

The Mouse's Plans

Chapter 1: The First Offense

by Draconicon

Salla had been warned repeatedly by his family and by others: mice were the targets of the world, and no matter how well off you were, no matter how much you studied, no matter how many times you got lucky and nobody hurt you, one day, they would. There was no getting around it, not for the richest, poorest, best, or worst. Those at the bottom would always be kept there by those that were a bit better, and those at the bottom would be more than happy to fight them over the little scraps that they had, just to improve their own shitty lives.

Such was the maxim that most of the family lived under, but Salla was different. Or at least, so he considered himself. The white-furred mouse left the house every day on the same route to high school since he'd started attending in ninth grade, and over the three and a half years since, nothing had happened to him. His family considered it something of a miracle, considering that his head was always somewhere else, always considering some new what-if.

Unfortunately, halfway through his senior year, whether it was fate, luck, or something else that had been watching over him, his protection finally ran out.

Passing under the railway bridge that rose over the main street cutting the neighborhood in half, Salla was thinking about how he was going to prove his history teacher wrong on the last homework assignment - the textbook had gotten the economic history of the city wrong by some way - when someone grabbed him by his tail. The mouse yelped as he was pulled back under the bridge, under the shadowed edge, and before he could make another sound, he was pinned to the brick underside and his muzzle pinned shut.

"Hehehe, look at that...the smart-ass ain't so smart after all."

Rats, three of them. Each one topped him by at least six inches, though that wasn't hard to do considering his own small size at five-foot-even. His eyes went wide as one pulled out a pocket-knife, holding it to his throat as the rat leaned in close.

"Starting to make the rest of us look bad, mouse," the rat said, slowly turning the blade side to side, flat, then sharp, then flat piece of metal pressing against his throat. "Teachers are starting to pay attention to you. See, we don't like that...we don't like that one little bit."

"Mmmph...mmph..."

"See, school ain't got more than one scholarship a year. I heard that some of 'em are looking at giving your smart-ass the chance to go to college if you keep up those grades. Yeah...I don't think that's gonna happen. Not when a shit-for-brains like you can't even look after himself.

"See, we got it hard enough, mouse. All of us, competing for the sports scholarship. Only enough money there for one of us, and you? If you were for real, you'd be doing what the rest of us were doing. Fighting fair, out on the court. But nah...you think you're smart. You think the teachers like your bullshit?"

Salla couldn't answer. All he could do was stare straight ahead as he felt the blade working along the side of his throat. Flat side again. Facts and numbers popped into his head, rushing through it so fast, so furious that there was almost nothing clear about them. Just how wide was the flat part? Less than an inch? More? How long was the sharp edge? Was it there now - no, not yet, but close, the flat part there, the sharp part pointed up towards the bottom of his muzzle. Not yet against something deadly, but close, dangerously close. If he so much as twitched, he'd be bleeding, not dead, but on the way to the hospital.

Numbers. Not enough. No money for hospital. Debt. Too much.

The rat slammed him back, and the numbers bounced out of his head, as well as so much more as the rattling of his skull felt like his brains had turned to dice inside. He groaned, forced to stare the rat in the eye again.

"You listening, mouse?"

He nodded.

"Good. Then you better get this through that smart-ass skull of yours. You keep your yap shut in class if you don't want to start going to school with some stripes, you know what I'm saying?"

"..."

"I said, you know what I'm saying?"

The tip of the pocket-knife caught the edge of his chin, and Salla huffed as he felt it snick his skin under his fur. Not enough for a spray, but enough for a single, warm, red line. The mouse shivered as the hand came off his muzzle, letting him answer.

"I...Understand."

"Good. Throw a few tests, too. Ain't right for a mouse to be getting better grades than the rest of us. Sooner you get it through your head where you belong, mousey, the better."

Finally, the knife dropped, and he could breathe the way he wanted to. The rats dropped him, and he fell to his knees. As he gasped for breath, covering the bleeding spot - more to see how much he was bleeding than to stop it - one of the rats kicked him right in the hip. He rolled, biting off a scream.

"Heh, you look good down there, mousey."

"Yeah. Might want to consider putting that ass to use, now that you ain't gonna be the brains of the class."

"Heard your mom used to be a whore. Look at that; you could go into the family business, fat-ass."

The one with the knife slapped his ass, the three rats leaving without even throwing a look over their shoulders at him. Salla watched them go, and as he did, he memorized everything that he could about them. He memorized the half-limping gait of the one on the right, with his nicked-in-the-middle tail and his bandaged wrist. He committed the higher-pitched laugh and the bouncy, thick-bottomed shoes of the one on the left to his memory. He forced the image of the ripped ear and black-dyed neck-fur on the center one into his mind to go with the threat of the knife.

