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This story is a fan fiction based on the web novel "Sabrina Online the Story" by Chris Yost, it is a work of speculation and must not be taken as canon.

Historical note: this story takes place during the events described in chapter 46 of Sabrina Online the Story by Chris Yost and starts three days after Sabrina has left Columbus.

Clarence & Cindy

Jumping to conclusions

By Styx

Chapter four

Cindy stood outside of Clarence's room, her paw inches away from knocking on the door. *How am I going to do this, how can I explain to Mrs. Skunk that this is all my fault?* Never does the thought of keeping it from Clarence's mother enter her mind. Her expression suddenly goes from one of fear and indecision to one of determination. *I'll just have to tell her and take what happens, I won't make the same mistake that caused this again. I won't run from the consequences of my actions anymore. If she forbids me from seeing Clarence again it's no more than I deserve.* Cindy took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

"Come in," came the muffled voice of Mrs. Skunk from behind the door.

Cindy opened the door, steeling herself for the difficult task ahead. She looked up and stopped short, surprised to see that she, Mrs. Skunk and Clarence were not alone. "M- Mom, Dad I didn't know you were going to be here this morning," Cindy said, surprised.

"Zig called after you left for the police station asking me to check on Clarence on my way to work and your mother decided to come along," replied Cindy's father.

"How is he?" she asked.

"Not much change," Sharon said sadly, "The doctors say his breathing & heartbeat has gotten a bit stronger and they have higher readings on his brain activity but not so much as to upgrade his chances any. The fact that he hasn't regained consciousness is what's really got them worried. They say the wound he received to the head just wasn't serious enough to account for his remaining unconscious so long."

For several moments Cindy considered waiting for her parents to leave before

telling Mrs. Skunk that she was to blame for what happened to Clarence, but no, she thought they had to know too.

Ellen noticed the uneasy look on Cindy's muzzle. "Cindy dear, what's wrong?"

At this, Rodney looked at his daughter again and he too saw her troubled expression also. "Honey, are you okay?"

"Yes, well, no, not really. I just spoke with Susan at the police station."

Sharon looked up. She was anxious to find out why her son had been nearly killed, but didn't want to press Cindy since she looked rather worn. When her eyes met Cindy's however, she got the feeling that Cindy wanted to talk to her.

"Did she happen to explain why she attacked Clarence?" Sharon asked.

"Yes she did," Cindy said. "She also told me about what she thought Clarence did." Cindy looked nervously between the older furs. "I- I'm sorry Mrs. Skunk, this," Cindy said motioning to Clarence. "This is my fault," she said miserably.

Sharon was confused. "Cindy dear, what do you mean your fault?"

"Cindy, you didn't attack Clarence. Why would you say that you're responsible?" added her mother.

"B- Because you were right mother," Cindy said sadly, but when she saw her mother's further confusion spoke on. "Remember mom, when you told me that Clarence would think I wanted to break up with him if I continued to not take his calls?"

"Yes," Ellen said.

"Well that's why Clarence met with Susan, he wanted her to talk to me for him," Cindy said.

"Well that makes sense I suppose," Ellen said. "But what is it that Susan thought Clarence had done?"

Cindy became apprehensive. "Uh she thought....that....he....um," Cindy closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "She thought that Clarence raped me," she said in a rush.

"WHAT!!!" both Ellen and Rodney exclaimed louder than either had intended.

"It was only a misunderstanding," Cindy explained. "He didn't really," she finished.

"Of course he didn't," Ellen said.

"No, Clarence just isn't capable," Rodney stated, and then asked, "Why weren't you taking his calls?"

"Uh," Cindy muttered. "Well you see Daddy, I wasn't taking his calls because I was afraid he wanted to break up with me, and I just couldn't face it," she finished, her voice full of shame.

"I thought we talked about this already," Rodney said, taking her paw and pulling her into a comforting hug.

Cindy gave a small despairing whine, and then said, "I know Daddy and I was stupid not to listen to you. I should have known you were right, but I couldn't stop thinking how distant and distracted he seemed. I couldn't help but think he decided to break up with me." She sniffed back the tears that were threatening to spill forth and continued, "It wasn't till yesterday morning when I talked to Mom about it that I realized that Clarence must have been upset about Sabrina leaving, too. I was so wrapped up in my own feelings that I had completely forgotten that she was special to him, too."

"You're not stupid sweetheart, don't ever say that," Rodney whispered in her ear.

