

STENCHER THE SKUNK

By: S. Brown Harris

One day Candi and her father walked along the shaded trail of Cedar Forest Nature Preserve. A few feet ahead of them, a pile of dried leaves began wiggling. Candi watched a baby skunk emerge and scamper over to her. She bent over and picked up the ball of soft black and white fur. The tiny creature curled up in her hands causing her to giggle. “Oh Daddy, please may I keep him?” Candi pleaded. He didn’t have the heart to say no. They took Stencher with them to the pretty yellow house on Oak Street.

As soon as they stepped through the doors, Candi’s Mom shouted, “Where did you get that skunk? You don’t think that you’re going to bring him in here, do you?” Candi begged her Mom to let her keep Stencher. Many promises later, Candi’s Mom agreed, with certain rules of course. “Stencher must be kept outside in his cage at all times. He is not to be brought in the house EVER! You also must do all of the things you promised. You know skunks can let out a terrible smell when they get angry. So you must never, ever make Stencher angry.”

Candi hugged her mother happily. “Thanks Mom. I promise you’ll never be sorry that you let me keep Stencher.”

Time passed. Candi and Stencher played together often. Stencher was never any trouble. He was a good skunk. Candi lived up to her promises to feed him and clean up after him. Candi’s Mom and Dad were very proud of the way that Candi was handling her responsibilities.

Months later, Candi, her Mom and Dad had to go away for a whole day. Stencher could not come along. Candi's father said to her, "Candi, be sure to leave enough food and water to last Stencher for the day."

"Not a problem." Candi assured her father. She was on her way to get Stencher's food and water when Sally and Tanika came by to see if she wanted to play.

"Sorry but we're about to leave for the day. Maybe tomorrow." Candi offered.

"Candi, time to go." Her dad's voice rounded the corner. Candi hurried off to the car.

It was late in the day. The sun blazed down hot from the sky. Stencher wondered, "What's keeping Candi?" His mouth was parched dry and his belly grumbled with hunger pains. He waited patiently at first. Then he grew restless. He could not imagine what had happened to Candi.

Finally, Stencher decided to find out what was keeping Candi. He pushed open his cage door and scampered out. He ran towards the back door of the house. He pushed as hard as he could but the door wouldn't open.

Stencher's eyes were drawn to an open window. He climbed up on the garbage can and jumped through the window. Before landing, his paws got tangled in the curtains. Thinking that a monster was about to eat him, Stencher wrestled to break free. When they didn't work, he did what any skunk would do—he lifted his tail and blasted his enemy with his spray. Still the monster held onto him tightly. Stencher thought, "Maybe if I'm very still and quiet this creature will let me go!"

It worked. Stencher wiped his brow with relief. "Whew, that was close!"

Stencher walked away leaving the curtains in shreds. He went into the kitchen, hoping to find Candi. He was disappointed that she was nowhere in sight. “Well, I might as well eat and get something to drink while I’m here!” Stencher pawed at the pantry until it opened. He found raisins, cereal, bread, sugar, honey, peanut butter, jelly, just to name a few.

Try as he might, Stencher could not get into any of the goodies. He sighed heavily, still hungry and now very discouraged. As he turned, his tail knocked the jar of peanut butter to the floor, breaking it open. “Ahh,” he thought, “so that’s how it works.” Stencher hurried over and ate until he tired of it. He then knocked the jelly and honey down to the floor breaking each open. He ate until he was full.

Suddenly his thirst was unbearable. He dashed about looking for water. He climbed on all the counters and cabinets. He looked in every room. Not a drop could be found. He left behind a trail of peanut butter, jelly and honey paw-prints.

“Maybe there’s some up there.” He stared up the stairs. “I might even find Candi.” He face lit with hope.

Stencher crawled up the stairs. He looked in the last room upstairs. At last, he found water in the bathroom. Stencher jumped on the rim of the toilet seat and stuck his head down into the toilet bowl. The water was cool and refreshing on his parched tongue. Stencher turned to jump down and fell backwards. He flailed frantically in the air. Suddenly his paw stuck in the roll of soft white tissue. Landing safely on the floor, Stencher tried to pull his paw out of the soft mass. The more he pulled the longer the tissue got. The cushy mass curled around Stencher in mounds. He ran from room to room to get away with the white monster growing longer with each step.