And most of all, he forced their names, patched into the back of their jackets, into his head. Veron, Gabriel, and their fucker of a leader, Lars. He whispered the names as he got back to his feet, holding one hand against his hips as his legs threatened to go out from under him. One by one, he went through the names until they were as embedded in his mind as the descriptions.

He had something else to think about on the way to school. Ever more inventive possibilities of getting back at them popped into his head, all starting with making sure that the school knew to come down hard on them.

Salla was young. He didn't know the way that the system worked yet, or he would have known to stop wasting his time relying on *them*.

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"What do you mean, there's nothing you can do?"

The words were as incredulous as he felt, and at the same time, Salla already had the answer popping into his head. He rubbed his head as the principal shrugged, the moose leaning back on his chair.

"It didn't happen on school grounds."

"It was a threat based on anything I did on school grounds, and to coerce my behavior on it."

But it didn't happen here, I'm afraid. So it's not in our jurisdiction.

"But it didn't happen here, I'm afraid. Not our jurisdiction. You'll have to go to the police, if anyone."

The mouse could feel his heart racing. Not in fear, even, but in pure fury as he stared up at the older, antlered male. He wanted to see some sympathy there, but all he saw was the shrugging of a man that didn't really have any interest in the situation before him. The white-furred mouse might as well have been an annoying piece of paperwork for all that the school head seemed to care.

"I see," he muttered. "So, you'll do nothing."

"I'm afraid so."

"Then one more question."

"Yes?"

"What did you get for giving up any ability to work outside the system?"

"I'm sorry, what?"

"Never mind."

Salla stood up, shaking his head. The band-aid that he'd gotten from the school nurse for the slice beneath his muzzle had already dried, and while the blood had stopped, it still burned. That knife had probably been dirty, which meant tetanus possibilities, which meant that he needed to open the scab and clean it before it got infected - since the nurse had done diddly about that - and that meant pain and -

He was halfway to the door when the principal sighed. The mouse kept his hand on the doorknob, telling himself not to feel any hope, but he did, anyway. The luck that had kept him safe for the past three and a half years told him that there might be some luck there, something worth leaning on.

"Yes?"

"This wouldn't happen if you kept your head down. Mice...don't do well when people start paying attention."

"...Any other pearls of wisdom?"

"Pay attention, and stop making a target of yourself."

"As well say to learn my place, then."

"It wouldn't be the worst thing you could do."

"..."

There was no answer to that. None that he could give without getting himself either further in trouble or kicked out of school for the duration of the week. Doing that would be playing right into their hands, too, and that -

Oh, ho ho. No. No. They wanted to bury this, did they? Well, that wasn't going to happen. That was not going to *fucking* happen.

"Aren't you going to say something, Salla?"

"No, sir. Seems like if you can't do anything, then there's nothing I need to say about it."

"A simple thank you for my time would suffice."

"That implies that your time ever has value."

"Salla!"

The mouse shrugged, ducking out of the office before the moose could get out from behind his desk. By intention, it was timed to the ringing bell that announced everyone being let out from their first period, and he slid between the various, much taller bodies of his fellow students. It didn't take long to get lost in the crowd, and as the principal ducked out of the office to try and find him, he was nowhere to be found. He kept his head down, staring straight at the ground as he ambled forward.

No help from the office. No help from the others here, either. Time to find where the next person in the chain of authority is.

Lars and his goons were all but forgotten at that point. They had perpetrated the crime, but Principal Mattis had decided to let it go. He was the most recent offender, and that shot him right to the top of the mouse's list.

Second period would normally see him going to his calculus class, a class with a population of four students in total, but he was ahead of the curve there, anyway. No, no, second period meant going to the library. Time to hit the internet.

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If there was one word to describe the mouse, it was 'smart.' If there was a second, it was 'petty'. In the grand scheme of things, Principal Mattis's offense was the smaller of the two, in that he had not done something directly horrible to Salla the way that Lars and his friends had.

However, the mouse had made the mistake of dismissing not only the crime, but the guilty party, and that was something that the mouse refused to let slide.

Most of his fellow students probably hadn't cared to learn how to look up the public record of the average citizen. He had. Surprisingly easy, when one came right down to it: a call to the 411 service had directed him to the proper authorities and databases with information on everyone's public lives, whether that was where they lived, or where they worked, or what they had been involved in, employed at, and more over the course of their lifetime. Was it entirely legal? Probably not, but there were different places authorized to deal in different information, and it wasn't that hard to fit the pieces together if you had the patience.

