

Rat Rebellion
Chapter 7: The Kingdom Comes
By Draconicon

In a surprisingly short time, it was done. The nobles of Cornu were all taken, from the lowly knights of the kingdom to those that were powerful enough to call parts of the city their home, and even the fox that served as governor of the city. Everyone, *everyone* that had power in the city eventually came under the sway of the rats, and the rats themselves spread from Florus Manor throughout the rest of the city. They populated the different households of nobility, serving as both masters of their new slaves and hidden puppeteers to ensure that the city began to change.

Of course, as always, there were arguments over the way forward. Anastus sighed as he heard the knocking on his door once more, looking up from the various reports that had come in from the different households.

“I’m busy.”

“Not busy enough.”

Lidochka, as expected. The rat rubbed his forehead, taking a few deep breaths before folding the letters up again. They’d have to wait; either he answered her, or she would cause more problems.

“Come in.”

His office, a converted bedroom in Florus Manor, was more than large enough for the two of them. The sweeping bookshelves on either side lent it the air of a study, and with the bed taken out, there was a great deal more room than a guest chamber should have had. More than enough for the broad desk that he had put in, one that ran from one side of the room to the other and required a lifting portion to be able to get out from behind it. He sat there, in a chair that loomed higher than it needed to, and he had been spending most of his time directing the different actions of the other rats.

Had been. Lidochka had his attention now.

The once-whore stepped into the room, not bothering to cover herself still. Some of the slave rats had started wearing clothes, and indeed, he had made it clear that the rats should be allowed. He had expected Lidochka to want the same, but apparently, she had other ideas. Crossing her arms, she looked down at him.

“You’re not changing enough.”

“Is this about taking away the slave label again?”

“Yes. That should have been the first thing you did.”

“If I did that, we’d have the army on our doorstep. There’d be no telling how long we’d actually keep the city after that.”

“It still needs to happen.”

“And it will. Later.”

“When? When everything else is done?”

“...If it has to be that way.”

He understood. There was still a sting considering that there were many foxes, ones that weren’t noble, that looked down on the rats still. There were many of them that were quite happy to look down on his people, that believed them all slaves. They didn’t know how easily the rats had changed the city already behind the scenes, or how easily most of the rats could change the fox in question.

And for the sake of the long game, he wanted to keep it that way. All rats, both those that were given the serum to control others and those that were still unmodified, needed to stay quiet about what they could do. They had to pretend that they were still slaves for the moment, until they had a greater foothold.

One city does not overcome an entire kingdom. We could secede, but they would come for us.

And the entire rat population of the city would be put to the sword. Slaves that had risen up, that had found a weakness of the ruling class, could not be trusted. They’d just be exterminated, and their numbers replaced from other parts of the kingdom. He tapped his fingers on the desk as Lidochka continued glaring at him.

“Look. It will happen.”

“When?”

“When it’s safe.”

“You mean, when nothing bad can happen. When it won’t make people angry.”

“No, I mean when it won’t get us all killed.”

“We finally have a place where we can live free, and we have to pretend that we can’t. So, what’s changed?”

“...We’re free.”

“Yes, but we have to pretend that we’re not. That’s not freedom. That’s not even close.”

Anastus sighed. He didn’t know what he was going to have to do to get through to her. Everything that he’d said, everything that he’d tried as an explanation had just bounced off her, going nowhere. Everything that he said about the dangers didn’t matter. She was too angry to actually believe that this would go anywhere if they didn’t do this quickly.

And she might be right. He still doubted himself after what he’d been forced to do with Cassia. She had made it clear that the foxes would never surrender power willingly, not to the slaves. They would fight tooth and nail to make it out of there, to hold onto their power, to deny freedom to those that they believed lesser.

I can’t talk with them. And I don’t want to enslave them.

But what was left? War? They didn’t have the numbers for that, or the equipment. It would be akin to sentencing all rats to death to try for that.

And yet, Lidochka was more than willing to go down that route if he didn’t give her something. If he didn’t give her something quick, something immediate to show that he was dedicated to making sure that they were all equal, then she was going to do something of her own. He didn’t know just what she’d be able to accomplish on her own, but he knew that she’d try.

And worse, she’d have the others following her. Not all of them, not even half, but he was sure that she’d take a least a third of the rats in their little rebellion with her. She wasn’t alone in her beliefs, not by a long shot.

He sighed, rubbing his forehead. Lidochka leaned in, her breasts almost bumping the edge of his face.

“You declare that rats aren’t slaves, by the end of the week, or I’m going to do it myself.”

“You don’t have a majority of the nobles under your control,” he muttered.

“You don’t know that.”

“I kept records of who enslaved who. Most of the nobles of the city are controlled by rats that agree with me. Not you.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

“Why?”

“Because...I will take extra steps.”

“I don’t see how. Lidochka. Please. Just...trust me. You know why I’m doing this.”

“Yes. Because you’re a coward.”

“...”

