

ONE

“Cute, real cute,” the elderly man commented to his son as they pulled into the driveway in front of a small cabin overlooking a lake. He was pointing to a sign in front of the cabin surrounded by flowers. The sign was two skunks sitting up facing each other holding a WELCOME banner between them. There were other skunk statuettes within the flower bed.

“Dad, I did warn you that the owner was a fan of skunks, much like I’m a squirrel fan. She only rents to other furies.” The driver set the small sports utility vehicle in park and turned off the engine. Another small SUV pulled in behind them.

“Furies?”

“We’ve been over this, Dad. Fans of cartoon animals, much like Trekkies are fans of Star Trek and other similar fandoms. Or how some sports fans paint their faces in their team’s colors before attending a game and wear the jersey of their favorite player.”

The older man nodded. “So, how much did this place set you back?” he asked as he got out and groaned a bit from the muscles that had stiffened on the hour plus drive to the cabin. He slowly stretched.

“One grand for the week.”

“A grand?!?”

“Dad, you haven’t been looking at vacation rentals lately, never mind hotel room rates,” his son continued as he got out of the vehicle and proceeded around back to open the tailgate. He grabbed a duffle bag. “Most other places that sleep four to six on a lake run fifteen hundred or more for the week here. And most of those draw water from the lake, so you need to bring drinking water. Also, you’re on your own for a boat. This place has a well and includes a sixteen-foot fishing boat in the rental fee. You do need to top off the fuel tank with premium ethanol-free fuel at the end of the week. There’s a store a couple of miles back in the village that sells it. That’s a bargain as boat rentals elsewhere are running close to a hundred or more a day plus fuel.”

The father shook his head as he grabbed his duffle. A small dog at the next camp over started barking at them. It charged towards them but stopped at what they assumed was the property line. It continued to bark and yap.

“Quiet Blitzen!” its owner, an older woman, scolded it. She waved over to them. “Don’t mind him. He barks at everyone. I hope you enjoy Cathy’s place. She gets a lot of repeat renters.” The owner escorted her dog into the neighboring cabin. “You’re being naughty...” The rest of her sentence was cut off as she closed the door, while wagging a finger at her dog.

The older son set his duffle bag down on the doorstep. A deck wrapped around the front of the camp from the doorstep, overlooking the lake. On the deck was a table with four chairs and a

propane grill. Back at the doorstep, there was a skunk welcome mat and another skunk-themed welcome sign to the left of the door. He lifted the sign off its hook to reveal the cabin's key. After unlocking the door, he put the key back, reset the sign, and entered. His father and his younger brother from the other SUV followed him in.

Both his father and younger brother stared about at the skunk motif within the front room facing the water, which doubled as both a sitting area and dining room. The curtains had skunks in various poses. There were skunk salt and pepper shakers, skunk drink coasters, and a skunk cribbage board on the table. The theme of the skunks continued into the kitchen with skunks on the potholders and skunk magnets on the refrigerator. There was a picture on the kitchen wall of a cartoon skunk in apron and chef's hat whisking a bowl of something. Opening a cabinet door revealed skunks on the dishes and coffee cups, including one where the handle was a skunk's tail. There was another skunk sign on the bathroom door: Little Stinker's Place. There was skunk artwork, both toony and realistic, on the walls throughout the camp. Even the bed sheets and blankets on all the beds had skunk themes along with more skunk curtains. There were little skunk figurines on the fireplace mantel. A skunk plushie sat on the couch. They shook their heads as they glanced back at the older brother who had secured the rental.

He shrugged as he stated, "Well, I did warn you both."

The younger brother pointed to the cribbage board. "Well, at least we don't need to dig-out the spare, though that's a little over the top. Look where the ninety-point skunk line is at the base of the tail." He chuckled. Scoring only ninety points in a cribbage game out of a possible hundred-and-twenty was a bad game and term for losing so badly was "you got skunked".

They wasted no time unloading both vehicles and getting the food for the week put away.

"Bro," younger brother called out after exiting the bathroom, "even the towels have skunks on them. There's a skunk statute wearing a gas mask sitting on the toilet's tank lid. The liquid soap dispenser looks like that skunk from Disney's *Bambi*."

"Flower?"

"Yeah, that one. You push down on Flower's head and the soap squirts out of his tail tip. This place is crazy."

"No crazier than a place with a bear, loon, or moose theme like some of the other places I've rented in the past. And as you know, if I could afford to own a place on a lake, it would be decked out in a squirrel theme."

"True. I remember the one with all the moose stuff including the plushie moose head mount. At least most of those are more in line with what one would expect for a fishing camp in the Maine woods."

