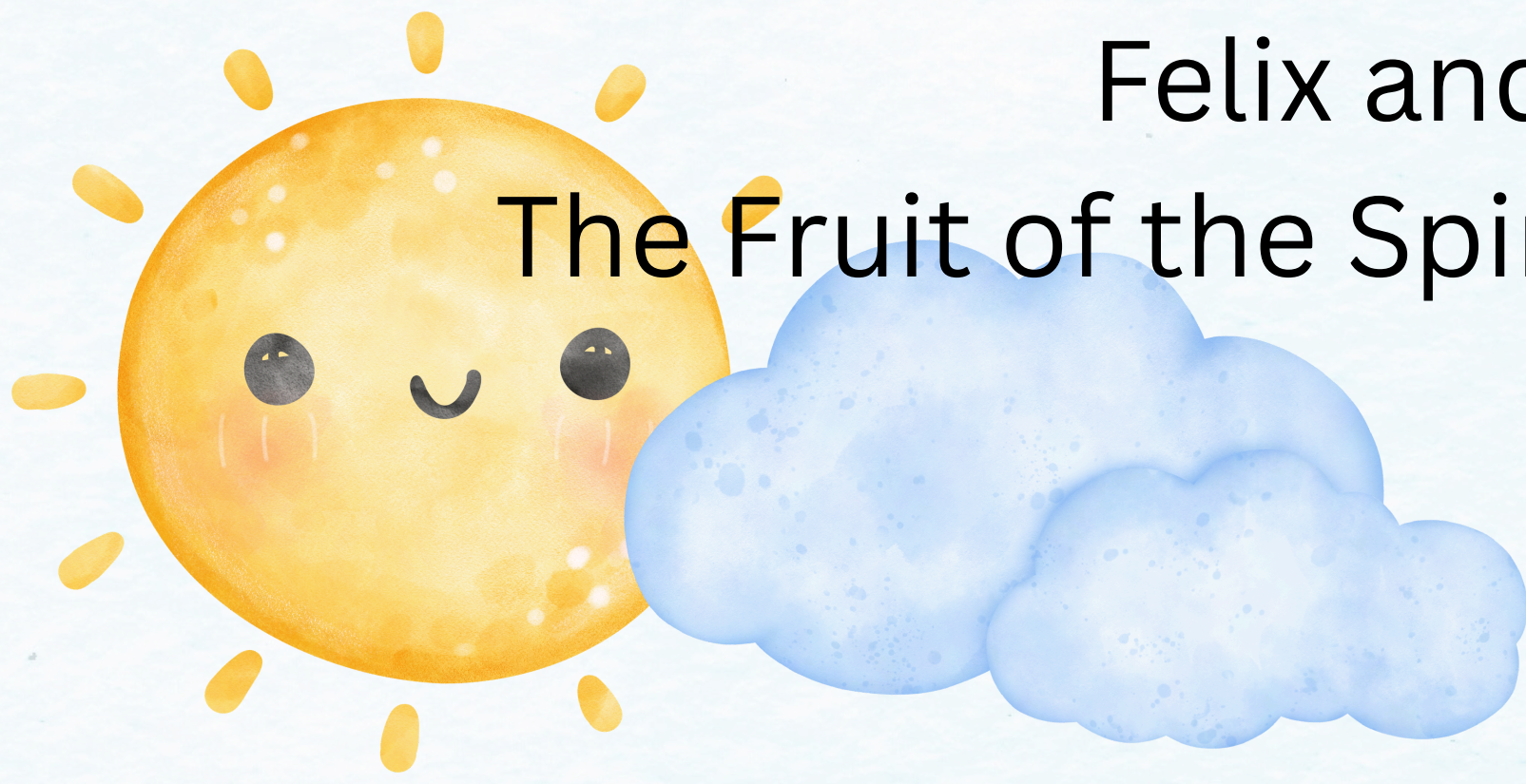


Felix and Friends:
The Fruit of the Spirit Series



2

Felix learns about Love



by Melissa M.
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Patrik had been with the family for a couple of weeks, and despite his best intentions, Felix was struggling with the new arrangement. He was trying to be nice to his cousin at the encouragement of his friend Charlie, but it was just so hard.