All this was confusing to Sharon. "Excuse me Cindy, but why would you think Clarence wanted to break up with you?" Sharon asked softly.

Cindy sniffed, wiped her eyes, and pulled herself from her Father's embrace and faced Sharon. "Mrs. Skunk, th- the last time Clarence and I were together we uh... we were kissing and well I, I felt so completely safe and secure in his arms. For the first time in my life I wanted to be with somefur. I wanted to be with Clarence." She lowered her eyes, ashamed of herself. "I- I invited him up to my room. But Clarence stopped me and tried to remind me that I was saving myself, but I wasn't listening. Every part of me, mind, body, and heart wanted to be with him. I had given in to my desire for him. That's when he broke away and ran for the door. I was so stunned by this that it was only then that I realized what I was saying and doing. I was only just able to stop Clarence at the front door. I begged him to stay. He said that he wanted to wait till marriage and I told him that that's what I wanted too, and that I was glad that he didn't give in like I did. But I had noticed his face and he was scared. I mean it was a look of absolute fear. He didn't calm down until he was sure I wasn't going to try to drag him upstairs again, but like I said, he seemed preoccupied for the rest of the night, and I started to think that I had frightened him off."

"I see," Sharon said, and then smiled warmly at her. "I wouldn't be too hard on yourself Cindy. Things like that can happen to the best of us," she finished. Sharon wondered if she should press the young doe, but her need to know why her son was very nearly killed and may yet still die overwhelmed her curiosity. "Cindy, can you tell me why Susan thought Clarence raped you?"

"Uh," Cindy muttered, mortified. "Clarence had gone to Susan to ask her to talk to me since I wasn't returning his calls. Naturally he thought I was angry with him. Susan wanted to know why I was supposed to have been angry with him, and well, Clarence, instead of just coming out and telling her what happened, became nervous. I guess he wanted to save me from being embarrassed or something, but only said that we were making out and that things got a little out of control. Susan, seeing how nervous Clarence was and believing that I was angry with him, put that together with Clarence's unfortunate choice of words." Cindy exhaled heavily. "She jumped to the wrong conclusion." She paused for a moment, and then looked Sharon in the eye and continued. "Susan had always been very protective of the rest of us. We always said that we were sisters in heart if not by blood. When she came to think that Clarence had forced himself on me, she flew into a rage and attacked him," she finished.

Sharon walked over to Cindy and hugged her close and spoke quietly in her ear. "You shouldn't blame yourself dear, we've all made mistakes that we wish we could undo."

"I was afraid you wouldn't want me to see Clarence anymore," Cindy said, her voice trembling with relief.

"I think Clarence is old enough now to choose who he sees," Sharon stated in good humor, breaking out of the hug but still holding on to the younger femme's paws, "but I have no problems with him continuing to see you." But her smile soon faded. "If he comes through this," she said solemnly. "I know Susan is your friend, Cindy, and you're close to her. I can even understand that you seem to have forgiven her...but I can't," she said, anger now showing in her eyes. "If my son dies may God have mercy on her, because I won't. I will do everything I can to see her spend her life in prison." Sharon suddenly realized what she was saying and to who. "I'm sorry Cindy, please forgive me. I'm afraid that I'm not feeling myself with all that's happened." She excused herself and went back to her son's bedside and, taking his paw in hers, starting to straighten stray strands of his head fur.

Cindy was torn between her long time friendship with Susan and her understanding of Mrs. Skunk's anger. At best even if Clarence came through this with a full recovery, Susan would be facing a long prison term for nearly killing him. If he didn't....*NO!* She stopped herself, *HE WILL! He will live. Deb is right, he's going to be just fine.* Cindy held on to that thought, believing for all she was worth that Clarence would come back to her, his mother, and the other furs that cared for him. Cindy looked over at Clarence's mother and she did seem to be at her limit. From the way she carried herself, Cindy could tell that she wouldn't be able to stay on her feet much longer. "Mrs. Skunk," Cindy asked.

"Yes dear?" Sharon replied.

"Please forgive me ma'am," Cindy said, "but you look exhausted. You should go

home and rest. I'll stay here with Clarence." She saw a look of indecision on the older femme's face. "I promise I'll call you if there is *any* change," she finished.

Sharon appreciated Cindy's offer, but wasn't keen on leaving her son's side, particularly after last night's revelation. "Thank you Cindy, but I don't feel right leaving him now," she replied.

