

Chapter 77

“Welcome back to *Granite State*. We now will show you some of the state police interview footage with the squirrel who use to be Ross Delling.”

The scene fades and is replaced with the interior view of a small meeting room. A state trooper is sitting at the table. Richard Michaud scampers in with a normal-size gray squirrel perched on his back. The gray squirrel jumps from his back onto the table. Rick pulls his phone out of his pocket and carefully swipes at it. After a moment, the phone beeps. He holds it up close to his mouth.

“Lieutenant Campton, I know you met Rose in Colebrook a few days ago, so you know she can talk. But I’m stating this for your recorded interview.” His phone repeats it much slower and deeper. He then places the phone in front of Campton. “You’re also aware of the app I have been using to better understand Rose. Again, I did that to demonstrate it. Would you also like to say something into my phone to prove to whomever watches this interview later that when Rose speaks, it’s not a trick?”

Lieutenant Campton picks-up the phone. “If I hadn’t heard her with my own ears, I would think this is an elaborate joke.” The phone repeated his words at a slower pace and lower in pitch. He set the phone back in front of the gray squirrel. “Will you please state your name for the record?”

The gray squirrel’s tail wigwagged a moment and it glanced briefly at Rick who gave her a thumbs-up. “Rose,” she said slowly and clearly so it could be understood without the app. The app repeated it.

“Who were you before?”

“I used to be the human, Ross Delling.”

Lieutenant Campton nodded like he had always interviewed a talking, normal-size gray squirrel. “Ms. Rose, how did you do it?”

“The same way I accidentally transformed Pistachio last year.”

“Rose,” Rick butted in. “He needs details.”

“Oh! Sorry!” She grabbed her tail a moment groomed it briefly before letting it go and repeating, “I’m sorry.” She started squeaking faster, pausing now and then to let the app repeat her words at a more intelligible pace. “I used nanobots to rewrite my DNA from human to squirrel. After what happened to Pistachio, I realized I needed to alter the process before trying again on myself as I wouldn’t survive going two weeks without food or water. I sped-up the process and changed only a small portion of my human body into my new squirrel form in just a couple days. I split it off from the portion of the human body I no longer needed and headed off into the woods to my new life.”

“Nanobots? Microscopic robots like in sci-fi films?”

Rose nodded. “I had originally planned to change myself last fall. At the time my employer, *Second Limb Prosthetics* had started a new division, *Second Fur Mascot Costumes*. The mascots division was testing a new robotic-assisted squirrel mascot suit. Pistachio was the performer. I planned to ‘borrow’ the suit to get some squirrel practice in and then change myself. I had planned to leave a delayed-time email telling my boss, Nate Santorum, where to retrieve the suit from once I was finished with it. I had prepped the suit with the nanobots but didn’t know about the bowling meet event Pistachio was going to perform at the following day.”

“Why did you choose to become a squirrel, Ms. Rose?”

“Humanity sucks. Look at all the bad things you deal with as a police officer. How many times do you get to do something positive versus all the times you have to deal with bad things? I wanted nothing more to do with it.” Rose drooped her tail again. “But I also didn’t want to just kill myself. I chose a squirrel simply because that was the first animal mascot suit *Second Fur* had created. If Pistachio’s suit had been a fox, skunk, or otter, that’s what I would have chosen. But his character is a squirrel, so that is what the suit became. So, I spent my time learning about squirrels to better prepare myself after the change. Before I could go through with it, Pistachio wore the suit to that event, was struck by lightning, which triggered the nanobots to change him instead of me.” Rose drooped her tail.

Campton opened a folder in front of him, glancing at something and turned to Rick.

“How do you feel about being a large squirrel now, Mr. Michaud?”

“As I’ve tried to reassure Rose many times back when she was human, I’ve accepted it. Especially, when considering the alternative is I’d probably be dead. Having fur and a bushy tail,” he wigwagged his tail back and forth, “is a small trade-off to being allowed to continue to live, Lieutenant.”

Campton turned back to Rose.

“How exactly does this process work to change someone from a human to a squirrel, Ms. Rose?”

The gray squirrel drooped her tail and shook her head negatively as tears started to fill her eyes. “I don’t remember, Lieutenant. I didn’t retain that part of my human memories when I changed. I didn’t think as a normal squirrel I would need to remember how it worked.”

Campton turned to Rick. “How about you, Mr. Michaud?” He tapped the open folder in front of him. “Apparently, you’re a silent partner in *Second Limb Prosthetics*.”

Rick nodded. “My wife and I settled with Nate Santorum and Ms. Rose-then Ross Delling rather than sue over my transformation. In that settlement we became silent partners in *Second Limb* and in return, Rose shared her knowledge with *Second Limb*’s tech staff. I, honestly, don’t know how the process works, Lieutenant, in any kind of details. From my understanding, basically, the

nanobot thingies are given a DNA blueprint to follow and they follow it. Tell them the body they're in is supposed to be a squirrel and not a human and they go to work making the changes necessary."

"Why would such a technique be of interest to you, Mr. Michaud? Are you hoping to reverse the process in yourself?"

Rick shook his head negatively. "Rose would have reversed this when I was first hospitalized if it had been possible. I had lost too much mass at that point. I lost over 100 pounds in the process, Lieutenant. If Rose had tried to reverse the process, I'd be a midget at best. When the Canaan Bowl-o-Rama was struck by lightning, I was charging the batteries in the fursuit and was electrocuted. The surge caused the batteries to overload and burn. That in turn caused the suit, which was mostly plastics and other synthetics, to melt and burn against my body. I had arrived in the hospital severely burned. The hospital staff didn't think I'd survive long enough to be transferred to Boston. Rose's nanobots miraculously healed my wounds in a matter of days. After all, they were following the blueprint they were programmed to follow: This human should be a squirrel. Where they saw burn damage, they fixed it. Where there was a tail missing," Rick wigwagged his tail, "they grew one. Now, as to my interest in this, imagine what that technology could do for medical science if our staff can figure out how the healing part works without the fur and tail side effects."

The video ends and the audience once again sees Liz Sanchez standing in front of Robert Frost Hall.

"Wouldn't that be incredible? We need to go to another commercial break. When we return, we'll talk to Rose. Please stay tuned."