

TWO

The anthro skunk had his target in sight. The mix breed growled at him from within the chain link fenced-in yard until he flashed his tail and began to turn around to fire. The dog fled back towards the camp door whining in fear with its tail between its legs. The human turned anthro skunk frowned and lowered his tail. The dog started frantically scratching at the door whining and barking for its owner to let it inside.

“It’s obvious this dog has been hit many times before,” he mumbled. “I can’t be that cruel, it’s not like he has bothered us like the neighbor’s yappy annoyance.” He turned and started making his way back to his son’s rental passing by some bushes just before the dog’s owner opened the door and turned on a floodlight briefly. With the dog inside, the light was turned off.

He paused for a moment and felt a need to not go directly back. Instead, he changed directions, going down onto a rock by the edge of the lake hidden from view from the camps by some bushes. He sat, staring out at the water. His vision was so much better than before in the near dark. And he didn’t need his glasses, which must have fallen off during the initial change. He had just now realized he didn’t have them on. The stars were so sharp and crisp. He didn’t recall the last time he could see the Milky Way so well. It was so peaceful down on that rock with just the sounds of crickets and other critters and the water lapping gently at the lake’s edge. A shooting star passed over the lake. And most importantly, the arthritis pain was gone. He was able to sit comfortably and realized he’d have no issues when it was time to get up off that rock and return to the camp. He lost track of time gazing there over the water just taking all the beauty in.

The bushes rustled briefly behind him, catching his attention. He glanced back over his shoulder. To his shock, he found himself staring nearly nose-to-nose with a normal skunk roughly 20 inches¹ in length from nose to base of tail. The feral skunk paused a moment, looking up at him, and squeaked in its own language. The anthro skunk was startled to realize he could understand the normal-size skunk.

“I’m very happy you didn’t spray that dog. That suggestion on the board was a test for new renters. You passed, meaning I’m willing to risk meeting with you.”

The father-turned anthro skunk stammered for a moment before making coherent sense. “Who are you? How is it I understand you? I know you’re not speaking English. Yet, I can understand your squeaking.”

The normal-size skunk chuckled as it sat up and held out a forepaw very human-like. “My name is Catherine Nightshade, and you are one of my tenants for the week. You can understand me because you ‘got skunked’ at cribbage. As you’re now a temporary anthro skunk, you can understand our language.” She paused a moment cocking her head slightly sideways. “Based on your reaction, you’re not Steve ‘Almond’ Carboneau, are you?”

¹ 50cm

“I’m Maxwell Carboneau. Steve’s father.”

The anthro skunk hesitated for a moment and then held out his forepaw, much larger than the normal skunk’s. She gripped one of his clawed fingers in her paw firmly and shook it and nodded. She was very careful not to scratch him with her sharp claws. Her paw pad was light pink.

“I’m glad to meet you. If I may call you, Max, you may call me Cathy.”

Max nodded.

“Great! I’m guessing you’re a normie and not a furry.”

“Normie?”

“Someone who isn’t a furry fan.”

“Yes, that describes me. Steve has tried to describe it to me, but I can’t wrap my head around it. Of course, I find people dressing up as Darth Vader or Spock kind of strange too.”

“That’s alright. Anyway, many furies upon getting skunked want to try out their ability to release musk.” Cathy wrinkled her nose. “If you’re interested, Max, I’ll show you a safer non-living target on the other side of the property. Then I’d like to meet your son. We’ve only interacted online in the past. I was quite happy to offer him a week at my home when he reached out to me. Of course, I hadn’t expected him to bring non-furies with him.”

She moved back through the bushes and waited until he followed. When he caught up to her at the edge of the camp road, he looked back towards the camp and then looked down again at Cathy. “I’m starting to wonder if someone laced our beer with quite the hallucinogens. That’s easier to believe than that I’m really an anthro skunk and I’m talking to a real skunk.”

Cathy chuckled lightly. “Well, obviously, my suggesting you’re not hallucinating won’t work. So instead, why don’t you follow me? I’ll take you to the target range, and trust me, once you let off a round of musk, you’ll know this isn’t just a drug-induced dream.”

She led him across the camp road and he followed. They passed up into the woods several hundred yards² until they came into a small clearing. He had no problem following her thanks to his improved night vision. He even had little trouble passing among the bushes, which would have slowed him down in human form, though he still wasn’t as quick as the normal skunk who easily passed under them. Within the clearing were a few different scarecrow-like effigies. Some of them were human-shaped while others were dog-shaped.

