

Chapter 48

The legal name change hearing was quick and easier than Rick had expected. He proceeded down to the administrative office to obtain a few extra copies of his legal name change document. From there, he ducked into the rest room long enough to strip off the clothes and sandals he had to wear to the hearing. He tucked them into his backpack. He also carefully tucked the name change documents into a rigid folder in the pack. He proceeded to strap that back on and exited the courthouse.

Rick paused at the crosswalk in front of the courthouse. He looked for traffic before setting out to cross the street as his car was parked on the other side. He heard tires squeal and in his peripheral vision he could see a pick-up truck whip out of a parking space down the street and speed towards him. His squirrel instincts won out briefly as he tried to dart back and forth with the truck changing course to match. The driver obviously was aiming for him.

“This is Newscenter 9 News at Noon. One man is dead after a single vehicle accident this morning in Groton. We turn now to Lois Sanchez who is live at scene of the accident. Lois...”

Lois Sanchez is holding a microphone with the Newscenter 9 logo on it. Behind her is the Groton Town Common. A tarped over vehicle is at the edge of the common with police caution tape around it. A tow truck is backing-up to the tarped vehicle.

“Thank you, Bill. Good afternoon. Yes, it is a terrible scene behind me here in Groton. The driver was instantly killed. We have bystander footage to share of the accident...”

Lois fades from the screen to be replaced by phone video footage...

(voice over) “Wait, is that a giant squirrel, Lois?”

“Yes, Bill. Remember Richard Michaud from about a month ago?”

“The guy who was transformed into a squirrel in a medical accident?”

“One and the same.”

Anger swelled within Rick enabling him to get control and tamp down the panic instincts, letting fight dominate rather than flight.

With little time to give it conscious thought, Rick ran towards the truck chatteringgrowling with three quick bounds, his mind quickly racing through the necessary calculations. He leapt up and forward, just clearing the vehicle as it roared through the space he had been occupying just a

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moment before. He came down on all four paws properly with his legs absorbing the shock of the landing. He took a couple of bounds to slow down his momentum, before turning to look back at the driver.

His would-be killer looked back at him in surprise instead of paying attention to where he was going. The truck slammed into a light pole and a large granite boulder on the edge of the town common, crumpling the engine compartment. The driver was partially ejected out the windshield as the truck's airbags deployed and the pole slammed down on the roof of the truck. All the remaining windows shattered. Black smoke poured out from under the damaged hood.

Rick finally lost the battle versus his squirrel instincts and quickly scaled the nearest tree screeching in panic.

The video footage shown on air cuts out just before the truck slams into the light pole and bolder. Lois Sanchez appears back on screen.

"As you saw, the driver of the truck tried to run him over. He then lost control of his truck and slammed into a granite boulder and light pole at the edge of Groton's Town Common. He was partially ejected from the vehicle and died instantly of his injuries. He was not wearing a seat belt. Police are not releasing his identity at this time as they are still trying to notify his next of kin. Police are labeling this a hate crime."

"How is the intended victim?"

"Shaken-up. After the incident Mr. Michaud had climbed a tree. His wife arrived soon afterward to coax him down so he could answer questions from the police. His wife tried to block us as we came forward to ask questions."

Lois fades again briefly showing Dr. Abigail Michaud approaching the camera.

"Dr. Michaud, may we have a moment of your husband's time?"

"No, Ms. Sanchez. Hasn't my husband been through enough today? You saw how long it took me to coax him down from the tree to answer police questioning."

"It's alright, hon. I'll give them a statement." Rick pushed around Abigail to face Ms. Sanchez. "Ms. Sanchez, I don't know who my would-be killer was. I did see him at the DMV last month while I was waiting my turn to update my license photo. I don't understand why he did what he did. How was I so much of a threat to him that he'd try and kill me?" Tears started to roll down Rick's muzzle. "Why can't we all just live and let live? Whatever his motives, it cost him his life." Rick shook his head. "I plead with your watchers wear your seat belt. I know it's not the law here unlike most other states. There's more at stake than your own life. Now his family is

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being punished for his choice not to wear one. My condolences to his family. Now, if you'll excuse us." Rick and his wife walked away.

Lois appears back on screen. "We will keep you informed on this developing story as further details become available. This is Lois Sanchez reporting live from Groton. Back to you in the studio, Bill."

Abigail drove Rick home. One of the furry club students followed driving Rick's car. They thanked the student and went into their home. Rick leapt up on the couch and started to shake all over as the adrenaline rush finally wore off. He then curled-up and openly wept.

Abigail was immediately by his side, gently stroking his fur trying to reassure him.

Finally, he looked-up at Abigail. "You nearly became a widow this morning, Abbie," he finally choked out between sobs. If I had miscalculated my leap, I would have gone through the windshield instead of over the vehicle. The impact would have killed me. But there wouldn't have been any way the driver could have survived the blunt force my body slamming into his head. I'd have taken him with me. And a small part of me is finding comfort in that awful thought." He curled up again, burying his face in his tail and continued to sob.