"If you two boys are unpacked," their father cut in though his boys were men by several decades, "let's go see if there are any fish in this lake. This **is** fishing camp, after all."

They spent the afternoon on the water, catching and releasing multiple bass in the foot-plus¹ range. It didn't seem to matter what lure they used or if they fished into the weeds near shore or in deeper water. They boated back to the dock around five pm.

As they trudged up the short hill from the dock to the cabin, the father turned to his older son. "Steve, you outdid it this year. I don't care about the skunk theme, but with fishing like that it's not like we'll spend long in the camp itself other than for eating, bathroom breaks, or sleeping. What's on the menu tonight?"

"Same as we usually do first night, burgers and dogs as it's quick and easy."

"I'll go fire-up the grill," Steve's father stated, "and see how much of a cleaning it will need. Jake, dice some onions, wrap them in foil with a little oil and butter. We'll grill those too. No need to heat-up the camp tonight."

"And me?" Steve asked.

"Beer duty."

"I can handle that, Dad, easily," Steve responded pulling three local microbrews out of the fridge and passing them around after opening them. "At least these aren't skunk themed." He grinned.

"If they were skunky, we'd dump 'em for something better," Jake responded after taking a swig referring to the slang term for a beer gone bad.

The father shook his head at the apron but put it on anyway. It had *The Looney Tunes*' Pepe Le Pew on it, also wearing an apron with 'Kiss the Cook' on his apron. He had hearts for eyes with his lips puckered up for a kiss.

After the simple dinner, they went back out on the lake and fished some more, coming in at sunset after catching several more fish. The neighbor's dog charged towards them again, stopping at the property line barking the entire time. The dog's owner spritzed the dog with water. "Bad dog, Blitzen! You don't bark at the neighbors!" She glanced up at the three men. "Again, I'm sorry about that." She pointed at her door and the dog went over, holding its tail between its legs and waited for her to let it in.

The three renters entered their camp for the week. Steve grabbed three more beers. They sat at the table in the front room overlooking the lake, watching the post sunset twilight.

"Care for a game of cribbage or two before calling it a night?" the father asked his two sons.

"Sure," both replied.

¹ 30cm

Steve moved the cribbage board between them and chuckled. Like everything else, the board was skunk themed. In this case, looking down from above it was in the outline of a skunk with the start line near the base of the tail, with the holes going clockwise around the edges of the skunk's outline. The 60-point mark had two small skunk tails on it marking the double-skunked line (a really poor game). It proceeded to the base of the tail on the side opposite from the start line with a single small skunk tail marking the 90-point skunked line (a poor game) as Jake had pointed out earlier. It then proceed up the tail with the 120-point win hole at the tip of the tail. The pegs for tracking points were flat skunk tails in various colors. There was small, neat print down the center white stripe of the back: "Don't Get Skunked!" with an arrow pointed at the 90-point line.

Jake started shuffling the deck of cards. He hesitated for a moment and then showed the other two that not only did the back have a toon-like winking, smiling skunk sniffing a flower on it, but the face cards were also skunks. He shook his head again, chuckled as he continued shuffling, and then set the deck down. They cut for lowest card to see who would deal first and proceeded to play. They bantered as they played.

"Steve, you must have flunked out of dealing school," his father scolded after looking at his cards.

"I learned from the best, Dad," he replied meaning his father.

For those unfamiliar with the game, it would take a while to explain all the rules and scoring. Basically, you're aiming for cards that add up to fifteen which scores two points, pairs, again two points and three or more cards in a run, scoring 1 point per card in the run. If you have a jack in your hand in the same suite as the cut card, you score a point for having the "right jack". And it gets more complicated from there. In a three-way game, five cards are dealt out and one in the "crib". Each player throws one card into the crib leaving four in their hand. A card is cut for all to use. Play begins, each player laying a card down one at a time and trying to score off the previously played card combined with theirs. Once all cards are down, each player adds up the points in their hand. The dealer gets the bonus crib. Dealing shifts and the next round occurs. Among the father and two sons, when someone had a zero-point hand, they'd do some wild count of things one couldn't score such as fourteen-two, eighteen-four, double kangaroo run for eight more, and so on, ending with, "And wrong jack for nineteen!" It's impossible to score nineteen points in cribbage. So, a nineteen-point hand is really zero points.

