

Chapter 75

“Ross set us back...”

“She goes by Rose now, Nate,” Rick interrupted him.

Nate sighed. “Yes, sorry. Rose has set us back at least six months. While he...er she had finished passing on all she knows, our staff needed time to process it. It’ll be hard to ask her questions now that she’s a normal squirrel.”

Rick shrugged. “Be thankful she kept most of her end of the deal. She could have vanished and experimented on herself at any time after my accident.”

Nate nodded. “True. How much does she remember?”

“In the interview with Lieutenant Campton, not enough to try and question her if the staff has questions. She remembers she was human before. She immediately recognized me and she’d recognize you, and probably other staff members. But as for the DNA manipulation process that changed her into a squirrel, that part of her memory didn’t remain after the transformation. And now as the saying goes, ‘The cat is out of the bag.’ The state police will release their findings at tomorrow’s news conference. I need to know exactly what I can and can’t say, to the news media, Nate, when the time comes.”

“What?”

“We can’t keep it mum anymore. And I’ll be doing my best to act as a buffer for Rose as she’s probably going to be as much of a media sensation as I was a year ago. It’s going to be difficult for her.”

Nate nodded. “Very well, if the media asks, give them the gloss-over version in layman’s terms.”

“That’s all I can do anyway, Nate, much like I told the police. I’ve remained out of the process on purpose.”

“Good evening and welcome to Newscenter 9 News at Six. Tonight, we have an update on the death of Ross Delling. We go live to Lois Sanchez, reporting tonight from Groton. Lois?”

Lois Sanches is shown standing in front of Robert Frost Hall on the WMSU campus. “Thank you, Bill. Good evening, Lois Sanchez here. State police held a brief news conference late this morning in regard to the death of Ross Delling...”

The scene changes to the news conference from earlier in the day.

“Mr. Delling committed species suicide.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

The scene quickly switches back to Lois. “They are listing his cause of death as ‘species suicide.’”

“Say, what, Lois? I’ve never heard that term before.”

“‘Species suicide,’ Bill. It’s a new term they’ve come up with in this case. And it’s a strange case. In fact, we’ll be dedicating most of tonight’s *Granite State* news magazine at 7pm to it.”

“Can you give us a brief overview, Lois?”

“Ross Delling is not dead.”

“Then why are the state police calling it a suicide?”

“They’re calling it ‘species suicide,’ Bill as he’s no longer human, but a squirrel.”

“WHAT?! Wait? Like, Richard Pistachio Michaud?”

“Yes, except Ross is a normal size gray squirrel. I know that sounds crazy and our audience has more questions. They should tune into our *Granite State* news magazine tonight at 7pm and we’ll try to answer them, including meeting the squirrel that was Ross. *She* now goes by Rose. Here’s a brief preview.”

Rick is sitting at the base of an oak tree on the WMSU campus with a gray squirrel perched on his head. The gray squirrel’s tail wiggles back and forth.

“Rose, this is Lois Sanchez with Newscenter 9 news. She wants to ask you a few questions.”

The gray squirrel looks directly at Lois. “Hello, Ms. Sanchez,” it squeaks out, barely audible to the listening audience. It is quickly repeated at a slower, lower pitch by Rick’s phone. “You may call me, Rose.”

The scene cuts back to Lois. “Catch the entire interview tonight at 7pm. This is Lois Sanchez reporting live from Groton. Back to you in the studio, Bill.”