

Chapter 70

“Less than two minutes until kick-off for WMSU’s homecoming football game versus Boston Tech here at Handley Memorial Field. The team captains are out on the 50-yard line for the coin toss. By tradition Nutty, WMSU’s mascot, tosses the coin. As many here in Groton know, Nutty has been sidelined after a spinal injury at a basketball game late last fall. So, Pistachio will be filling in. There he is. Wait, what’s this? He’s pushing a student in a wheelchair out on the field. The student is wearing Nutty’s head and paws! Nutty’s back!!!”

The crowd cheered loudly, chanting, “Nutty! Nutty! Nutty!”

Nutty waved to the crowd and handed a sheet of paper to Pistachio. He turned on his lapel microphone and read:

“Hello, all my fans and friends! I can’t thank you enough for all your good wishes and support in the past year. I wasn’t going to break tradition and allow my injury to sideline me from my duty to toss the coin today at the Homecoming Game.”

Pistachio paused as the crowd cheered again as Nutty pointed to the two team captains and held-up the large coin. On one side was a squirrel’s head and on the other a squirrel’s bushy tail. On both sides was the text: “Official WMSU Game Coin.” Nutty indicated to Pistachio to start reading again.

“As you two can see the coin has two sides. By tradition and honor WMSU always lets the visiting team make the call while the coin is in the air. Ready?”

The two captains yelled, “Ready!”

Nutty tossed the coin in the air. “TAILS!” Boston Tech’s captain yelled. The coin landed. They all looked down to see it landed tail-side up.

“Tails it is,” the referee called out.

“We’ll receive.” Boston Tech’s captain stated.

Both captains gently hugged Nutty. As they offered to shake hands with Pistachio, he pulled each into a hug, patting each on the back, wishing the visiting captain good luck. Pistachio’s words echoed through the speakers as he hadn’t turned his microphone off. Hugging WMSU’s captain, he said, “Show’em how fierce Squirrels fight!”

The crowd roared chattering and chattering, waving their fake red squirrel tails. Pistachio looked to the crowd holding a forepaw to his mouth in a oopsie gesture pretending he hadn’t realized he had left his microphone on. He turned it off. He then wheeled Nutty off the field and brought her over by the cheerleading squad. She gave Pistachio a thumbs-up. Rick felt the vibration of his phone in his pocket. Nate Santorum flashed on his caller ID. He apologized to Nutty and stepped aside, to answer the call.

“Hello, Nate!” Rick answered.

“Rick, where are you?”

“Here’s the kick-off. Boston Tech #33 has it! WMSU’s defenders slam into him at the 50-yard line. Wait! He’s fumbled the ball! WMSU has it!” The crowd roars loudly. Nate could clearly hear all this through Rick’s phone.

“I’m working my day job, Nate. I’m at WMSU’s homecoming football game. Just one moment and I’ll be back with you!”

Rick slipped the phone back in his pocket, scampered down the sideline wigwagging his tail and egged the crowd into cheering louder. Most in the stands did so, waving their fake red squirrel tails in near unison. At the other end of the bleachers he sat up again and pulled the phone out of his pocket.

“Sorry for the interruption. What’s up?”

“Ross is missing.”

“What?!” Rick’s tail lashed about as the crowd cheered loudly.

“FIRST DOWN!”

“Ross hasn’t turned-up at work since Tuesday, Rick. He hasn’t answered his phone nor any texts inquiring as to what was up. I put in a wellness check request with the police yesterday. I just got word that his vehicle wasn’t in his apartment complex’s parking lot. The apartment manager pointed-out that his mail hadn’t been collected in days. The manager let the police into his apartment. It looks like he packed some things and skipped town.”

Rick drooped his tail. “I hope wherever he’s gone off to he’s alright and hasn’t done anything stupid.”

“Me too. He was acting a little funny the last few days before he vanished, but not much more than how he usually acts. They’ve put out an all-points bulletin on his vehicle. I’ll let you know more if/when I learn more.”

“Thanks, Nate.”

“TOUCHDOWN, WMSU!!!”

Rick turned back to helping lead cheering in the game, but his mind was elsewhere.