

FIVE

Day three and again, the fishing was incredible. Alas, late afternoon thunderstorms cut the time on the lake short. The storms raged through dinner time. Fortunately, they had a contingency plan for non-grill days. In this case, make your own fresh dough pizza. As usual, there was too much food as they always packed extra should there be last-minute company. The storms died down at sunset.

Steve set up the skunk cribbage board.

“No way in hell!” Jake protested holding his hands up and shaking his head in the negative. “I don’t want to become a skunk!”

“Oh, come on, Jake. It’s harmless. You saw Dad change back as did I. Dad and I talked this over. It would be faster if you joined us in the game.”

“What do you mean?”

“The two of us want to visit Cathy tonight,” Max replied. “You might not have read her body language as she left yesterday. She was dragging her tail. It’s obvious she was hurting inside. We figured the two of us would go try and cheer her up. Show her we don’t mind the little trick of the board. I know it scares you. Will you still help us?”

“Wait? To do that, you need to be double skunked.”

“And we must in our hearts want that to happen,” Steve replied. “It would be quicker in a three-way game. If just the two of us play, it will take at least two games as only one of us could be double-skunked at a time. And the second game would be tricky with one of us a feral skunk. With you helping, it would take just one game. You could beat us both. You’d then have the camp to yourself for the evening and we’d be back in the middle of the night.”

Jake nervously looked at the board and then nodded slightly as he sat down. He won the cut to deal first. After dealing, he dealt a card into the crib. He stared at his hand in disbelief and quickly tossed the only card that didn’t help into the crib. After the other two each tossed a card into the crib, Steve cut the deck. Jake flipped the Five of Diamonds. He started visibly shaking nervously.

“Everybody’s friend,” Max replied until he noticed Jake shaking. “You alright?” his father asked him with concern.

“You’ll see,” Jake replied. “Let’s just say that the bewitched board doesn’t fool around.”

Max led off. “Four, you need one to peg on it.”

Steve shook his head laying down a nine. “Thirteen.”

Jake put down a five. “Eighteen”

“Twenty,” Max put down a two.

“Twenty-six,” Steve stated laying down a six.

“Thirty-one for two,” Jake replied laying down a second five and pegging two points on the board.

Max glanced at Jake. “Fives are apparently cheap. Let’s try that again. Four,” Max started off again.

Steve dropped a queen, “Fourteen”

Jake paused a moment debating. He put down the Jack of Diamonds. “Twenty-four.”

Max stared at the cards Jake had put down so far. He then laid down another two. “Twenty-six.”

Steve, “Go”.

Max looked at Jake. “You’ve got the other five, don’t you?”

Jake started shaking more as he lay down a third five. “Thirty-one for two.” And pegged two more points on the board.

His father and brother stared at his hand in disbelief. It took a moment for Steve to remember to lay down his last card, a ten. “Last card.” He pegged one point on the board.

“Congratulations, Jake. In all my years playing, I’ve never seen that hand. I’ve seen people come close.”

“The board’s possessed!” Jake cried out. “There’s no fucking way I could have gotten that hand otherwise! If this board could rig lottery tickets like that, we’d be rolling in enough cash that you could buy-out all the camp owners on this lake!”

“Calm down, your safe, Jake. We’re the ones asking to lose badly, not you. We need to continue the game,” Max replied. “I’ve got fifteen-two, fifteen-four and two pairs for eight total.” He moved his pegs accordingly.

“That five saved my hand,” Steve replied. “I went from a single fifteen to three of them. Six points total.” He moved his peg, now at seven total points to his father’s eight.

Jake stared at his hand. “I still can’t believe this.”

“Cursed board or not, go ahead and count it out,” Max encouraged his son. “Take a photo if you want. It’s that rare.”

“Fuck no on the photo. The board helped me ‘cause you two are crazy and want to become fucking skunks for the night!” He stared at them for a moment. They looked back patiently. He threw his hands into the air. “Fine! The four fives can be combined in four combinations of fifteen. Same with matching each five to the jack. That’s sixteen points. Four of a kind can be matched up to a total of six pairs, so that’s twelve more points for twenty-eight. Right Jack is one more point for the largest hand one can score in cribbage, twenty-nine.” Jake moved his back peg twenty-nine points ahead of his front peg, thirty-three points in total with his scoring in the ‘pegging round’.