Having done it every year since coming to high school to find out what his teachers were like, Salla put those skills to use to find out everything that there was to know about Principal Mattis. It took all of second period to get the forms put together for the different information distribution companies, and most of third to pull together the payment information for such requests that required it. None of it was his, but he imagined that a few of the bigger jerks in school would have some serious questions from their parents when bills from credit card companies started coming in with their names on them.

Shouldn't go flaunting your driver's license around when people are watching, Salla thought as he got up from the computer. He'd have emails with everything Principal Mattis had touched over the course of the last thirty years of the mouse's adult life, provided that it wasn't sealed away somewhere behind a court order. Somehow, he doubted that the principal had anything that bad, but if he did, then that would be flagged as something that couldn't be accessed, but was still present in the system.

All of that would give him plenty to play with in terms of getting the mouse to realize that there were consequences to his actions. Once you took a role with authority, you *used* it. You did not hide behind this or that reason. You *used* your power, and you used it to protect those that didn't have any.

No ifs.

No ands.

No buts.

As the bell rang for lunch, he left the library and made his way to the cafeteria. The mouse felt the eyes of others on him, some of which were glancing at the bandage that covered his chin and the upper part of his throat, but most of them didn't seem to care about the injury. Some of them seemed to smirk, though even Salla admitted that might have been his imagination.

But that realization allowed him to lose himself inside his own head again. The mouse's feet found the familiar paths from the library to the cafeteria, and it didn't take long to file into one of the lines for pizza slices and substandard fries. They were all plastic, cardboard, and

barely edible, but it was food. Fuel for the mind, as some of the lunch-ladies had called it. Sustenance, at best, and sometimes the dirt was better.

He was lost in his thoughts of what-if and then-whats as he made his way along metal railings with a plastic tray when something jostled him from behind. The mouse turned, only to see Lars looking down at him.

“Heh, I heard you went to the office today, mousie. Didn’t go blabbing anything, did ya?”

“...”

“You better not. Got an uncle on the force. You say anything, and it ain’t me that they’re gonna be looking at.”

“...”

“You gonna say something, mousie?”

“You’re in the way.”

“Heh, and?”

“Not of me.”

An impatient dolphin shoved past the rat at that point, carrying a platter of slime-like burger meat and a few potatoes that might have been fried wedges. It was hard to tell in this place just what kind of food you were getting, only that it was ostensibly edible. Lars stumbled back, only to jump forward, throwing a punch at the other mammal. His bully-boys joined him, and then the dolphin’s pod did the same. A one-on-one fight quickly devolved into three-on-three, then three-on-six as the rest of the pod showed up.

Salla tapped his student ID number into the machine and quickly ducked away, shoving the gummy slice of pizza into his mouth and binning the fries on the way out of the room. As soon as that fight was over, whoever won, Lars would be after him again for not getting him out of the way faster. It wouldn’t matter that the rat had been the one to block the only way in and out of getting one’s food; all that mattered was that he’d blame the mouse for it, and the best thing to do – for now – was to be far, far away.

Still, it was worthwhile having that encounter. A family member on the police. Explained why Lars was getting away with everything, particularly after that story of the rat jock doing a line of meth off a cheerleader’s tits came out last year. If it got silenced at the department level, then that was a whole other problem.

For a moment, Salla worried that revenge was impossible, but he still had some slight faith. Not much, considering what had happened with Principal Mattis, but some slight bit.

School and police are different. There might be some that still do what they're supposed to do.

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He returned to the library at sixth period, ducking out on a history class. He was four chapters ahead of the teacher and had supplemented World War 2 in the textbook with a great deal from the local public library. The last thing that he needed was more propaganda teaching that he would be compelled to challenge.

Instead, he sat down and checked his email. Some of the reports had come back, though not all of them. He printed them out for a hard-copy, and then started reading what had come back.

The answer was, not a lot. Principal Mattis had been the head of this school for nearly a decade, and prior to that, his record had him bouncing around a LOT. Still an educator, but never at any school for longer than half a school year before moving on. That wasn't exactly normal, but there was nothing standing out as a reason. No newspapers that might have detailed a charge for that time period, nothing like that.

At least, not until he reached a headline from thirty years ago.

He opened the image, the school's broadband worse than usual as it took nearly a full minute for the headline and image to load. However, it was worth it.

Professor Mattis Suspended! Investigation Launched In Student's Death!

"...Perfect."

He was already planning this little exposé as he read further. The report wasn't about a murder, but it did show that the student had been having many after-hours meetings with the moose. Back then, Mattis had apparently been a chemistry teacher, and there had been prior accusations of 'overly-intimate conduct', which might have been overreaction or might not have.

The student hadn't been found dead, though. They had died during a lab accident in Mattis's classroom, something that had, apparently, happened due to exposed flames and chemicals that shouldn't have been in the lab. The first article didn't mention much else, only that Mattis was put on suspension for the event and was being investigated.

