

## FOUR

The fishing was just as good that second day. The evening meal was steak with roasted corn and baked potatoes topped with sour cream, chives and shredded cheese. There was also tossed salad. One did not go hungry at fishing camp in this family. They were all a bit too stuffed to go out and fish again after dinner. Jake pulled the spare cribbage board out of his duffle and set it up. His father and older brother watched him closely.

“What? I don’t want to get a physical skunk tail again or worse!”

“It’s perfectly harmless once you get over the initial shock. It actually relieved me of my arthritis pain for a while,” Max responded.

“While my character is a squirrel, I got to snuggle my bushy, stripped tail until I fell asleep,” Steve added. “It was so soft and enabled me to better picture how it would be to be my squirrel character.”

Jake looked back and forth between his brother and father. “Don’t you see? She’s tricking you both. You’ll become addicted to it and eventually want nothing but to be a skunk just like her.”

“You’re just being paranoid, son,” Max replied. He held up his hands in surrender at the glare Jake gave him. “Fine, we’ll use your board this evening.”

They played four full games all with close scores as the sun set. Half-way through the fifth game, there was a scratching at the floorboards near the door. The panel popped up again like the night before and Cathy entered. Jake visibly tensed as he set his cards facedown.

Cathy squeaked out. “I hope I’m not bothering you. I was just checking in to see if anyone got skunked. I don’t always sense it, though sometimes I do.”

Jake stared at the others in disbelief. He brought his left hand around to his backside feeling over the small of his back above his buttocks. No tail, yet he could understand the skunk.

She chuckled lightly. “I said last night the ability to understand me takes longer to wear off. We still have a few hours before I’d need to pull out my smartphone or you’d need to get skunked again.” She only then noticed they were using a normal cribbage board and the smile fell from her muzzle and her tail sagged. “Oh, I’m sorry. Last night must have scared you something awful. It tends to do that to normies. I’ll leave you be the rest of the week.” She turned to head back to the trap door.

“Cathy, please don’t go,” Max said. “We were using our board to humor Jake.”

The skunk paused and turned back towards them. “Really?”

“Yes,” Jake replied with a little force in his voice. “I won’t let you steal either of them.”

“What?” she responded in shock sitting up. “Steal them?”

Jake pointed to the skunk shaped cribbage board. “That thing. Changing into a skunk is like weed or some other drug. You get a little of it, and you’re soon hooked. You need to become a skunk more and more. You admitted it yourself last night. Dad admitted to feeling less pain after the change. Prior to him going outside last night, he said he may need us to skunk him some more due to how he felt as an anthro skunk.”

“Jake,” Cathy replied. “In all my years renting out this camp, no other furry has become ‘addicted’ to this other than me. For them, it’s a fun, temporary change for a night or two before they head home. As much of a dream as it is for many in the furry fandom to want to become their character, alas they know in reality it’s not practical in this current world. I have just been lucky in that I’ve found a way to do it.” She waddled towards him. “I’m willing to trust you, though I can smell your hostility from here. Will you trust me, Jake?” She stopped at his feet and looked up at him making big, cute eyes at him. “I’ll let you pet me if that would help. I saw your brother’s post about you losing your cat a month back.” She sagged her tail. “It’s always hard to lose a fur-member of the family. I’ll even get up in your lap if you like.”

Before he could respond, the skunk climbed up the chair leg, hesitating for a moment. When Jake didn’t cower away or flinch, she carefully got into his lap and curled up. She was about the weight and size of his late cat. Jake hesitated at first, but then he gently put his hand on the skunk’s back and stroked down her back. A mixture of cedar and mint scent faintly wafted up.

She looked up at him while only moving her head slightly. “See, that’s not so bad, is it? We can trust each other even if it’s just a little.”

Jake began to massage her fur one-handed like he used to do to his cat. To his surprise Cathy uttered a noise from deep within similar to a purr. He began to relax as he continued to pet her with one hand. With the other, he flipped cards as needed to continue the game. When the game concluded, which again was another close game, he stopped petting her.

She looked up at him again. “Feeling better?”

“A little. Your fur is so soft. And I didn’t expect you to smell of cedar and mint.”

“We are a very clean species, Jake. It takes me close to an hour every evening to properly groom my fur,” she replied. “My nesting den is lined with cedar to discourage parasites. I mentioned I have some creature comforts. It includes a tub my size I use weekly. That bath includes mint in it for the same reason as the cedar. If you’re done petting me, may I get down? Or do you want me here for you to keep petting as you play another game?”

“I’m done for now,” Jake replied as he scooped her up with both hands, startling her a little. He gently set her down on the floor, tail facing him. “Thank you,” he said. “But I still don’t want you stealing them from me.”

Cathy sighed and squeaked. “I promise you, Jake. I won’t make them change. I can’t force them to change. It’s totally their choice from here. I’ll leave you all be. I won’t bother you again unless one of you chooses to get skunked. As I said when I first came in, sometimes, I can sense when it happens. But not always, which is why I peaked in this evening.”

She waddled over to the trap door, lifted the panel and slipped down. After the panel closed over her, she sighed to herself and she shed a few tears. This was one of the reasons she only rented to furrries. Normies were always so scared. This summer season has been unusual. She had rented to a higher number of furry newcomers than in the past as many of her regulars just couldn’t work it into their schedule to come that summer. Among the newcomers, Steve was the first one to bring normies with him in years. It had also been over a month since she had trusted any of her new renters with her secret, most having failed the test. She had enjoyed the petting and wished Jake had been willing to trust her a little longer and pet her some more. She was growing lonely again. It was the major regret, other than a lack of vocal cords, with her decision to leave humanity as normal skunks were solitary creatures. She had been a very social extroverted human.