Jake picked up the crib cards with a shaky hand and stared at them for a moment. He laid them down showing two jacks, a king, and a queen. “Four more fifteens for eight and a double-run for another six and a pair jacks for two more. Sixteen total.” Jake moved his back peg up the board to the forty-nine-point mark. He then slugged down half his microbrew.

Both his father and brother looked at him, then at the board, and then at each other.

“This thing doesn’t fool around if you ask to become double skunked, does it?” Steve asked rhetorically. He looked directly at his father. “I’m not as spooked as Jake but having that kind of hand and crib combined is really too coincidental. You still want to go through with this, Dad?”

Max nodded as he gathered the cards, shuffled and dealt. Again, Jake scored another six points in pegging and had twelve points in his hand. Putting him at sixty-seven after two hands. Again, his brother and father scored less than ten points each with pegging. Max’s crib was a nineteen. Steve shuffled and dealt. It was a near repeat of the round before. Again, Jake scored another six points in pegging and had another sixteen-point hand, putting him at the seventy-nine-point mark while his father and brother were barely between thirty and forty each. The two of them turned into anthro skunks. They stripped off their clothes before sitting back down.

Jake stared at both of them. “The game’s not over yet! How come you’re starting to change already?”

“Obviously, the board knows we’re going to lose and by a lot,” Steve replied. He was again, in gray, white and brown like two nights before. “At least the process is painless. That’s always a debate in the fandom about transformation.”

It was Jake’s turn to deal again. He stared at his five cards. Two fours, two fives, and a six. Nearly regardless of which one he threw, he already had twelve in his hand before the cut. Unless he tossed the six dropping himself to 4 points before the cut. He did that and prayed. The cut was another six. Jake shook his head. The fucking board wasn’t going to let him off that easy. Even if he had tossed one of the fours or fives, he would have had the same twenty-four-point hand. He wasn’t going to let the cursed board win that easily. So, he did what he could to help the others peg.

As he laid his last card down, fur sprouted from the back of his hand. Within moments, the room changed in size growing much larger as he found himself tangled in his clothing. He cried out in panic, but all that uttered forth was high pitched squeaking. He finally pulled himself out of the heap. He didn't need to feel over his body to realize he had become a feral skunk.

“NO!!!!” He squealed as tears rolled down his muzzle. “Why? Why?” he buried his muzzle in his fuzzy front paws and sobbed. “I don't want to be a skunk.”

“Jake, you were sandbagging, weren't you?!” the feral skunk his father had become squeak-cried from the chair across from him. “You were intentionally passing on obvious pegging chances. I taught you better than that.”

Steve stretched up from his chair and pulled his gray feral skunk body up onto the tabletop. He waddled over to Jake's crib hand. He sat up and carefully gripped the cards one at time in his claws, he flipped them over, remembering what order each of them had tossed a card into the crib. “Yes, he was sandbagging. He wasn't just playing the pegging round intentionally bad. He tried to break his hand up! But the cut put him back to twenty-four.” He stared at the crib cards, the other a five on the bottom, so it was dealt into the crib, two fours which were the ones he and he assume his father had thrown in, and the six Jake had thrown in. A twenty-four point crib even if he had thrown a five or twenty-one points if he had thrown a four. “If he had played his best, between pegging and the scores in both hands he'd be out and still human. Only you and I would have become feral skunks as planned, Dad.”

The gray skunk looked down over the edge of the table at his younger brother and felt a brief wave of dizziness. “You did this to yourself, Jake. Did you forget the rules? No sandbagging to try and keep others from being skunked or both get skunked! All you had to do was play your best and you wouldn't have been affected. What were you thinking?”

Jake curled into a ball hiding in his tail. He continued to whimper on his chair ignoring his brother.

“Steve, enough,” his father squeaked in a commanding voice, stamping his front paws on his chair. “What's done is what's done. We shouldn't have pushed him. He got scared. People can do some really dumb shit when scared.”