Despite his best efforts, he couldn't find anything else about the result of the trial. It seemed like that had been closed to the public, from what he had found, and that the moose had been sequestered, and the jury likewise. It painted a very poor picture for the principal, that was for sure.

That, combined with his constant movement across the country...

He imagined that would lead nowhere, but even that much put forward would be a level of muckraking that would be impossible for Mattis to completely bury again. Considering the fact that he had just allowed a student to be attacked for school-related events and was on record for telling the mouse that he should just keep his head down? If there was any old verdict, even with statute of limitations in play, it would still color the opinions of everyone around him.

Combine that with the fact that the school journalism team, as ill-funded as they were, were constantly looking for ways to justify their existence? Even a patchy version of what he'd found would be plastered all over the school by morning, and hidden from Principal Mattis until it was too late.

Actions have consequences, Principal Mattis, he thought, highlighting the information that he'd printed off that was pertinent to the report. If you will not deliver the consequences to those under your power, then I'll have to deliver the consequences of your action to you.

Was that fair? Was that following the chain of authority? Was that any kind of a *good* thing to do? Not really. Was it something that was justified? In his mind, yes. Mattis clearly hadn't learned. It was time to remind him what it meant to let something go by when you were the one responsible for other people.

And then we'll see if his replacement has any better ideas of just how to treat his students...

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After dropping the story and all the rest of the information off at the journalism club at the back of the school, he went about his day. The rest of his classes were fairly boring, all of which he had been ahead in for the last month. He allowed himself time to drift rather than maintaining that lead, some of the anger that he'd been holding onto fading away. Not the principal, of course, nor at the rats, but just some of the overall anger at the unfairness of it all. He started to think again, to dream of what-ifs, and he spent the rest of his day staring out and thinking in.

He had always been a bit of a daydreamer when he didn't have something to focus on, and that day was no different. He tried to conjure up dreams of what he would do when he was out of school, what he'd accomplish, but whenever he tried to think of some future that fit with the warm rooms of the classes, the memory of that cold knife point returned. Every time, it jolted him from his seat, and it sent a chill of cold water down his back.

By the end of the day, he was receiving weird looks for more than just the bandage on his chin. He was sliding down in their eyes, someone that might be more than just weird. Those looks brought back a determination to see this corrected.

I did nothing wrong, Salla thought as he walked through the halls. I did nothing wrong. I don't deserve this.

Despite his convictions, there were little doubts that kept trying to wiggle in. He thought of his route, thought of how he could have been paying attention, about –

No, he silenced those thoughts. I did NOT invite them to do that. I did NOT make it okay for them to start threatening me with a knife. The only thing that I did was keep my head in the clouds. I can change that. But they're the ones in the wrong. Not. Me.

And so determined, he kept walking...but not before noting that the journalism club had stopped by the school nurse on his way out. He smiled to himself, beginning the long walk home.

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Principal Mattis: Tough Teacher, or Ain't-Arsed Administrator?

“Clumsy title, but it serves the purpose,” Salla mused as he folded the paper under his arm. “That should keep everyone talking for quite a while.”

And it wouldn't take long before someone else made a call to the police, and from there, the whole investigation would begin. Would it be enough to charge Mattis with something even as minor as neglect? Not at all, but the publicity would be terrible for the school and the district as a whole. Salla knew that they were barely holding on to a reputation of doing well by their different schools. They were on the news nightly with some spokesman or another talking about how they took things seriously all across the district, not just in the rich schools.

Even if the investigation came to nothing, the public eye was still a thing. The district would have to do something when the story hit the news, and the easiest thing would be to let Mattis go into a quiet retirement, unofficially firing him.

You had your chance, Salla thought as he walked into the library. You could have done something for your students. I gave you a chance.

The plan had come together all too easily, but the core problem had yet to be addressed. He still had to do something about Lars and his friends, but that problem could wait until he saw who Mattis's replacement would be. That would take a few days, maybe a week.

The mouse could wait that long. After all, no point in doing it himself if someone actually did what they were supposed to do. He nodded at the librarian as he entered the haven of books, and made his way to the computers.

But nothing says I can't help the news along... He scanned the paper, opened one of several dummy email accounts he had, and sent it off to the local news station. If they hadn't already heard about it from one of the students or from the journalism club, this would hurry that along. If they had, then they'd see it as one more person interested in the story.

Let's see how long you last, Mattis.

Salla smiled. It was the first time that he had smiled like that, a smile that went all the way back on his face. Then again, it was the first time that he had bothered to actually take charge of things like this. It had gone well for him. Maybe he should try it again, sometime.

The End