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How a Wish Saved the Raccoons

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One afternoon, Mother Raccoon had just settled in to tell the children a story when Daddy Raccoon strutted over, tail swishing.

"This afternoon," he announced, "I am taking these young ones into the swamp to teach them real raccoon skills. It's time they learned to hunt like proper, brave 'Coons — like me." He gave his tail a very proud flick.

The little raccoons looked miserable. The swamp meant hunters. They had heard the gunshots before, seen the shadow of a man moving behind the bushes with a rifle over his shoulder.

They wailed and yelled, but Daddy Raccoon was firm — he was the head of the household (or rather, the head of the old hollow tree) — and off they went.

As they filed out, Mother Raccoon called after them: "If anything frightens you, wish with all your heart that you'll be all right. The Fairy Queen may be nearby."

Daddy Raccoon sniffed. He thought that was the sort of thing only Mother Raccoon would say — she was such a dear soul, she was kind even about rabbits, so of course she believed in fairies. Some of the older little raccoons privately agreed with him, and walked a little taller, feeling very grown up.

The swamp was exciting at first. They learned to test the mud, to scent out the best patches, to move quietly. They were just beginning to feel like real hunters when — *bang* — a shot rang out close by.

"Quiet!" said Daddy Raccoon sharply. "Not a sound."

The second shot was closer still. The little raccoons trembled. Then one of them squeezed their eyes shut and whispered, "Oh, if there's any fairy at all nearby — please tell that man with the gun to go home."

And they heard the hunter mutter, just beyond the reeds: "Well, I expect they're all away today. I'll try again tomorrow." His footsteps retreated through the grass.



Daddy Raccoon led them all home in silence. Mother Raccoon was curled up by the tree, shaking with worry. When she saw them safe, she let out a long breath.

"Tell them as many stories as you like," said Daddy Raccoon, and his voice was quite humble. "One of your fairy friends just whispered to a man with a gun to go home."

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