"Maybe you should reconsider, Sharon," Rodney spoke. She had obviously extended permission to use her first name to Cindy's parents. "It won't do Clarence any good to exhaust yourself."

Sharon looked at Rodney, and then down at Clarence. She still didn't want to leave him, but decided they were right; she shouldn't over tire herself while she could do nothing but wait. She will have to trust others to watch over Clarence. "I'm going now sweetheart. I'll come back tonight, but if you want me to come back sooner, you just have to wake up and ask and I promise to be at your side before you've finished asking." She then leaned in closer and kissed her son on the side of his muzzle then whispered in his ear, "I very much approve of your taste in femmes dear, Cindy is a fine choice." She stood. It was then when she realized that she failed to consider how acute lapin hearing really is.

Rodney & Ellen beamed with pride at their daughter, who stood paw over her mouth, trying to cover the pleased yet highly embarrassed expression on her face. The extent of Cindy's embarrassment could be easily seen by the deep pink hue of the inside of her ears, and the fur on her cheeks was sticking out so straight the blush could be seen clearly there as well.

"Oh my," Sharon said when she spotted the young doe.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Skunk, we didn't mean t-," the young femme started.

"Nonsense Cindy, you can't help being a rabbit anymore than I can help being a skunk," Sharon said as she stepped closer to the rabbit and lowered her voice to the same whisper, this time knowing Cindy's parents could hear. "I meant every word, I can't imagine Clarence choosing anyone better," she finished and made to leave.

"Would you like a lift home Sharon?" Ellen asked.

"No thank you, Ellen, I can manage," she replied as she looked back at her son and saw that Cindy had taken her place at Clarence's bedside, taking his paw in hers just as she had done.

"I just wanted to say that Rodney and I have a very high opinion of Clarence, too," Ellen whispered to Sharon. "Not to say that the young furs she's seen weren't nice, but Clarence is the first male we could see Cindy spending her life with," she finished.

Sharon hummed. "I hope they have the opportunity to do so," she said solemnly.

Ellen placed her paw on the skunk's shoulder and gave a gentle squeeze. "He's going to be just fine, you just wait and see," she said reassuringly.

"Yes," Sharon said with only a half felt smile. "I'm sure your right." Then she spoke up. "Cindy? I'll be back at six unless you call, take good care of him for me."

"I will ma'am, and I'll call you if there is any change at all," the rabbit replied.

"Thank you, dear," she said, and left the room.

Rodney turned to his wife. "Well I need to get going. I have two interviews to conduct at the office this morning and I need to drop off that tape deck at the studio on my way home." He then walked over to Cindy and kissed the top of her head. "I'm leaving now Honey, if anything happens give your mother and I a call after you call Mrs. Skunk."

"I will Dad," she said as she turned and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Rodney then stopped on his way out and gave his wife a kiss. "I'll see you tonight, Hon."

"Alright Dear," the older doe said and kissed her husband goodbye. She then walked over to join her daughter. "Cindy dear, would you like me to call in sick at work and keep you company?" she asked.

Cindy smiled at her mother. "I'll be fine Mom. Debbye will be stopping by any minute now."

I should have known, those girls are more sisters then friends. Lord please let all this work out for Cindy's and Clarence's sake. "Alright sweetheart, give me a call if you need anything," she said and gave the younger rabbit a hug, which Cindy returned, and left.

Cindy cupped her left paw on the side of the unconscious skunk's head, careful not to put pressure on the bandage covering his wound, and scritchd the fur on his ear with her index finger. "Hello Clare," she said softly. "I've missed you....Oh Clarence I'm so sorry. This is all my fault. I was so sure you wanted to break up, and I couldn't stand to hear it. I never dreamed something like this would happen. Please come back to us. I'd give anything to hear your voice right now, even if the first thing you said was you wanted to break up. I'd still be happy just knowing you were alright." She pulled her paw away from his face and moved it to his right paw and carefully lifted it to her muzzle and breathed in his scent.

"I somehow doubt that that would be the first thing out of his mouth. In fact, I'd be very surprised if he ever said anything like that to you."

"Debbye!" the doe said, startled. She looked towards the door and saw the disapproving squirrel. "H-how long have you been there?" she asked as she gently placed Clarence's paw back on the bed.

"Long enough," Debbye said sternly as she walked over to the bedside opposite Cindy. "Long enough to know that you're still putting more blame on yourself than you should. Look Cin, I didn't say anything at the station because Susan didn't need it thrown in her face and I figured you'd realize the truth after having some time to think it over."