Patrik seemed determined to make everything difficult.

During the first couple of days, Patrik mostly just sulked and kept to himself. Felix tried to get him to talk or play, but it was a no-go. Patrik just wanted to be alone. Felix understood that to a degree, so it didn't bother him too much at first.

But after a few days, Patrik changed. He started talking—but he wasn't very nice. He complained about everything: the tiny room he shared with Felix, the “country” food he wasn't used to, the sounds of the crickets at night.

Nothing was good enough.





Everyone in the family did everything they could to help Patrik feel at home. Hazel, Felix’s mom, changed the menu to try to suit Patrik’s taste. Märta, sweet and loving, tried over and over again to get Patrik to simply accept a hug. Hans, Felix’s dad, made sure to include Patrik—as Patrik would allow—in any father-son type outing or activity that he typically did with Felix. But Patrik simply pushed everyone away. He would respond to all kindness by getting annoyed, angry, or simply storming off to the room the boys shared.

Felix had had enough. As far as he was concerned, Patrik was pricklier than Charlie, his hedgehog friend. He didn’t understand how the rest of his family could keep on being so loving in spite of everything. Felix sighed irritably as, once again, an angry Patrik had locked him out of his own room.



“Really, Patrik?” muttered Felix irritably. “Let. Me. In.” He emphasized each word with a hiss of anger. “It’s my room too, you know,” he wailed.

Patrik shouted back from behind the closed door, “Leave me alone.”

Felix sighed dramatically and kicked his small foot at the base of the door.

“Come on. This is getting annoying,” he grouched. Then, as if his comments weren’t already harsh enough, he added, “*You* are annoying.”

Patrik’s reply carried the same anger as before, but there was an unmistakable quiver in his voice.

“Well, no one’s forcing you to talk to me,” he began, making no effort to open the locked door between them. “If you’re so annoyed, why don’t you just go talk to someone else in this ‘perfect’ family of yours?”

Felix huffed. “Or **INSTEAD**,” he emphasized, “maybe you could just leave.”

“Leave and go where?” Patrik whimpered, a clear undertone of panic mixed beneath the anger.

“I don’t care!” shouted Felix. “I just wish you would just go back to where you came from so I can have my life back!”



Felix’s bitter words echoed through the house. At first, they were met by a sort of stunned silence—then a low, steady voice that Felix knew oh so well came from behind him.

“Felix,” Hans said firmly.

Felix looked up at his father, unable to meet his eye. Shame and embarrassment flooded him at the exchange that had just taken place.

“Dad,” he murmured miserably. “I... I didn’t see you.” His words barely came out as a whisper. He knew he had done it this time.

Hans put a solid paw on his son’s shoulder, and Felix hesitantly raised his eyes to meet his father’s gaze. He ached at the disappointment he saw there.

“Go to the kitchen, please, and wait for me,” Hans instructed. “I want to talk to you.”

“Yes, Dad,” Felix replied softly, and he started down the hall toward the kitchen.





After Felix had gone, Hans knocked gently at the door to the boys' room.

"Patrik?" he called softly. "Can you please open the door?"

He waited patiently and was soon rewarded with the sound of the lock sliding back.

Then, with a moanful creak, the door opened a crack.

"Are you alright, son?" asked Hans as he carefully opened the door the rest of the way.

He watched his nephew with concern. Tears trickled down from red-rimmed eyes as Patrik stood sorrowfully before him. He was the picture of misery, and Hans prayed once again for strength and wisdom as he knelt by the boy.

"I'm fine, Uncle Hans," Patrik whispered, though it was painfully clear that he was anything but.

"Are you sure?" Hans coaxed tenderly. "Do you want to talk?"

Patrik shook his head at once. He wasn't ready to talk just then. He felt all mixed up inside and just wanted to be left alone.

