

Attack of the Skunk Woman

by Judy Freespirit

At 2 a.m., I was awakened out of a deep and wheezy sleep by someone shaking my shoulder and saying, "It's time for your treatment."

Before I opened my eyes, I smelled her. It was the Skunk Woman, back again after all my previous protestations.

"You'll have to leave," I said in my most adamant voice.

"Your doctor ordered this treatment, and you're going to take it," she said as she continued preparing the breathing treatment.

"Get out of here now!" I yelled.

"Now you just behave yourself," she snapped "and we'll get this over with."

"Just get away from me!" I shrieked.

She continued standing next to my bed. "Just take your treatment," she repeated with a leering smile.

Tears were streaming down my face as I pushed the button to call the nurse.

"Nurses' station, how may I help you?"

"I want you to get this woman out of my room."

"Woman? What woman?"

"The respiratory therapist who is reeking with perfume and making me sick. You promised to send someone else. If you don't have someone else, I refuse the treatment. Just send someone to my room to get her out of here now."

I clenched my lips, but Skunk Woman pushed the steaming treatment mouthpiece between them.

I took it out and repeated, in the most emphatic voice I could muster, "Get out of my room! You're making me sicker, and I want you out of here."

At that, she just smiled and pulled the chair, which was halfway across the room, to the foot of my bed, sat down, and folded her arms.

"Just take your asthma treatment like a good girl," she admonished.

I sat there, shaking and seething, breathing the steaming medicine into my lungs as tears streamed down my face. At last the nurse arrived with the head respiratory therapist.

“What’s the problem here?” the nurse asked.

“I want this woman removed. She’s wearing perfume and it’s making me sick and she refuses to leave,” I said.

“Go out and wait for me in the hall,” the supervisor said to Skunk Woman.

Skunk Woman didn’t budge. “She’s being hysterical,” she told her boss.

“I said, wait for me in the hall,” the supervisor repeated as she pointed the way.

Skunk Woman still did not move. “She has to take her treatment,” she repeated.

“I’ll take care of the treatment,” her supervisor said. “You wait for me outside.”

Reluctantly and with studied slowness, Skunk Woman left the room. The supervisor smoothed the pillows behind me and pulled the chair further from the foot of the bed before she sat down. Still shaken, I continued sucking on the steaming medicine container.

“I’ll wait here till you’re finished,” she told me. “I’m really sorry. That shouldn’t have happened.”

When the treatment was over, I asked the nurse for paper and a pencil. I wrote a scathing note to the hospital administrator with c.c.’s to everyone I could think of who would have even the remotest interest in what had happened to me. Under the circumstances, it was all I could do.

It’s hard to imagine that anything good could have come out of this incident, but in my anger, adrenaline began coursing through my veins and made my breathing much easier.