



# FAST EDDIE

Janet Wyman Coleman

pictures  
by  
Alec  
Gillman

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Four Winds Press ❄️ New York

Maxwell Macmillan Canada Toronto  
Maxwell Macmillan International  
New York Oxford Singapore Sydney

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Four Winds Press  
Macmillan Publishing Company  
866 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022  
Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Inc.  
1200 Eglinton Avenue East  
Suite 200  
Don Mills, Ontario M3C 3N1  
Macmillan Publishing Company is part of the  
Maxwell Communication Group of Companies.

First edition  
Printed and bound in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The text of this book is set in Goudy Catalogue.  
The illustrations are rendered in Prismacolor pencil.  
Book design by Andrea Schneeman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Coleman, Janet Wyman.  
Fast Eddie / by Janet Wyman Coleman ; pictures by Alec Gillman. — 1st ed.  
p. cm.

Summary: To the dismay of Puff the cat and Jones the squirrel,  
Fast Eddie the raccoon takes on his human neighbors one final time.  
ISBN 0-02-722815-0

[1. Raccoons—Fiction. 2. Cats—Fiction. 3. Animals—Fiction.]

I. Gillman, Alec, ill. II. Title.

PZ7.C67713Fas 1993

[Fic]—dc20

92-31243

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*Dedicated to  
Ruth and Frank,  
my three men,  
and great friends,  
without whom  
Ed and Puff  
would never have seen  
the light of day*

*—J. W. C.*

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*It took place in the suburbs. Not on some beaming mountainside or at the edge of a slurping lake. It could have happened in California, Maine, or even New Jersey . . . anyplace where there are people and trash.*







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# 1

AT THE END of the driveway, two animals faced each other. The sun was setting behind them, so you couldn't make out their features. There were pointed ears, round noses, and whiskers. One animal had a long tail. It lay on the tar like a dead snake. The other had a short, wispy tail.

"You're new around here, aren't you?" It was the velvet voice of a cat.

The red squirrel nodded. He noticed the cat had a permanent smile.

"Have you met Eddie?"

The squirrel thought it was an odd question. "No, I haven't," he said.

"The raccoon. You must have heard of him."

"No. I haven't," the squirrel repeated. *This one's not a fighter, he decided. No scratches and her fur is clean and white.*

The cat's ear flicked. She leaned forward and whispered, "Wait a minute! You've never heard of Fast Eddie? I can't believe it."

A pair of barn swallows exploded from the garage. They dipped and flew straight toward the squirrel and the cat. At the last second, the birds swooped into a maple tree.

A hundred yards away, a raccoon headed toward his hole. His fur glistened. A magnificent tail floated behind him. In an old oak tree, two crows watched his progress.

"I won't miss him a bit when they finally get him," chuckled the first crow.

"Me neither," agreed the other.

The raccoon vanished, as if the earth had swallowed him whole.

A gust of wind wiped the field, knocking the tall grass backward. It circled the pine trees and shook the top branches. A single cloud meandered across the sky.



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## 2

A SCREEN DOOR squeaked. The squirrel hopped behind the tire of the station wagon and squatted in the shadow.

“Kitty! Here, Kitty!”

The cat licked her shoulder until a square patch of wet fur appeared.

“Come on, Kitty! Dinner!”

The squirrel peered around the tire. He inspected the Victorian house and the attached barn. It was a purple-gray, like the sky in winter, but the trim was as white as milkweed. There were large windows and square porches with flat roofs. Jones loved flat roofs. The clapboards, he noticed, looked like telephone wires. They circled the house, connecting the windows. His eyes focused on a woman.

“Dinner!” Blond curls surrounded the woman’s face. She wore a purple T-shirt and baggy blue jeans. Her toes curled over the porch steps.

“Hurry up!” The head of broccoli resting in her hands looked like a bridal bouquet.