"I'm sure," he confirmed. "I think I just want to be alone right now, if that's okay."

"That's fine, Patrik. You know where I am if you change your mind," Hans said with a kind smile.

"Now, I'm going to go have a word with Felix. He shouldn't have talked to you that way. He knows better than that. And please," Hans continued, reaching down to wipe a stray tear from Patrik's cheek, "know that we are very glad you're here with us. You are family, and family belongs together. I know things have been pretty hard for you these past weeks. But I'm here for you, okay?"

He lovingly scratched behind Patrik's ears, offering whatever small comfort his nephew would accept.

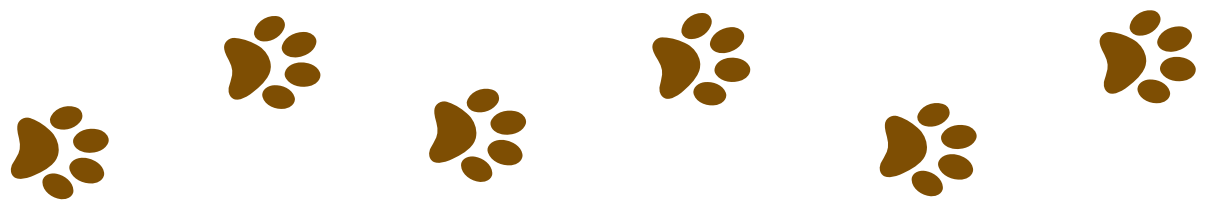
Patrik found himself leaning into the kind touch. He smiled weakly.

"I know. Thanks," he whispered.





Meanwhile, Felix paced the kitchen floor as he waited for his father. He didn't need anyone to point out just what he had done—he was already feeling guilty for the way he had shouted at his cousin. He knew it was wrong and wished he could just take it all back. He finally pulled out a chair from the table and sat down with a frustrated sigh. His feelings were all jumbled up inside, and he didn't really know what to do with them. *What a mess*, he thought, wearily rubbing a paw across his face. Then, a slight creak of the floorboards alerted Felix to his father's presence. He jumped up quickly, nearly toppling his chair in his efforts to get everything out all at once. Hans steadied the chair as his son began to pace once more, the words stumbling out of his mouth at record speed.



"Dad! I'm really sorry I said those things," he began pitifully. "I promise I didn't mean anything by it. I was just mad. I... I didn't think." Hans gently reached out to his son and steadied him. "Felix," he said, the name nearly a whisper. "Take a moment." Felix took the cue and sighed, breathing deeply, trying to calm his anxious nerves. Hans smiled sadly at his son. He could see that Felix was truly sorry for what had happened, and he knew that he needed to get to the root of it. He wanted to protect the hearts of both his boys—to help them heal and find a way to friendship. "I know you weren't thinking, son," Hans said softly, his voice tender and calm. "That's the problem." Felix hung his head and nodded. Hans put a gentle arm around his son's slim shoulders. "Come on, Felix," he encouraged. "Let's go for a walk. We need to talk."



“So, talk to me, Felix,” Hans invited as the two mice walked through the grass along the river. The air was crisp and clear, and he could sense that the time outside was already doing his son a world of good.

When Felix didn’t answer at once, Hans paused and turned toward him.

“What’s going on, son?” he prompted gently.

Felix finally sighed and sat down on a rock, his gaze fixed on some unknown spot across the river. “It’s just so hard, Dad,” he breathed. “Everything’s all messed up! I just... I just want things to go back to how they were before.”

Hans sat next to his son and nodded understandingly. He knew the adjustment had been hard for the entire family. Some things are never easy, even when they’re right and good.

Hans glanced over at his son and asked gently, “Don’t you think Patrik wishes for the exact same thing, Felix?”

Felix looked over at his father before guiltily averting his gaze once more.

“I guess so,” he mumbled, starting to see what his father was getting at.

