

The Raccoon

He crept through the misted trees on silent paws. His fur was a coat of stone-coloured bristles. His tail, a bush of black and white stripes. His eyes were concealed by a bandit-like mask.

The raccoon lifted his nose to the wind and took a sniff. The tantalizing scent of food drifted on the breeze. He glanced sideways. His family was still there, still safe. He worried his children were not ready. He dismissed the thought. If a problem arose, he and his mate would take care of it. The children would return safely to their den.

The mist around the trees pulsed, as if breathing. The raccoon's cunning eyes detected a shining light through the trees. A house stood there, a harsh brick construction that was a blot on the raccoon's home.

No matter. Food was the most important thing, and this was where to find it.

The windows glowed with a soft yellow light, like the eyes of a beast. The raccoon watched as his mate and two of his children approached the house's bins. Their pelts undulated with their stealthy movements.

He felt pride; his children were finally grown, and able to feed themselves. The raccoon encouragingly brushed his tail against his youngest child, the only male and the smallest. The fragile youngling raised a shaky paw and followed his mother and sisters.

The raccoon set his eyes on the awaiting feast and leapt up onto the bin with glee. A mistake. The resounding *clang* startled some birds out of the nearby trees, and his ears picked up a stirring inside the house. The tall ones had awakened.

He panicked. His fur caught the fresh condensation in the air as he descended from the bin. In moments like these, even the tiniest sensations were pounding in his mind.

The raccoon ushered his family ahead of him and scooped up the little son in his jaw. His adrenaline-fuelled feet gripped the earth as he launched himself forward, eager to get away before trouble came to get him.

There was a sound of boots crunching on gravel, and the raccoon didn't need to look back to now it was the tall ones, coming to punish them for their transgression of trespassing. He leapt over a rock and turned back for an instant to see that a tall one had produced a long, slender instrument. He remembered it from past scavenging's. It was an instrument of death.

The shots ripped through the clean night air. There was a yowl of pain and shock. The raccoon realized it was his own. He fell to the moist ground as the first wave of pain surged through him. His son fell from his mouth and made a dash for the trees. The tall ones shot at him and missed.

His family was ahead of him, safely in the trees. The young sisters whimpered, and his mate turned in frenzied circles.

The hunt was over.

Darkness.