

CHAPTER 1

A Raccoon Emergency!

Chris hit the front door of the house like a hurricane. “Gram, Gram! We have to do something!”

Chris’s grandmother called down from the top of the stairs. “Up here, Chris. What’s wrong?”

Chris was almost breathing too hard to explain. “Down the street - caught a raccoon - it had babies in a cage.”

“Slow down,” Gram said, patting Chris’s shoulder. “Take a few breaths.”

By now, Chris’s little brother James showed up. “What? What’s happening?”

Chris finally got it out. “Mr. Montgomery caught a raccoon a few days ago and put it in a cage. The raccoon had babies, so he finally left the cage open so it could leave.”

“Raccoon babies?” James squealed.

Chris went on. “The mother raccoon left and took all the babies except one. It’s been crying and crying and getting weaker. Now Mr. Montgomery says it’s going to have to be put to sleep!”

“What do you mean?” James demanded. “Do you mean they’re going to kill it?”

Chris nodded, barely keeping back the tears. “Why doesn’t the mother raccoon come back and get it? It shouldn’t have to die. Someone should take care of it!”

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Gram patted him again. “Chris, I don’t know why the mother raccoon didn’t come back. But we can’t fix that. What do you think should happen to that baby raccoon?”

“Someone should help it grow big enough to take care of itself,” Chris declared.

Gram nodded and smiled. “Good decision. Who’s going to do it?”

Chris had no answer.

Gram pointed a long finger at him. “Haven’t you heard whom to ask when you want something done?”

Chris thought a moment. He hadn’t heard, and he didn’t know who to ask.

Gram broke into a tinkly laugh. “It goes like this, Chris. ‘If you want something done, do it yourself.’”

Chris blinked and thought. Do it myself? I have to go to school. Besides, what if I take it and it dies anyway?

“Chris,” Gram’s voice had never sounded more loving, “could God be asking you to care for His helpless little creature?”

He looked into Gram’s glistening eyes. “I’ll do it if you’ll tell me how.”

Gram took his hand and gently pulled him to a standing position. “While you get the baby, I’ll call a friend of mine who raises Persian cats. Don’t you think a formula for a baby kitten would work for your raccoon?”

“My raccoon? I can’t believe it’s going to be mine.”

Gram made a shooing motion. “Well, go get it. Then you’ll believe it.”

Chris ran out the door. Before long he was knocking at Mr. Montgomery’s door. When the door opened, Chris

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suddenly felt shy about his request. "I ... uh ... my grandmother wondered if we could try to save the little raccoon. I mean, if you would give it to us." The words started slowly, then rushed from his mouth.

Mr. Montgomery looked surprised. Then he smiled at Chris. "Sure. You can have it. It's in the cage." He closed the door gently.

Chris felt his heart beating wildly as he approached the cage and reached inside. Carefully parting the fur nest, he felt something warm. And tiny! His hand closed around the animal and drew it out.

Chris took one glance at the tiny raccoon and stuffed it inside his shirt. He raced home faster than he ever had before. As he ran, he prayed silently. Thank You, Jesus, for letting me try to save this raccoon. Please, please help me take good care of it so it can live and grow up.

"Gram, come see it!" he yelled, slamming the front door.

Gram hurried in from the kitchen. "My friend told me how to mix the formula," she said, "but well have to run over to her place for a little bottle." She stopped and looked at Chris. "Where is it?"

He pulled the baby raccoon from his shirt and held it in the palm of his hand. Its tail barely hung over the edge. Chris could see a fine line where the eyes that were now tightly sealed would be open someday.

It was cute!

Thick yellowish-gray fur covered the tiny body. It faded to much lighter and finer fur under the tummy. No mask showed on the tiny face. No rings showed on the little gray tail. The fur coat ended at the raccoon's wrists, leaving its

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little brown hands almost bare. Hands? They looked more like hands than feet.

The baby barely moved but made a little crying sound. Chris looked at Gram. "It doesn't look so good. We better feed it quickly."

Gram nodded and scooped up her purse. "Grab a towel to wrap it in, and let's go."

Gram's friend, Mrs. Dearborn, had a tiny bottle in her hand when she opened the door. "Come in, come in," she said. "I have a warm bottle ready for your baby." Her sleek gray head nodded as she opened the towel blanket and took a good look.

"Isn't it precious?" she said, shaking a drop of milk onto the inside of her wrist. She eased herself down to the sofa then gently opened the little mouth and put the bottle in, but the tiny animal refused to suck the bottle. The weak little animal struggled while Mrs. Dearborn forced warm milk into its mouth. Finally, the raccoon realized what was happening. Chris saw it go after the nipple. Mrs. Dearborn looked up at Chris with a smile. "You'll probably have to force it a few times. After it catches on, it'll look like a baby robin at feeding time."

"How often should I feed it? And how much?" he asked, watching the milk disappearing from the tiny bottle.

"Feed it as much as it wants and as often as it wants, if you can," she said, holding the bottle at a steeper angle to allow the milk to go into the nipple. "I think it will drink about an ounce every two hours."

Chris gasped. "Every two hours? Even at night?"

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The older woman nodded, wearing a knowing smile. “You can put it where you won’t hear its cries if you don’t want to be bothered later. But you must feed it during the night for awhile. It’s very dehydrated.”

Chris heard a loud sucking sound, and Mrs. Dearborn pulled the bottle from the raccoon’s mouth. The baby started squirming and crying again.

“I’m wrong already,” she said. “I just fed it an ounce, and it wants more.” She looked at Chris and shrugged. “I raise kittens, not raccoons, so you’ll have to learn as you go.” She got to her feet, still cuddling the raccoon. “Let’s weigh this little baby.” She laid the raccoon on a tiny scale. “Not quite four ounces. Subtract the milk, and it weighs about three ounces.”

Chris got up and took the crying baby. “Let’s go, Gram. I’ll feed it as soon as we get home. Thanks a lot, Mrs. Dearborn.”

Back home, Chris showed off the little raccoon to his dad. James wanted more than a look. “Can I hold it?” he asked.

“No,” Chris said quickly. “I need to feed him more.” He went to the kitchen and poured formula into the bottle. “This bottle holds two ounces,” he said to Gram. “Think it’ll take that much?”

“You may as well try it,” Gram said. “It’s gone for two days without food, so we better get plenty down it, at least tonight.”

A few minutes later, Chris, Gram, and the raccoon sat in the living room. Chris held the baby on its back, exactly as

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Mrs. Dearborn had done. “I don’t have enough hands, Gram,” he said. “Could you open its mouth for me?”

He touched the little nose with the bottle, and the raccoon snatched the nipple before Gram got there. “Hey,” Chris said, “It’s smarter than a cat.”

The baby took another ounce and fell asleep. The nipple slipped from its relaxed mouth.

“OK,” Gram said, “who’s going to get up with it first? We’ll take turns so it’ll be sure to get all it wants.”

“I’m getting up every time, Gram. If it’s going to be my pet, it is my responsibility.”