"The truth?" Cindy said indignantly. "The truth is that *it is* my fault. If I had just spoken to Clarence and faced my fears instead of running away from them none of this," she gestured to the skunk's prone form, "none of this would have happened." She sighed and lowered herself into a chair that had been pulled over to the bedside.

Debbye's expression softened. "Look Cindy," she said as she walked over to Cindy's side of the bed and knelt beside her, "I know you feel like you're the only one at fault, and I'm not saying you're blameless, but it's not entirely your fault. As I see it all three of you, Susan, Clarence, and yourself, share responsibility for this."

"CLARENCE?!" Cindy was just barely able to keep her voice at an acceptable volume. "How can you say Clarence is responsible, he's just an innocent victim! He didn't deserve this!" she gestured at his body again.

"No Cindy, I'm not saying he was asking for this. You tried hiding from your fear that Clarence wanted to break up with you; this prompted him to go to Susan for help. Susan went off half cocked thinking he had raped you without getting the facts straight. Clarence tried to get across to Susan what had happened between you two without actually telling her; causing her to misunderstand his meaning. If he had only told her-

But I think he was just trying to spare me the embarrassment," Cindy interrupted.

"I suspect that's likely the case, and it was a very noble thing to do, but, never the less, if he had just told Susan what happened we wouldn't be here now. I know it seems harsh to put blame on him when he can't even defend himself, but somehow I think he would agree with me if he were awake."

Nodding, Cindy reached out and took Clarence's paw in hers once again, "I know you're right, but when I think how I could have prevented it all," she said in a shaky voice.

The squirrel put her paws on the other femme's shoulders. "You told his mother what happened didn't you? What did she say?"

"That I shouldn't be too hard on myself, that everyfur has done things they regret."

Debbye nodded. "She's right, everyfur makes mistakes. You just have to learn from them and move on. I know I've told you what happened the first time I went shooting with Lee; I almost killed our relationship before it got started. Fortunately, a caring friend intervened and Lee forgave me."

"I suppose," Cindy said, feeling better. "I just hope Clare is that forgiving, too."

"So are you going to stop kicking yourself while you're down?"

"Yeah, I guess," the rabbit sighed.

"Good," said the squirrel with a mischievous grin. "Because you could have caused serious injury to yourself with those enormous bunny feet of yours."

"HA!" Cindy said as she shot out of the chair and spun around to face the other young femme. "Then it's a good thing we're in a hospital. You won't have far to go for the stitches when I kick that fluffy tail of yours out that window and into the nearest tree where it belongs!" she retorted with an evil gleam in her eyes.

For a moment or two neither of them spoke, and then both of them broke down into helpless giggles as they moved to hug each other. For the first time since her father had told her that Clarence had been attacked, Cindy felt all the emotional weight magically lift and instantly knew that was what Debbye had intended. "I really, really needed that, thank you, Sis," she said.

"Now that's more like it, you were starting to worry me. So how is he doing?"

"Well," the rabbit said as she ended the hug, "he's improved a little but they're still not sure about his chances. They can't seem to explain why he's still unconscious. His head injury just wasn't that bad."

Both femmes fell into silence. Debbye pulled another chair over to the bedside so that they sat facing each other. Cindy took Clarence's paw in hers again, and the day wore on without incident. Debbye stayed with Cindy till four; then left to run some errands. When Sharon returned at six, Dr. Fisk joined them.

"Mrs. Skunk," the doctor said as he entered into the room while looking down reading the chart he carried, "I have some news about your son's condition." He then looked up and saw that Sharon was not alone. "I'm sorry Miss," he said, now looking at the doe, "could you please give us a few minutes? I need to discuss some private matters with Mrs. Skunk."

"Of course doctor, I'll wait out in the hall," Cindy said as she started towards the door.

"Just a moment," Sharon said as she held out her arm, stopping the rabbit from leaving. "Dr. Fisk, this," she indicated the younger femme, "is Cindy Lapin, a very close friend of my son's. Whatever you have to say on Clarence's condition you can say in front of her."

Cindy was warmed at the acceptance Sharon had just shown.

"As you like Mrs. Skunk," the ferret said, "your son's physical condition has improved a great deal and we are now certain he will live."

Cindy's expression brightened as did Sharon's

"Oh that's wonderful doctor!" she exclaimed, but then she saw the grim look on the doctor's muzzle. "There's more isn't there doctor?" Sharon asked solemnly.

