

# Adventures of Great Rabbit

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### Among the Micmac and Passamaquoddy of the Northeast coast it is Mahtigwess the Rabbit who is a powerful trickster. Rabbit has m'te'oulin, great magical powers.

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### Wildcat is mean and ferocious. He has a short tail and big, long, sharp fangs, and his favourite food is rabbit. One day when Wildcat was hungry, he said to himself: "I'm going to catch and eat Mahtigwess, Great Rabbit, himself. He's plump and smart, and nothing less will do for my dinner.". So he went hunting for Great Rabbit. Now, Great Rabbit can sense what others are thinking from a long way off, so he already knew that Wildcat was after him. He made up his mind that he would use his magical power against Wildcat's strength. He picked up a handful of woodchips, threw them ahead of himself, and jumped after them, and because Great Rabbit is m'te'oulin, every jump was a mile. Jumping that far, of course, he left very few tracks to follow.

### Wildcat swore a mighty oath that he would catch Great Rabbit, that he would find him even if Mahtigwess had fled to the end of the world. At that time Wildcat had a beautiful long tail, and he swore by it: "Let my tail fall off, may I have just a little stump for a tail, if I fail to catch Great Rabbit!". After a mile he found Rabbit's tracks. After another mile he found some more tracks. Wildcat was not altogether without magic either, and he was perservering. So mile by mile, he kept on Rabbit's trail. In fact, Wildcat was drawing closer and closer. It grew dark and Great Rabbit grew tired. He was on a wide, empty plain of snow, and there was nothing to hide behind except a little spruce tree. He stomped on the snow and made himself a seat and bed of spruce boughs.

### When Wildcat came to that spot, he found a fine, big wigwam and stuck his head through the door. Sitting inside was an old, gray-haired chief, solemn and mighty. The only strange thing about him was that he had two long ears standing up at each side of his head. "Great Chief," said Wildcat, "have you by any chance seen a biggish rabbit running like mad?" "Rabbits? Why of course, there are hundreds, thousands of rabbits hereabouts, but what's the hurry? It's late and you must be tired. If you want to hunt rabbits, start in the morning after a good night's sleep. I'm a lonely man and enjoy the company of a respected personage like you. Stay overnight; I have a fine rabbit stew cooking here." Wildcat was flattered. "Big Chief, I am honored," he said. He ate a whole kettle full of tasty rabbit stew and then fell asleep before the roaring fire.

### Wildcat awoke early because he was freezing. He found himself alone in the midst of a huge snowfield. Nothing was there, no wigwam, no fire, no old chief; all he could see were a few little spruce boughs. It had been a dream, an illusion created by Great Rabbit's magic. Even the stew had been an illusion, and Wildcat was ravenous. Shivering in the icy wind, Wildcat howled: "Rabbit has tricked me again, but I'll get even with him. By my tail, I swear I'll catch, kill, and eat him!" Again Great Rabbit travelled with his mile-wide jumps, and again Wildcat followed closely. At nightfall Rabbit said to himself: "Time to rest and conjure something up." This time he trampled down a large area and spread many pine boughs around. When Wildcat arrived, he found a large village full of busy people, though of what tribe he couldn't tell. He also saw a big wooden church painted white, the kind the French Jesuits were putting up among some tribes. />

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### Wildcat went up to a young man who was about to enter the church. "Friend, have you seen a biggish rabbit hereabouts, running away?" "Quiet," said the young man, "we're having a prayer meeting. Wait until the sermon is over." The young man went into the church, and Wildcat followed him. There were lots of people sitting and listening to a gray-haired preacher. The only strange thing was the two long ears sticking up at each side of the priest's cap. He was preaching a very, very long sermon about the wickedness of ferocious wild beasts who tear up victims with their big, sharp fangs and then devour them. "Such savage fiends will be punished for their sins," said this preacher over and over. Wildcat didn't like the long sermon, but he had to wait all the same. When the preaching was over at last, he went up to the priest with the long ears and asked:

### "Sir, have you seen a very sacred, biggish rabbit hereabouts?" "Rabbits!" exclaimed the preacher. "We have a wet, foggy cedar swamp nearby with thousands of rabbits." "I don't mean just any rabbit; I'm speaking of Great Rabbit." "Of him I know nothing, friend. But over there in that big wigwam lives the wise old chief, the Sagamore. Go and ask him; he knows everything." Wildcat went to the wigwam and found the Sagamore, an imposing figure, gray-haired like the preacher, with long white locks sticking up on each side of his head. "Young man," said the Sagamore gravely, "what can I do for you?" "I'm looking for the biggish Great Rabbit." "Ah! Him! He's hard to find and hard to catch. Tonight it's too late, but tomorrow I'll help you. Sit down, dear man. My daughters will give you a fine supper."

### The Sagamore's daughters were beautiful. They brought Wildcat many large wooden bowls of the choicest food, and he ate it all up, because by now he was very hungry. The warmth of the fire and his full stomach made him drowsy, and the Sagamore's daughters brought him a thick white bearskin to sleep on. "You people really know how to treat a guest." said Wildcat as he fell asleep. When he awoke, he found himself in a dismal, wet, foggy cedar swamp. Nothing was there except mud and icy slush and a lot of rabbit tracks. There was no village, no church, no wigwam, no Sagamore, no beautiful daughters. They had all been a mirage conjured up by Great Rabbit. The fine food had been a mirage too, and Wildcat's stomach was growling. He was ankle-deep in the freezing swamp. The fog was so thick he could hardly see anything. Enraged, he vowed to find and kill Great Rabbit even if he should die in the attempt. He swore by his tail, his teeth, his claws - by everything dear to him. Then he hastened on.

