snow and got a few of the root called truffles. These she boiled and set before him, and this was all the food they had or seemed likely to obtain.

When he had finished his light repast, Manabozho took up his station in the door to see what would happen. As he stood thus, holding in his hand his large bow, with a quiver well filled with arrows, a deer glided past along the far edge of the prairie, but it was miles away, and no shaft that Manabozho could shoot would be able to touch it.

Presently a cry came down the air, and looking up he beheld a great flight of birds, but they were so far up in the sky that he would have lost his arrows in a vain attempt among the clouds.

Still he stood watchful, and confident that some turn of luck was about to occur, when there came near to the lodge two hunters, who bore between them on poles upon their shoulders, a bear, and it was so fine and fat a bear that it was as much as the two hunters could do with all their strength to carry it.

As they came to the lodge-door, one of the hunters asked if Manabozho lived thereabout.

“He is here,” answered Manabozho.

“I have often heard of you,” said the first hunter, “and I was curious to see you. But you have lost your magical power. Do you know whether any of it is left?”

Manabozho answered that he was himself in the dark on the subject.

“Suppose you make a trial,” said the hunter.

“What shall I do?” asked Manabozho.

“There is my friend,” said the hunter, pointing to his companion, “who with me owns this bear which we are carrying home. Suppose you see if you can change him into a piece of rock.”

“Very well,” said Manabozho; and he had scarcely spoken before the other hunter became a rock.

“Now change him back again,” said the first hunter.

“That I can’t do,” Manabozho answered; “there my power ends.”

The hunter looked at the rock with a bewildered face.

“What shall I do?” he asked. “This bear I can never carry alone, and it was agreed between my friend there and myself, that we should not divide it till we reached home. Can’t you change my friend back, Manabozho?”

“I would like to oblige you,” answered Manabozho, “but it is utterly out of my power.”

With this, looking again at the rock with a sad and bewildered face, and then casting a sorrowful glance at the bear, which lay by the door of the lodge, the hunter took his leave, bewailing bitterly at heart the loss of his friend and his bear.

He was scarcely out of sight when Manabozho sent the children to get red willow sticks. Of these he cut off as many pieces, of equal length, as would serve to invite his friends among the beasts and birds to a feast. A red stick was sent to each one, not forgetting the woodpecker and his family.

When they arrived they were astonished to see such an abundance of meat prepared for them at such a time of scarcity. Manabozho understood their glance, and was proud of a chance to make such a display.

“Akewazi,” he said to the oldest of the party, “the weather is very cold, and the snow lasts a long time; we can kill nothing now but small squirrels, and they are all black; and I have sent for you to help me eat some of

them.”

The woodpecker was the first to try a mouthful of the bear’s meat, but he had no sooner began to taste it than it changed into a dry powder, and set him coughing. It appeared as bitter as ashes.

The moose was affected in the same way, and it brought on such a dry cough as to shake every bone in his body.

One by one, each in turn joined the company of coughers, except Manabozho and his family, to whom the bear’s meat proved very savory.

But the visitors had too high a sense of what was due to decorum and good manners to say any thing. The meat looked very fine, and being keenly set and strongly tempted by its promising look, they thought they would try more of it. The more they ate the faster they coughed, and the louder became the uproar, until Manabozho, exerting the magical gift which he found he retained, changed them all into squirrels; and to this day the squirrel suffers from the same dry cough which was brought on by attempting to sup off of Manabozho’s ashen bear’s meat.

And ever after this transformation, when Manabozho lacked provisions for his family he would hunt the squirrel, a supply of which never failed him, so that he was always sure to have a number of his friends present, in this shape, at the banquet.

The rock into which he changed the hunter, and so became possessed of the bear, and thus laid the foundations of his good fortune, ever after remained by his lodge-door, and it was called the Game-Bag of Manabozho, the Mischief-Maker.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com