The doctor looked from Sharon to Cindy, whose expression changed from one of hope to that of concern. "Yes I'm afraid there is, as you know your son's head injury was not so serious as to account for his continued unconsciousness. While unusual it has been known to occur in those who have suffered severe shock. In short Mrs. Skunk your son's mind has drawn in on itself; there is nothing we can do to revive him. The amount of time the patient takes to wake up varies from case to case but the longer they stay unconscious the greater the odds of some debilitating condition developing, even if he were to wake up right now chances are that there would be some minor problems like a speech impediment or a small loss of motor control. We have no way of knowing when he'll wake, it could be mere hours or days but he could be like this for weeks or months."

"Years?" Cindy asked helplessly.

"That," the doctor said, "is...a possibility."

The rabbit cast her gaze down to Clarence closed her eyes and fought back the tears. Sharon stepped up behind her and placed her paws on her shoulders and placed her muzzle on the side of her head and spoke softly. "He'll be fine, Cindy, you'll see."

The two skunks had walked together for hours when a thought occurred to Clarence. "So, if you couldn't talk to us, what did you do for all these years?" he asked.

"Well, aside from watching you and your mother live your lives, nothing at all."

Clarence stopped in his tracks and looked at his father. "So you've just been watching everything we do?"

"Well, yeah, just about. I hope you don't find out any time soon Clarence, but you'd be surprised at how much free time you have when you're dead," Owen said, grinning again.

Clarence grew a little panicked. "E- Everything!?"

A knowing smile played across Owen's muzzle. "Well, not quite everything. I mean I let you have your privacy when the situation called for it. For example if you had decided to take Cindy up on her offer the other day, I wouldn't have followed you into her room," he said.

The fur on Clarence's muzzle stood out so straight as he blushed that it was more like porcupine quills than actual fur. "Y- You, you were there? You saw th- that!?" Clarence choked.

"Well, yes," Owen said, feeling guilty. "I'm sorry for spying on such a private moment. I normally bounce back and forth between you & your mother, watching as you two go through your day. I popped in on you and Cindy just before she asked you to go upstairs," he finished, with an embarrassed expression on his muzzle.

Clarence, looking mortified, started walking again without saying another word.

Owen fell into step along side him. "Um, Son, about that incident, I was wondering....why you reacted that way?"

Clarence considered the question for a moment then said, "I- If you were there you sh- should have heard why. I believe that, well th- that sort of th- thing should only be f- for married furs," he said, quickening his pace.

"Yes, I was there, Clarence, and I did hear the reason you gave Cindy. I just don't believe it," Owen stated.

"But I"

"Let me rephrase that," Owen interrupted, "I don't believe that's all there is to it. You were scared, Clarence. I saw real fear in your eyes. Some might go so far as to say that it was abject terror." He regarded his son for a moment and went on. "Just what was it Clarence? What about the prospect of sleeping with Cindy caused you to bolt like that?"

"I- it's just- I mean- I've never, um I- I was nervous," Clarence sputtered.

Owen stopped walking. Clarence continued on but stopped when his father placed a paw on his shoulder. Clarence didn't say anything more or turn around, he just looked down as if studying his feet.

"Clarence, you and I both know that's not it"

"I don't want to discuss it"

"Son, please, we may never get the opportunity to talk like this again. I might be able to help with what's troubling you." Clarence didn't respond, he just continued looking down and closed his eyes. "Please, Clarence," Owen begged, "Let me be more than just a spectator in your life." Owen could feel tears start to form but blinked them back. "Let me be a father to you even if it's just this one time."

Clarence for his part had been doing everything he could to keep hold of his temper, but his grasp started to slip. His whole body started to tremble with the echo of his father's words. *Who the hell does he think he's kidding? That's it I've had it!* Clarence snapped around to face his father, years of suppressed anger boiling to the surface. **"DON'T FEED ME THAT CRAP!"** Clarence yelled at a totally shocked Owen.

"Clarence, I---," Owen started.

"Spare me; you want to know why I was scared? FINE! I'll tell you. I was afraid that I'd do the same thing to Cindy that you did to my mother. I didn't want to trap her in a marriage with a fur she doesn't really love and a child she never wanted," Clarence seethed.