Steve and Jake were good players, having learned from their father from the time they could count and add. Their father had learned from his father and had played countless games in the Navy back during the Vietnam War. He had been one of the lucky ones. He had been assigned to the South Pole rather than South Vietnam. No one believed he was a fireman at the airfield there until he showed photos. The trucks were marked with the name of the airfield, Antarctica, and in masking tape: "Unvolunteer Fire Department". Basically, if a plane crashed on the runway, their job was to fight the fire long enough to get the pilot/co-pilot out of the crashed plane and then let the fire burn-out. There was a lot of downtime in the firetruck cabs as crashes were rare. So, a lot of cribbage was played to pass the time.

It was a close game with their father beating them both by only five and seven points each. The biggest loser, Steve in this case, dealt first in the next game and so it went again. Except this time, Steve and Jake both had lucky streaks with the cards, both scoring several twelve-to-sixteen-point hands. Their father had an unusually bad streak with a bunch of nineteens and four-to-six-point hands. Both Steve and Jake were on the home stretch while their father was struggling to make the skunk line. In the end, Steve beat-out Jake by two points, leaving their father at seventy-nine, 'skunked' by eleven points. They all had a good laugh as they all agreed it was a very unlucky streak of cards. It was rare that their father got skunked in cribbage. The two sons quieted a moment as they stared at their father, looked at each other, sniffed their empty microbrew bottles, and stared at their father again.

"What's the matter?" he asked his two sons as they started staring at him. His eyes shot wide as black fur covered his hands and his face began to elongate into a muzzle while they sniffed their bottles and stared at him some more. His clothing became a bit baggy as a large black and white striped tail sprouted behind him. Black and white fur raced to cover the rest of his body as his fingernails turned into claws. He stood up in panic and his pants and boxer shorts dropped to the floor. A large patch of very fluffy white fur covered his privates, blocking them from view. The resulting "G-rated" anthro-skunk was about a foot shorter than the human that had sat at the table before. His now oversized t-shirt hung at an angle over his smaller frame. He felt over his body while staring at his two sons. Pulling off the shirt, he ran into the bathroom and stared at the mirror and yelled a very non-G-rated, "WHAT THE FUCK?!?" He felt his muzzle again. He then exited the bathroom with his tail thrashing about behind him in agitation. "AGAIN, WHAT THE HOLY FUCKING FUCK IS GOING ON!!?"

After the initial shock, Jake started laughing uncontrollably. "You literally have been skunked, Dad! Look at the rest of this camp. It makes total scents that you're now a skunk!" He laughed some more at his pun. Inside he was really, really scared, but didn't want to reveal that. So, laughter and a bad joke was the only other thing he could do.

Steve remained speechless for a moment until he saw the tiny, neat print on the side of the cribbage board: "If someone gets 'Skunked', please read underneath." He read that aloud as he reached for the board and turned it over. In small, but neat handwriting similar to the rest on the top of the board was a message which he read aloud:

"Surprise! I don't know how the board works to cause the transformation nor why it only works here in the camp. If you or one of your companions just 'Got Skunked', please don't panic. The effects are temporary and will last about three hours. The worse your score, the more normal feral skunk vs. cartoony anthro you will be. If you get double-skunked you'll be feral for at least six hours. If you continue playing and get 'Skunked' again, the effects are cumulative. IE, another three hours and your score deficit is added to the previous deficit and you become more feral-like. If you lose by at least ten points, you will have musk glands. Somehow, the board will know if you played your best or if you tried to sandbag. Sandbagging will not trigger you getting 'Skunked' regardless of how low your score. However, sandbagging to

help someone else not get skunked results in both getting skunked. The board knows if you're trying to cheat. It doesn't like cheaters.

A couple of quick rules for the newly 'Skunked':

One: Do not spray inside the camp or I will charge you a fumigation/cleaning fee and you will never be welcomed here again. Instead, if you wish to test out your spray ability, please enjoy your temporary skunk form outside.

Two: As tempting as it may be, please do not use the immediate neighbor's small dog as your spray target, regardless of how deserving it may be to receive musk directly in its muzzle. I get along well with that neighbor. Instead, about four camps over to either side are dogs just as worthy of getting a bit of midnight perfume. I don't get along with either of those distant neighbors. So have at it if you wish.

Three: Make sure you're not seen by the dog's owner if you're not full feral."

As Steve read this to the others, their now anthro skunk father calmed a bit as he stretched his limbs and probed at his new body gentle with his claws. He swished his tail about surprised at the control he had over it. As Steve finished, a devilish grin appeared on the skunk's muzzle as he seemed to accept his fate.

"All my aches and pains are gone," their anthro skunk father stated. "I haven't felt this good in many years. Maybe you'll need to beat me this bad again tomorrow night. Meanwhile, I think I'm going to go have a little fun before calling it a night. Four camps over in either direction you said?"