Stencher did what any skunk would do. He lifted his tail and blasted out his spray. "Take that!" Just then, the tissue ran out. Stencher proudly blew on his tail like a gunfighter blows on his six-shooter after hitting his target.

By now, Stencher was exhausted. With his belly full and his thirst quenched, he decided, "I'll find Candi later."

Stencher carefully climbed back out of the window. After all, he didn't want to raise the attention of that long white monster again. He kissed the ground as he landed and scampered happily back to his cage. Within seconds, he fell fast asleep.

Later in the evening, Candi and her parents returned home. What a sight met their eyes and what a foul smell met their noses. The once neat clean house was a MESS. There was no doubt that this was Stencher's doing.

Candi's Mom was very annoyed as they looked all around the house for the mischievous little creature. Shredded curtains happily greeted them in the living room. The kitchen was filled with Stencher's sticky paw prints. Broken glass with clumps of peanut butter, jelly and honey was smeared all over the kitchen floor. The pantry was in a shambles. Candi's mom couldn't contain her anger any longer. "Will you look at this mess? Candi, you know what this means!" Candi started to protest but dropped her head in silence instead.

They decided that they had better have a look upstairs. Mounds of toilet paper wrapped around their feet and legs as they went from room to room. Each room was filled with Stencher's horrible scent. Candi knew there was no point in trying to change her mother's mind. With one look at her father, there was no doubt that he felt the same way.

Candi ran from the house with tears streaming down her sun-kissed cheeks. She found Stencher fast asleep in his cage. She patted him on his head. “Why Stencher, why would you do such a thing?” Then she noticed the bowls. She realized that she had forgotten to leave food or water for poor Stencher. Her carelessness was going to cause her to lose her beloved pet. Her heart broke even more.

“Maybe they’ll change their minds if they know that it wasn’t his fault.” She ran off to tell them. They were busily cleaning Stencher’s mess up when Candi burst into the room. “Daddy?”

He cut her off before she could say another word. “Not now Candi. Just come in and help clean up this mess!” With stooped shoulders, Candi did as she was told.

After everything was finally back in order, Candi explained why Stencher had come into the house. Her father sighed heavily. “I’m sorry, Candi. That just confirms that we made the right decision. Stencher has to go. You promised that you would take care of him and feed him. Stencher was NEVER to come into the house. We have no choice. Stencher must go!”

Candi understood. The thought of losing Stencher still hurt. Her father continued. “Tomorrow we’ll take Stencher back to the woods and set him free.”

Later that night when they were all asleep, Stencher finally woke up. He wondered if Candi had returned home yet. He got out of his cage and scampered to the window. When he got underneath the window, a large man with a sack thrown over his shoulder was coming out. Not looking where his feet were landing, the man stepped on poor Stencher. This hurt and made Stencher mad. He did what any skunk would do. He lifted his tail and blasted out his spray. “There, take that!” Stencher hissed.

When the man realized what was happening, he shouted. “You dirty rotten skunk!” Now this infuriated Stencher. “He doesn’t know me! It’s bad enough that he stepped on me. How dare he call me names! I don’t think so, Mister!” Stencher lifted his tail again, turned towards the man and sprayed nonstop. The man held his nose and yelled at the top of his lungs. “Help! Help!”

The loud commotion woke everyone in the house. They ran downstairs to see what was going on. When they got outside, they saw Stencher with his tail hiked up in the air. A strange man with a sack across his shoulders dare not move. Candi’s mom ran inside and called the police.

“Stencher, come here.” Candi called.

Candi’s father clipped his nose tight with his fingers and grabbed hold of the burglar with the other hand. By now the burglar happily followed Candi’s father.

A few moments later, the police arrived on the scene. They opened the burglar’s sack finding many valued treasures from Candi’s house.

One officer handcuffed the burglar and put him in the squad car. The other officer stayed behind to write the report. They all began to laugh as the story unfolded. Wiping the tears from his eyes, the police officer laughed, “What every house should never be without—a watch skunk. Thanks to Stencher, I’m sure you won’t be having any more trouble with burglars.”

Candi and her parents waved good-bye to the policemen and went inside. Stencher was safely back in his cage. Candi’s father cleared his throat, “Well, I guess Stencher has made up for his bad behavior. What do you think?” He inquired of Candi. Her face

lit brightly with a smile full of hope as she turned to her mother. Her mother replied,
“Whatever would we do without a watch skunk keeping us safe?”

THE END