

Chapter 76

Viewers see a montage of New Hampshire locations and scenery including the former Old Man of the Mountain rock formation. *Granite State* appears in white over the center of the screen.

“Good evening and welcome to this special edition of *Granite State* news magazine. If you missed our six o’clock newscast, we’ll be dedicating the next half-hour to discussing the ‘species suicide’ of Nashua resident Ross Delling. We go live to Lois Sanchez in Groton.”

Lois Sanchez is shown standing in front Robert Frost Hall on the WMSU campus. She waits a moment as the hall’s bell tower chimes. “Good evening, New Hampshire. Lois Sanchez here. It’s been a very busy day today trying to pull this story together for you. We only provided a brief excerpt from the state police media release during the six o’clock news. Let’s start there.”

Lois fades out and is replaced by a state police spokeswoman standing at an outdoor podium outside a brick building.

“Thank you for coming. As you are aware, a week ago we found the body of Ross Delling in a hunting cabin in Colebrook. We have completed our investigation into his,” the police spokesperson held her hands up briefly making quotation signs. “‘death.’ Mr. Delling committed species suicide. We needed to create a new term for what occurred to Mr. Delling. He went to that cabin to end his human life. Using nanite technology, he transformed himself into a gray squirrel, leaving most of his no longer needed human mass behind. So, while Mr. Delling lives on as a squirrel, his human life has ended. The squirrel Mr. Delling became has been located. The squirrel has been fully corporative in our investigation and is now staying with an undisclosed licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Thank you.”

Lois appears back on screen. “Yes, I know this sounds farfetched. But later in the show, we’ll talk to the squirrel who use to be Ross. After the break, we’ll share some footage of the state police interview with the squirrel that was formerly Ross. Stay tuned.”

(commercial break)

(Earlier in the day)

“...is now staying with an undisclosed licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Thank you.”

The spokesperson closed her folder and left the podium without taking questions. Lois shook her head in disbelief. She glanced at her camera operator. “I wouldn’t have believed what they just said, Roy, if it weren’t for Richard Michaud.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

“The guy up in Groton who is now a giant squirrel?” Roy asked as he disconnected the camera from the tripod and started to fold the tripod-up. “Do you suppose he has something to do with this?”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking. It’s only thirty miles (forty-eight km) up the Interstate. I think we should pay him a visit.”

“You’re the boss,” Roy replied as he hefted his equipment onto his shoulder and noticed that Lois was staring past him towards their company van. “What’s up, Lois?”

“Turn around, Roy.”

Richard Michaud was patiently sitting next to the van. Lois immediately headed over to the large squirrel.

“What brings you to Concord, Mr. Michaud.”

Rick’s tail slowly wigwagged back and forth. “Same thing as you. Ross Delling is the reason I’m a giant squirrel, Ms. Sanchez. I helped the police find the squirrel she became.”

“She?”

“Ms. Sanchez, if you understood the technology necessary to alter the DNA of a human into a squirrel and decided to use it on yourself, swapping genders is child’s play. She’s willing to tell her story. Are you interested?”

“Where is he...er she?”

“Not so fast. You’ll need to agree to the same conditions as Melissa Sagenthrope had agreed to when I had granted her my first interview. You get the exclusive scoop but must share the content with the common news pool immediately afterward.”

Lois looked suspiciously at giant squirrel. “Why are you making me this offer instead of contacting her again?”

“You’ve improved in your manners in the past year, Ms. Sanchez. You’re a New Hampshire reporter, while she’s a Vermont reporter. This is a New Hampshire story. Also, Ms. Sagenthrope is on vacation,” Rick replied.

“So, are you acting as the agent for the squirrel, formerly known as Ross, Mr. Michaud?”

Rick shrugged. “More or less, though nothing in writing.”

“I’ll agree to those terms, Mr. Michaud.”

Second Fur by Aldin Busheytail

“Excellent.” Rick offered his forepaw to seal the deal. They shook. She was impressed by his careful grip. “Come up to White Mountain State campus and head for the common in front of the student union building for 2pm, Ms. Sanchez. She now goes by Rose. And she is very much instinctually a wild squirrel with some human memories. Please keep that in mind this afternoon. In the meantime, she instructed me to give you this flash drive if you agreed to meet.” He handed it over.

“What’s on this?”

“A copy of her interview with New Hampshire State Trooper Lieutenant Campton in the hopes it answers some of your questions. Part of the deal she cut to fully cooperate in their investigation was to be provided a copy of the interview to do with as she pleases. Any of this you use needs to be credited back to the state police, of course.”

Rick scampered off to his own vehicle. He got in and drove off, waving to Ms. Sanchez and her cameraman as he passed by.