“Son,” Hans said, “your cousin has lost his parents. He’s had to leave his home and his friends—the only life he’s ever known—behind. You need to remember that you’re not the only one learning to adapt here. If you think things are messed up for you, how do you think they seem to Patrik?”

Felix picked up a small stone and tossed it into the river, watching the responding ripples spread. He knew there was no arguing with what his father was saying. It was easy to forget sometimes why Patrik was living with them in the first place. Well, maybe not easy—but easier, Felix thought.

Hans continued, “Felix, I know that you have had to give up some of your space. I know things are more crowded for us all right now. But families need to be there for each other—to love each other and give to each other. We need to show love to Patrik. He really needs us right now.”

“It’s just so hard, Dad!” Felix groaned in frustration. “I really have been trying to be nice, but Patrik isn’t nice back! He just complains about everything. I’m tired of it!” He let out a long sigh and tossed another stone into the river.

“I know, son,” Hans acknowledged. “Patrik is hurting pretty badly right now. He’s scared and probably feeling all mixed up, just like you. But he really needs us to be there for him.”

“But he doesn’t seem to want us around at all,” Felix countered.





“I know it’s hard to understand, Felix,” replied Hans. “Patrik is certainly working hard to push us away. I think that he’s just feeling very scared and insecure right now. He doesn’t know us all that well, and life here in the country is very different from the life he was used to in the city. I don’t think he knows quite what to feel. His whole world is upside down, and he’s just trying to protect himself by pushing everyone else away.”

“I never really thought of it like that,” said Felix thoughtfully.

“Well,” sighed Hans sadly, “it’s hard sometimes to see past the bad behavior to what might be spurring it on.”

“So, does that mean it’s okay for him to be mean, because he has a good reason for it?” Felix wondered aloud, his brow furrowed as he tried to work it all out in his mind.

“No, of course not,” answered Hans decidedly. “And that’s not what I’m saying. We’re all responsible to behave well regardless of what we are going through. I’m just encouraging you to try to show a little understanding, patience, and love to your cousin, knowing that he is going through some tough times.” Felix nodded as understanding began to sink in.

Hans smiled at his son and continued, “I also need you to let me handle things with Patrik. You know that I have spoken to him about things he has said. He isn’t just ‘getting away’ with anything. So, if you have a problem, you need to come to me with it, okay?”



“Okay. But dad?” asked Felix, “How can I show love to Patrik when he makes it so hard?”

Hans studied his son for a moment before replying. “Let me ask you something.”

Felix nodded.

“How could God show love to us?” asked Hans.

Felix wrinkled his brow. “What do you mean?” he wondered.

Hans continued, “Remember the Bible verse you learned in Sunday school?”

Romans 5:8: ‘But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’

Even though we do bad things, God sent His Son, Jesus, to die on a cross to pay for our sins in a tremendous act of love.

Without Christ’s sacrifice, we would be separated from God forever.

God’s love was given even though we did nothing to deserve it.

We sinned against God, and still He was willing to show us love and forgiveness.

We need to follow Christ’s example—and part of that is showing love to those around us – even if it seems like they don’t deserve it.”





All of a sudden, a mighty commotion erupted from the grove of trees behind them.

Both father and son looked up in surprise to see a skunk running crookedly toward them, his head stuck fast in an old metal bucket. The poor skunk couldn't see where he was going. He bumped into trees and bushes, zigzagging his way down the path in desperation.

"Help! Help me!" came the echoey cries from the poor little skunk. "O dear, O dear! What to do," he seemed to mutter to himself before once more shrieking loudly, "Danger! Help! Help!"

"Look, dad!" cried Felix in confusion. "That skunk has his head stuck in a bucket. How do you suppose that happened?"

"I'm not sure, son, but let's go see if we can help," Hans replied.

The two mice ran up to the struggling skunk, but were nearly plowed over in the skunk's desperation to try to escape his predicament.

"Hold still," Felix admonished. "We'll help you." He paused, assessing the situation before looking to his father for guidance. "Um, how do we get him out, Dad?"