Owen was flabbergasted. He knew that Clarence might think that his mother didn't care for him but just how he got the idea that his father & mother didn't love each other? "Clarence, your Mother and I---"

"Don't lie to me. I know the truth. I've known since I was eleven," Clarence stated hotly. "I was cleaning the garage when I came across a metal box. I looked inside it to see if it was important. It was full of records; among them was yours and Mother's marriage license and my birth certificate. After reading both of them something bothered me about them, but I couldn't place it. A few days later I was doing my history homework when it hit me, I went back to the garage and pulled your license and my birth certificate and checked the dates." Clarence scowled at Owen. "My birthday is only five months after the date you and Mother got married. The two of you got married because you got her pregnant with me, not because you loved each other. That's why Mother never loved me and why there are no pictures of you"

Owen closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "Clarence, please listen to me. Your Mother and I loved each other as much as it is possible for two furs to love. You're mother put all the pictures with me in them away because every time she looked at them she'd feel the pain of losing me all over again, and whether you know it or not, Son, your Mother loves you a great deal. She-."

"Oh come on!" Clarence interrupted. "She loves me, you say? Is that why, no matter how much I tried, she wouldn't spend any time with me? No matter how well I did

in school, she would be too busy with work. Is that why for as long as I can remember I never got so much as a 'Happy Birthday Clarence', let alone a birthday party?"

"Clarence, look, you have the facts but you've put them together wrong. Yes, you were conceived before you're Mother and I were married, but that's not the reason we got married. The fact of the matter is I had already decided to ask her to marry me. I had bought the ring a month before she told me she was pregnant. I always kept it on me when you're Mother and I were together in case I managed to scrape up the nerve to ask, but when she told me you were on the way I knew I had to ask then. If I waited even a day longer she would have thought I asked only because she was pregnant, so I reached into my pocket and presented the ring and asked her if she would marry me." Owen's expression became one of great happiness. "Clarence, my heart sang when she said yes." Then his expression became serious as he looked back to his son. "Don't ever say that your Mother and I didn't love each other, or you, again."

"You honestly expect me to believe she cares about me? I spent my childhood raised by babysitters and daycare workers until I was old enough to look after myself. I'll bet it makes little difference to her whether I live or die," Clarence said bitterly.

Owen made an angry sound in his throat and grabbed Clarence and spoke through clenched teeth. "Doesn't care? This is tearing her apart, especially now that she has realized how badly she neglected you emotionally. I know her treatment of you won't win her 'Mother of the Year', but you have to understand she only wanted to provide you with the best she could; you are the most important fur in her life. You're all she has!"

Clarence remained indignant. "If I'm so important to her why wasn't she ever there? How come she was always so wrapped up with her career?"

Owen's anger subsided as he forced himself to remember that Clarence just didn't know the truth. With a deep sigh he replied, "Clarence, that was my fault. My irresponsible belief that there was plenty of time for things like Wills and life insurance." Owen looked thoroughly ashamed. "I love you and your mother with all my heart, but I failed you both miserably. I was only thirty when I was killed and I had never bothered to fill out a Will nor take out a policy on myself. Because of that your mother, in order to provide you all she felt you deserved, took on to her shoulders a burden larger than any kid has a right to expect of any parent. You see, Clarence, we were all your mother had. Her family turned their backs on her when she told her parents that she had gotten pregnant out of wedlock. She tried several times to bridge the gap, but they remained cold to her. It was as if they never cared about her at all. She had a few friends, but they couldn't help financially as they themselves were trying to get their own lives and families started. Your mother had to go to work full time. She had left college willingly. I never expected her to but she wanted to devote herself to her family. So the only work she could get was unskilled labor. She could support the two of you with this but it wasn't enough. You became everything to her and she wanted everything for you. She knew she couldn't provide that working in a department store. She decided to go back to school as well as work full time. Can you imagine Clarence? How much time that requires? She

relied a lot on daycare and sitters. There were even times when she had to work one or even two part time jobs on the side to help pay her college tuition, the house, the utilities, food, and not to mention those sitters." He ticked off each item on his fingers as he counted them off. "It took twice as long as it normally would have if she was able to go back to school full time. Back then, Clarence, there wasn't a time of the day when your Mother wasn't either in school, working, studying, or grabbing the too few hours of sleep she allowed herself, and she did it willingly for you because she wanted to be able to provide all that she felt you deserved. She never meant to shut you out Clarence, please believe me, she always loved you. She just took too much onto herself. She just didn't realize, not until now, that she had denied you what she wanted to give you most, a loving mother." Owen looked at his son and saw that he still had a disbelieving expression. "I guess I'll just have to show you," he said. Owen stepped over to stand beside Clarence and gave him a grin. "I probably should have done this in the beginning," he stated as he waved his right paw in front of both of them. The air before them became almost liquid then solidified onto a scene of several furs, most of them young kits & cubs seated around a table with a small skunk in the center chair. The scene was decorated in streamers and balloons. All furs present except the skunk in the middle were singing a hauntingly familiar tune.