The cat lifted her head and smoothed it against the chrome bumper. “That’s Mrs. Plotkin,” she said. “She loves gardens and pink things. You should see the chairs in the living room.”

“Kitty! Here, Kitty!”

“Who’s Kitty?” the squirrel whispered.

There was a noise in the woods. A golden retriever thrashed through the trees, kicking dead leaves high in the air. Her tongue dangled from her open mouth. The dog erupted from the trees and raced across the lawn. Her ears blew straight back. She veered around the station wagon, brushing her shoulder on the fender. The squirrel recoiled from the dog’s four galloping legs. The dog gulped for air and sat at Mrs. Plotkin’s feet. Her tail swept back and forth.

“Where have you been? I’ll bet you’ve been in the trash next door.” A pink tongue reached for the broccoli. Mrs. Plotkin lifted it above her shoulder.

“That’s Kitty,” the cat said. “Mrs. Plotkin named her that. Mr. Plotkin doesn’t think it’s funny.”



“Go on in, you silly dog. Time for your second meal.” The screen door whined and slammed.

The cat ducked under the car, too. She crouched and rolled onto her back. Her eyes moved across the oil pan to the tail pipe to the end of the driveway. She watched a car drive by upside down.

“Names are so important,” the cat said. “I wanted to be called Samantha, but the Plotkins named me Puff. Imagine being called Puff! I always thought I’d be famous, but you can’t be famous with a name like that.” The cat scowled. “By the way, what’s your name?”



“Jones.” The squirrel cleared his throat. “Jones,” he repeated, but he was thinking, *Why would anyone want to be famous?*

“What?”

“Jones.”

“Jones what?”

“Just Jones.”

“Where’d you get a name like that?”

“Off a mailbox,” the squirrel replied. “When Mother ran out of names, she took them off mailboxes.”

“Oh,” said the cat. Her head twisted toward the house. “Do you like porches?” she asked.

“Just porch roofs.”

“You mean you’ve never slept on a porch?”

The squirrel shook his head.

“You have to find one with a triangle of sunlight.” The cat closed her eyes. “You lie down so that the sun falls on your stomach. Your fur gets warm and then hot. There’s no better feeling. You stretch as far as you can. You pretend to be asleep, but actually you’re listening. First, you hear big noises, like trucks. After a while, you hear everything. Yesterday, there were two mosquitoes arguing. One wanted to go inside and the other one didn’t.” The cat’s tail lifted, twitched, paused, and drifted to the tar.



The squirrel tiptoed around the tire. "What's in there?" he asked. His brown eyes fastened to the barn. Puff rolled onto her side. Bits of leaves stuck to her fur.

"The barn?" the cat replied. "It has high spots for sitting and looking down. You'd like that, Jones. There are tunnels underneath. They lead to the cellar. On the hottest day, it's cold in the barn. It smells of horses and chickens."

"Nice pine." The squirrel admired the large tree next to the barn door.

"I hate pines," Puff groaned. "The sap gets stuck in my fur. It takes me days to lick it out and I can't stand the taste."

"My brother was saved by a pine tree," Jones said. "He slipped on a wet roof and somersaulted backward. A branch reached out and grabbed him. He said it was like falling into grass clippings." Jones took a deep breath and scampered across the driveway.

"Where are you going?" Puff yelled.

At the base of the pine tree, the squirrel hesitated. His eyes followed the trunk to the gutter. He crouched and jumped straight up.

*I wonder how he avoids the sap,* Puff thought. In the middle of the tree, a branch jerked. It



dropped to the roof, depositing the squirrel on the black shingles.

Sammy Plotkin stood at his bedroom window, holding two plastic dinosaurs. He made a noise and slammed the figures together. Sammy smiled and glanced out the window. On the top of the barn roof, he noticed a squirrel. The animal was so still, it didn't look real.

"Mom," Sammy yelled, "can we get a weather vane someday?"

Mrs. Plotkin had just turned on the dishwasher, so she didn't hear the question.