The panic-stricken skunk tensed at the arrival of the mice. "Ahhh!" he squeaked out. "Who's there? O dear, O dear. Danger! Danger!"

Hans tried to appease the spooked critter. He spoke in a quiet, soothing voice.

"We aren't going to hurt you, friend skunk!" he promised. "We just want to help. Please calm down so we can get you free."

The skunk tensed, as if unsure how to proceed. Hans hoped that he would remain still and accept the help they had to offer.

After a moment's thought, he decided on a plan.

"Felix, I'll pull on the bucket handle, and you pull from the back," he instructed his son.

"Okay, dad," Felix tentatively agreed, a bit uncertain but ready to try.





The skunk didn't react well to the sudden invasion.

He howled in fear with a shriek, "Ah! Don't touch me! Who's there? O dear! Danger! Danger!"

The skunk's panic intensified, and all of a sudden he hissed and a pungent aroma covered Felix. He choked, sputtered and backed away as fast as he could, his paws wiping furiously at his face in disgust.

"Ahh! Eww," moaned Felix miserably. "He sprayed me! That's a strong smell. Ewww!"

Hans wrinkled his nose as the smell of the skunk's spray wafted his way. "O dear!" he murmured to himself before calling out, "Just get back, son!"

Hans continued to strain and pull hard at the bucket. "Almost got it," he muttered, and finally, with a pop, the bucket came off.

The skunk was at once jubilant. "I'm free! I'm free!" he exclaimed in delight before his gaze finally fell to his rescuers. A frown of worry returned to his face and he backed away in fear.

"O dear, O dear. Who are you? Are you danger?" he whimpered, eyes wide and afraid.

Hans calmly took a step back as he addressed the skunk. "Please put your tail down," he requested gently, hoping to avoid yet another spraying. "We're not dangerous. We just wanted to help!"

The skunk looked skeptical. "Not danger? Good. Very good," he decided. Then he turned and scampered away. "Need to run," he chanted to himself, "Need to hide. Danger, Danger everywhere! Danger!"

Felix and his father stood and watched as the jumpy little skunk bounded away and disappeared into the forest.

Felix sighed and looked to his dad. "He didn't even say thanks," he complained. "Ugh. And I smell awful."

Hans couldn't help but chuckle. "That's for sure," he agreed. "Peeyou!"

"Dad!" Felix cried in annoyance.

Hans smiled and patted his son's shoulder. "I'm sorry for laughing, Felix," he began, "but you definitely stink!"

Felix sighed, but there was a hint of a smile on his lips.

"Ha. Ha. Ha," he muttered and sat down in the grass.





Hans sat next to his son and looked at him thoughtfully. “You know,” he continued, “it seems as if you just experienced a very real object lesson on showing love.”

“What do you mean?” asked Felix, puzzled.

“Well,” Hans started, “you showed love to the skunk by helping him out even though you only got sprayed for your trouble. The skunk might not have appreciated your help or kindness, but he desperately needed it.” Hans paused a moment and looked his son in the eye. “Patrik desperately needs us too. He needs you, son.” Felix nodded slowly as his father’s words sank in. “I think I understand now,” he whispered quietly. Then he looked up at his father and smiled, “Thanks, Dad.”

“You’re welcome,” said Hans warmly, returning the smile and reaching down to give his son a hug. Then Felix stood and took a breath.

“I’d better go talk to Patrik,” he announced, brushing some strands of grass from his fur and glancing back toward the house—ready and determined to do better by his cousin. “I want to ask him to forgive me. I really do love him. I do, Dad.”

“I know you do, Felix,” Hans affirmed. “Now go on. Make things right.”



Felix tentatively approached his bedroom door, took a deep breath and knocked.

No answer.

He sighed sadly and tried again, calling out, "Patrik?"

He tested the door handle, and the door opened easily with a slight squeak.

He peeked in. Patrik was sitting sadly on his bed, tears still staining his cheeks.

"Can I please come in?" he asked, suddenly uncertain and nervous.