“I don’t care if you’re afraid of yourself or if you’re afraid of them, or if you think that they’re not really that bad and don’t deserve every last thing that we do to them, or what, but I know that you’re afraid to take it further. You’re terrified of getting it wrong. Well, let me tell you. I’m more afraid of going back than I am of dying. I’m more afraid of never getting to the point of *real* freedom than dying.

“I don’t care what happens to me. I don’t care what happens to the rest of us. We have a chance to live free.”

“Yes. Free, for a few months.”

“But we’d have those months. And we might get more.”

“You don’t understand...”

“No. You don’t.”

Turning on her heel and departing, she left him sputtering in his own indignation. He pulled the letters back to him, trying to look at them without feeling enraged about the whole situation.

I don’t understand?

He understood better than she did. He understood that he was the one carrying the entire rat population of Cornu on his shoulders while she wanted to waste it with wishes. He understood that he was the one that had been educated in the way that politics worked, while she was the one that just went and got *fucked* day in and day out. She was a whore, and he had been at least an assistant, and that –

Anastus shook himself from those thoughts. That wasn't going to fix things, and that was just going to piss him off past the point of recovery. For now, he needed to just focus on the letters and respond to them.

Taking up quill and ink, he began writing his responses to the rats in the houses of the city nobles...

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Two more days passed, and the morning of the second day hit hard. Mostly because someone came barreling into his room and shouting in his ear to wake him up.

“Anastus!”

“Gah!”

He almost leaped from his bed, gasping for breath, but before he could catch it, the black-furred rat that had come for him grabbed him by the wrist. He was dragged out of the sheets, into the halls, and towards the staircase, heading up, up, and up, as far up as they could get in Florus Manor.

“What’s going on?”

“Invaders, Anastus. Invaders.”

“Where? How?”

“Just a little way from the city, and I don’t know.”

His waker pulled him along until he was able to find his footing, and then he managed to push past. If there were invaders coming, then he needed to see what this was. What force could be coming, though? They weren't near any aggressive neighbors, nor was there anything nearby that wanted to take over the city, as far as he knew. No warring tribes, no aggressive barbarians. They were in a relatively peaceful place.

They reached the top of the manor, stepped out onto the observation tower deck, and Anastus shielded his eyes as he looked out at the field before him. He saw figures moving in the distance...many figures, now that he had a better look.

“Anyone at the walls mention any banners of note?” he asked.

“Not yet. Just that they were coming.”

They. Not just they, but a large army of ‘they’, Anastus noted. Far more than he wanted to think about fighting, too.

The closer they came, the more details he could make out. They were mostly foxes, with a few hound mercenaries that had been drawn into their ranks. That meant that it was probably an army of the kingdom's, then, as there were few lords that could afford that many mercenaries at once. He narrowed his eyes, shielding them against the morning light.

The question is, what kind of army? Something sent by the king, or with the king?

That answer came quickly enough. A banner finally came into view, revealing a fox on a field of purple and gold, and the fox wore a crown. Anastus winced at the sight of the king's personal banner, rubbing his forehead.

"Not good...not...good."

"What do we do?"

"For now? Make sure that everyone knows that they're to act as if nothing happened. That the rebellion never happened. Tell the foxes that they're to be as abusive and abrasive as they've always been."

"...Nobody's going to like that, Anastus."

"Nobody has to. We have to live through this to make any changes."

"But...that's the king out there."

"Yes, with an army."

"..."

"Make sure that everyone knows to fake it. Where's Lidochka?"

"...You aren't going to like this."

"I'm not liking it already. Where is she?"

"Um..."

"Please, do not tell me that she's outside the walls."

"Ummmmmmmm..."

"..."

"I told you, you aren't going to like this."

Anastus took a deep breath and turned his head. For all the profanity that he wanted to let loose, his scream was surprisingly incomprehensible.

#

There was no time to find Lidochka before the gates were opened to the king and his entourage. The rats flooded out into the streets, making it clear that they were good slaves, good and willing servants to the foxes. They were back to being naked, bowing and showing off as they had always been forced to do. Anastus was among them, as well as all the other rats of Florus's estate, and was 'allowed' a streetside view of the passing royal party.

It didn't help that Florus was having far too much fun abusing him again, cuffing him whenever he could get away with it.

"You understand what this means, right, rat?" the fox asked. "This little rebellion will be undone soon enough."

Anastus didn't rise to the bait. If he did, he ran the risk of exposing himself without the foxes doing anything. Instead, he kept his head down as the royal procession walked by, keeping his eyes on the street.

All the while, his thoughts were racing. There was no point in the foxes bringing an army here. The king had no reason to come to Cornu, as the yearly procession was months away. Something had obviously happened. A letter sent without anyone noticing? Someone getting a message out about the whole state of things? What? What had happened?

There was no clear answer, and that was terrifying.

The parade of soldiers, the royal procession, and more soldiers went by almost without incident. As the last of the foxes passed through the city gates, he almost thought that the rebellion might go unremarked.