### That night Wildcat came to a big longhouse. Inside, it was like a great hall, and it was full of people. On a high seat sat the chief, who wore two long white feathers at each side of his head. This venerable leader also had beautiful daughters who fed all comers, for Wildcat had stumbled into the midst of a great feast. Exhausted and panting, he gasped: "Has any one seen the bi-big- biggish G-G-Great Ra-Rab-Rabbit?" "Later, friend," said the chief with the two white feathers. "We are feasting, dancing, singing. You seem exhausted, poor man! Sit down; catch your breath. Rest. Eat." Wildcat sat down. The people were having a singing contest, and chief on his high seat pointed at Wildcat and said, "Our guest here looks like a fine singer

### Wild cat was flattered. He arose and sang: Rabbits! How I hate them! How I despise them! How I laugh at them! How I kill them! How I scalp them! How I eat them! "A truly wonderful song," said the chief. "I must reward you for it. Here's what I give you." And with that the chief jumped up from his high seat, jumped over Wildcat's head, struck him a blow from his tomahawk, kept on jumping with mile-long leaps - and all was gone. The longhouse, the hall, the people, the daughters: none remained. Once more Wildcat found himself alone in the middle of nowhere, worse off than ever, for he had a gash in his scalp where Great Rabbit had hit him with the tomahawk. His feet were sore, his stomach empty. He could hardly crawl. But he was more infuriated than ever. "I'll kill him!" he growled, "I'll give my life! And the tricks are over; he won't fool me again!"

### That night Wildcat came to two beautiful wigwams. In the first was a young woman, obviously a chief's daughter. In the other was someone whom Wildcat took for her father, an elderly, gray-haired, gentle- looking man with two scalp locks sticking up at the sides of his head. "Come in, come in, poor man," said the gray-haired host. "You're wounded! My daughter will wash and cure that cut. And we must build up your strength. I have a fine broth here and a pitcher full of wine, the drink the Frenchmen make. It has great restorative powers." But Wildcat was suspicious. "If this is Great Rabbit in disguise again, he won't fool me," he promised himself.

### "Dear sir," said Wildcat, "I hesitate to mention it, but the two scalp locks sticking up at the sides of your head look very much like rabbit's ears." "Rabbit's ears? How funny!" said the old man. "Know, friend, that in our tribe we all wear our scalp locks this way." "Ah," said Wildcat, "but your nose is split exactly like a rabbit's nose." "Don't remind me, friend. Some weeks ago I was hammering wampum beads, and the stone I was using to pound them on broke in half. A sharp flew up and split my nose - a great misfortune, because it does disfigure me." "It does indeed. A pity. But why are your soles so yellow, like a rabbit's soles?" "Oh, that's nothing. I prepared some tobacco yesterday, and the juice stained my palms yellow." Then Wildcat said to himself: "This man is no rabbit."

### The old man called to his daughter, who washed Wildcat's wound, put a healing salve into it, and bathed his face. Then the old man gave him a wonderfully strengthening broth and a large pitcher of sweet wine. "This wine is really good," said Wildcat, "the first I ever tasted." "Yes, these white people, these Frenchmen, are very clever at making good things to drink." When Wildcat awoke, he found, of course, that he had been tricked again. The food he had eaten was rabbit pellets, the wine was stale water in a half-wilted pitcher plant. Now it was only his great hatred that kept Wildcat going, but go he did, like a streak, on Rabbit's tail. Mahtigwess, Great Rabbit, had only enough m'te'oulin, enough magic power, left for one more trick. So he said to himself: "This time I'd better make it good!"

### Great Rabbit came to a big lake and threw a chip of wood into the water. Immediately it turned into a towering ship, the kind white men build, with tall sides, three masts, white sails, and colored flags. That ship was pierced on each side with three rows of heavy cannon. When Wildcat arrived at this lake, he saw the ship with its crew. On deck was the captain, a gray-haired man with a large, gold- trimmed, cocked hat that had fluffy white plumes right and left. "Rabbit!" cried Wildcat, "I know you! You're no French captain; you're Great Rabbit. I know you, Mahtigwess! I am the mighty Wildcat, and I'm coming to scalp and kill you now!" And with that, Wildcat jumped into the lake and swam toward the ship.

### Then the captain, who indeed was Mahtigwess, the Great Rabbit, ordered his men to fire their muskets and the three rows of heavy cannon. Bullets went whistling by Wildcat; cannonballs flew toward him; the whole world was spitting thunder and fire. Wildcat had never before faced white men's firearms; they were entirely new to him. It didn't matter that the ship, cannon, muskets, cannon-balls, bullets, fire, noise, and smoke were merely illusions conjured up by Rabbit. To Wildcat they were real, and he was scared to death. He swam back to shore and ran away. And if he hasn't died, he is running still. And yes, as Wildcat had sworn by his tail to catch and kill Rabbit, his tail fell off, and ever since then this kind of big wildcat has a short, stumpy tail and is called a bobcat.

### Based on an account by Charles G. Leland, 1884.