Patrik sniffled, swiping his paw at his tears before quietly answering,

"If you want. It's your room."

"You're crying," said Felix, biting on his lip, feeling awkward.

"Are you alright?"

Patrik sighed. "I'm fine," he murmured. "Just leave me alone... please?" A lone tear rolled down Patrik's face and into his whiskers. He continued, "I mean, I'd leave and go back home if I could—just like you want me to, but I'm kinda stuck here. So, I'm sorry about that, okay? Please just leave me be."

Felix was sad to hear how lonely and defeated his young cousin sounded. He walked over to Patrik and sat next to him on the bed. It was definitely time to make things right.

"Patrik," he began, "I'm really sorry about all those horrible things I said to you. It was wrong, and I am so sorry. I hope you can forgive me."

"It's fine," muttered Patrik, turning away sadly.

"No," said Felix firmly, but not unkindly. "It's not fine. I had no right to treat you like that. I haven't been a good friend—or a good cousin—to you. I'm sorry for being so mean." He took a deep breath, scooting closer to Patrik, hoping Patrik could feel how much he meant every word he was saying.

"I know it's been hard for you," he went on, "and I should be more understanding. I'm so sorry you lost your mom and dad. It must hurt a lot. I can't even imagine how I would feel if I were in your shoes. I just... I love you, Patrik." Felix felt a tear roll down his own cheek. He really did love his cousin, and he hoped that Patrik could see that.

Patrik stilled at Felix's words, as if trying to make sense of it all.

He finally glanced up at Felix, taking in his sad, but sincere, eyes. He whispered tentatively, "You love me?"

Felix nodded without hesitation. "Yeah. I really do," he said. "I know I haven't shown it much, but I promise I'm going to do better."



Patrik wanted to believe his cousin, but he couldn't quite still the doubt that gnawed at him deep inside. "You're just saying that 'cause your dad is probably making you," he offered, testing the waters, watching for any signs of apprehension or dishonesty in Felix's eyes. But there was none. Felix was adamant. "No, really, that's not why," he said. "Dad didn't tell me what to say. He just helped me see what I was forgetting. He helped me see that I wasn't being like Christ. I wasn't loving you like I should. Please forgive me."

Patrik could see the sincerity and love behind Felix's words. He took a breath and glanced around the room the boys shared. He thought about his own actions and how he hadn't been behaving very well either. He looked at Felix with a slight, nervous smile. "Well," he started, "I haven't really made things easier for you by talking badly about everything. I've been kind of mean too. I'm sorry about that."

"Does that mean you can forgive me?" Felix hoped, a smile starting to form.

"Yeah," said Patrik, "I mean, if you'll forgive me too."

Felix's smile filled his face, and his whiskers twitched in joy. "You bet!" he cheered. "How about we start over—and maybe this time we can be friends."



Patrik smiled his first real smile in weeks. "I'd like that a lot," he said, meaning every word. "And I'll try to do better too," he promised. But a moment later, his smile faded a bit. He whispered, "I just... I really miss my family. It hurts too much sometimes."

Felix put a gentle arm around his cousin's shoulder. He wanted to make it better, but knew he couldn't fix what had happened. What he did know was that he could love his cousin and be there for him.

"Well, I'm here," he declared. "And I'll help you however I can. You can always talk to me—or dad. He really is a good listener. And Märta really does give good hugs—mom too! We're all here for you. We're family, and we love you!"

Patrik smiled again, grateful for the offer of love, comfort, and friendship. "Thanks," he said sincerely. The boys sat in silence a moment, as if letting the day's events sink in.

Then, Patrik turned to his cousin, his nose wrinkled as he sniffed the air. "Um, Felix?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yeah?" replied Felix.

"Why do you smell like a skunk?"

Felix burst into laughter and hopped off the bed to go clean up. "It's a long story," he smiled, and the two boys laughed together.

Hans smiled from where he had been standing in the hall. It was going to be okay. With love, he knew the family would all be able to get through anything... together.

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that,
while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