Clarence stared, spellbound. The scene before him sparked some small twinge in his mind, a faint and faded memory. "Is this, is this my?" Clarence started to ask.

"Haaappy Biiiiirthday toooo yoouu, Haaappyy Biiirthdaaay deeeaar Claaareence," came in a faint and echoing chorus of voices from the phantom movie screen.

"IT IS!" Clarence cried excitedly. "It's my Birthday party, my fifth Birthday party," he said as he stared transfixed at what was playing out before him.

Clarence watched as the other furs finished singing to his younger self. He spotted two adult skunks standing in the background looking at the five year old skunk. Both appeared to be filled with happiness and pride, one a copy of the skunk beside him, the other a femme in her early to mid twenties. Given her fur markings he decided she could only be the younger version of his mother. After the cheers died down, his father bent down and picked up the birthday fur and held him between himself and his wife. Clarence continued to watch the scene as his mother & father held his five year old self and nuzzled his ears and tickled him into helpless giggles. He then reached over and hugged his mother, who hugged him back looking content and kissing her son on the forehead.

Clarence, awestruck, reached out to touch his mother but stopping just short, afraid of disturbing what was before him. "I- I remember this," he whispered slowly.

"You see Clarence?" Owen asked. "Your mother loved you then and she still does, now more than ever," he finished.

A tear made its way down Clarence's cheek. Seeing the one thing he had longed for all his life had a very profound effect. "But- but how, how can I be sure she still loves me?" he sobbed. "All- all I can remember is her being to busy and distant," he finished, sniffing.

"Here, I'll show you," Owen said quickly, then waived his paw before them again.

The scene of his mother snuggling his younger self started to waiver, became cloudy, and was gone. "No," Clarence muttered wistfully.

After a moment the cloudiness again cleared on a scene, but this one was much different from the one before. Before them was a solemn scene, a hospital room. In the bed he saw....himself unconscious, and it unnerved him more then he cared to admit. Beside the bed he saw his mother seated in a chair.

"Is that really me?" Clarence asked.

"Yes," Owen said. "This is the physical world, what you are seeing is the hospital room, where your body clings to life, and your mother."

Clarence looked closer and saw that, although she was calm at the moment, it was obvious that she had been crying. Indeed, from all the wet matted fur under her eyes he could tell that she had been crying a great deal. Sharon was sitting close to the bedside, one paw held Clarence's limp one to her muzzle, her nose buried into the fur on the back of his paw. Her other paw was stroking the side of her son's face. After a few moments she pulled her muzzle from Clarence's paw and held it to the side of her face and sniffed.

"Oh Clarence please, please pull through this. You have so much to look forward to. Cindy is a lovely femme; I'm sure I'm really going to like her. Please come back to me, Son. I couldn't stand it if you...if you died believing I didn't love you." Sharon paused for a moment, then continued, "Clarence I don't know if what they say about furs in comas being able hear what others are saying is true or not. I hope it is. I hope you can hear me because I want you to know I love you, Clarence. I've always loved you." These words spilled out quickly as tears again began to fall. "I know I haven't shown it," she said more calmly. "Clarence, I know I can never make up for my neglect but I promise if you come through this I'll do my best to try."

Clarence, watching the scene, fell to his knees and sat back on his feet, his head hung low, tears running down his cheeks. Owen knelt and placed a paw on his son's shoulder.

"Clarence?"

Clarence looked up to his father and sniffed. "I'll b-be okay, it's just a little." Clarence paused a second or two, looking up at the scene again. "It's kind of overwhelming, to want something with all your heart for as far back as you can

remember only to find that it's been there the whole time." He closed his eyes with a contented smile and whispered to himself, "My mother loves me."

Owen smiled warmly at his son, happy and relieved that he finally understood. He removed his paw from Clarence's shoulder and held it out to him, and pulled his son to his feet. "Of course she does, Son. We both do, always have," he said as he indicated with his other paw that they should start moving again.

END OF CHAPTER FOUR