“Pick a target with your backside aimed towards it. Make sure your tail is raised, and squeeze. Oh, and you might find it easier if you get down on all four paws.”

² meters

“Squeeze?”

“You’ll get what I mean when you decide.”

“Do you plan to do spray, too?”

Cathy laughed. “No, silly. Unlike you, I need to save my five or six shots for self-defense.”

“Five or six?”

“That’s all I get to store. Then it takes several days for my glands to ‘reload’.” She wrinkled her nose for a moment. “And any skunk who tells you they like the smell of their musk is lying. That’s one of the reasons I have this shooting range way over here away from the camp. Trust me, once you fire off your musk, the stench will prove to you this isn’t a hallucination.”

Max looked over the various targets and chose one of the dogs that was roughly the same shape and size as that annoying, yappy Blitzen. He turned around and crouched down on all four as suggested, while raising his tail. To his surprise he found himself muzzle-to-muzzle with Cathy again. She was looking down across his back.

“I want to make sure you hit your target, Max. Move just your forepaws a little to the left...good. Now lower your hind legs just a touch. Right there. Fire when ready. You’ve chosen most everyone’s favorite target.

“Because it looks something like the annoying yappy neighbor’s dog?”

“Exactly. Blitzen is annoying until you get to know him. He’s just protecting his master’s property.”

Max thought for a moment and suddenly knew which muscles to squeeze. The telltale strong odor wafted in the air as yellow colored musk quickly sprayed through the air from his hindside soaking the dog target. As the scent hit his much more sensitive skunk nose, he nearly doubled-over as he gagged having inhaled more of the odor than he expected to at point blank range.

“Oh, God!” he stammered. “I did that?” He nearly lost his dinner as his stomach churned from the stench.

“Yes. And now you smell what I mean? Come on. Let’s head back to camp, unless you want to fire again.”

“One shot if enough,” Max responded gagging some more. He could taste the acid from his upset stomach at the back of his throat but somehow fought back the urge to throw-up. Cathy patiently waited for him.

“Will you be alright?” She asked in a concerned tone of voice.

“Yes, and the sooner we put some distance from here, the better I think I’ll be.”

He followed the feral skunk back towards the camp. The foul smell of midnight perfume seemed to follow them but became more and more diffused as they made their way back towards the camp. Cathy held up her tail to signal Max to wait a moment before proceeding back inside.

“Max, I need you to play one more round of cribbage with Steve before I come in. And you need to skunk him.”

“Skunk him? Why? And what about Jake?”

“Who’s Jake?”

“My other son who joined us for the week. He’s not a furry either.”

Cathy’s tail sagged a moment. “I see.” She paused in contemplation and then continued. “Well, you’ll need to skunk them both then. As to why, well, they won’t understand me otherwise. Unless you want to act as my translator, they both need to get skunked. I left my phone in my den. I suppose I could go get it for back-up. I can then type on it and let it speak for me, but it would be faster if they get skunked like you.”

“Wait? You have a smartphone?”

Cathy scuffed a rear paw. “Well, of course. How else am I to browse the Internet? Human computers are too big for a skunk to lug around. Online, no one knows you’re s skunk.” She laughed softly.

Max shook his head in the negative. “Tell me, Cathy. Were you once human?”

The skunk scuffed a rear paw as she looked down briefly. She then looked back up and nodded slightly. “Yes. And no, I’m not going to tell my story to you out here. I’d rather only tell it once, which is why I need you to skunk them at cribbage. You’re all safe. It takes more than a couple of games to become a full-time skunk.”

“They’re both good players. The information on the bottom of the board warned they have to play their best.”

Cathy nodded and smiled devilishly. “Well, as I wrote on it, I don’t know how or why it works, however, it also seems to know if I want someone to ‘get skunked’ intentionally.”

Max stared at her.

She sat up and put a forepaw over her chest, making a cross sign over her heart as she looked up at him. “I didn’t do it to you. You lost fair and square, an unknowing victim of a bad game. It’ll also do it if in your heart, you want it to happen. You still have to play your best to prove you’re not stonewalling or cheating.”

Max sighed. “Very well. I’ll give it my...er...best shot.” He winked as he raised his tail briefly, turned and headed back into the camp. Part of him still thought this was all a drug-induced hallucination.

Cathy, meanwhile, quickly made her way back to her den to retrieve her phone.