And then, his hopes were dashed. Two foxes were thrown over the edge of the wall as soon as the gates were closed, each one screaming before their shrieks were pulled to a stop by the nooses around their necks. The foxes jerked up and down, bouncing on snapped necks. They wore the same uniform as the rest of the army, meaning that they had been part of the force that had come in at the beginning to secure the city for the king.

Anastus stared at the bodies, seeing that each wore a placard against their chest. They were simple: 'You Are Not Welcome Anymore'.

...Lidochka. That has to be Lidochka.

There was nobody else that would dare go that far with taking down members of the royal army, and there wasn't anyone else that had the guts to push that sort of message. The soldiers at the tail end of the royal parade whipped around, saw the bodies of their dead

comrades, and screamed. The hysteria spread through the army, with the better soldiers not quite losing their heads, but none of them reacted well.

What have you done...what have you done...

#

The king of Gaermus holed up in the governor's mansion in the center of the city, his army securing the whole area. All rats were pushed out and housed elsewhere, cutting off any ability of theirs to see what was going on. The other nobles were kept at arms' length, which at least meant that the king didn't know who was on his side. That meant that whatever message had called him to Cornu must have been anonymous enough to keep him from just summoning the snitch and having them safe with him.

Which meant that they had time. They had time to prove that there was no rebellion...

Anastus paced back and forth in front of his desk as he tried to figure out a way to minimize the damage that had been done. Two murders were not going to be hushed up easily, but so far, there had been no arrests, and no executions. That either meant that Lidochka and her people had gotten away from the scene of the crime unseen, or the king's men were waiting to see if they could use the culprits to find the other rebels.

I really hope it's the first one. I really, really hope it's the first one.

Despite his best efforts, he hadn't been able to track her down, either. She'd been missing at every turn, and nobody seemed to know where she had disappeared to. All they knew was that she had left in the middle of the night before the army got there, and that had been the last that anyone had seen of her. Anastus cursed under his breath over and over again, fighting the urge to punch the wall. With his new strength, he could easily punch right through it, and he doubted that would go over well with the rats sleeping on either side of the study.

He was just about to throw his desk across the room when the door opened. Half-expecting Florus to be entering to gloat, he was shocked to find her stepping in. The naked female smirked.

"I see that you noticed my message."

"Your – do you know how stupid that was?!"

"It needed to be said."

"They could have been fooled!"

"Not with this." She shook her head. "The captain of the guard sent that message."

"...I thought we managed to catch him."

“No, you were focused on the nobles. The captain didn’t even get on your little list. You were too focused on the people at the top doing *nothing* that you forgot about everyone else further down the list.”

He opened his mouth, then closed it again. She was right on that front, at least .

“Besides, they knew what they were going to find,” she said. “I ‘talked’ with the captain. He told me everything that he sent, and showed me the copy of the letter. He was going to use that as proof that he had been the one to call the king here, since it was otherwise anonymous.”

“Do you have the letter?”

“Of course.”

“Give it to me.”

“No.”

“No?!” Anastus gripped the sides of his head, on the verge of pulling his own whiskers out. “Why not?!”

“Because this is the first time that you’ve listened to me, and I *know* you. You are going to try and sweep this under the rug rather than take advantage of this opportunity.”

He gritted his teeth, but he knew that he wasn’t going to get the letter by browbeating her. Coming nude meant that she didn’t have the letter on her, which meant that it was stashed somewhere further off. That, in turn, meant that she wanted to get something from him. She was all but saying it.

Taking a deep breath, he put on as neutral a face as he could. Inside, he was steaming, but for now, he would be cautious, and he would listen.

“Go on.”

“Taking the city didn’t go the way you wanted. You forgot the important stuff, and you took it too slow.”

“I did what I thought was right.”

“And it wasn’t enough. It wasn’t anywhere near enough. And it wasn’t right, either.”

“...”

“This is our chance to fix it.” She nodded out the window towards the governor’s palace. “The king doesn’t know who invited him here, and now he knows that it’s more important than ever that he finds who knew about this. The letter is the proof you need.”

“There’s just one problem. He won’t believe a rat brought him here.”

“He would...if it was a cultured-enough rat.”

Anastus blinked. Lidochka nodded.

“Yes. You hear what I’m saying.”

“You want me to –”

“I want you to get in there...and I want you to bring me with you.”

“...Why?”

“Because this is our chance to convert the *king*.”

Anastus had almost seen the writing on the walls as she talked about the whole thing, but he hadn’t wanted to think of it actually happening. Even as he stumbled backwards, sitting on the edge of his desk, he could see how that would change everything. Take the king, and the kingdom itself would be all but theirs. The rats could start changing things from the very top, if they were careful.

He shook his head.

“No, no, we...we can’t. It’s too risky.”

“It’s our only chance.”

“No, no, we can do this. If we hide it for a while, go underground...”

Taking the king would mean reaching out and doing the same thing that he had done to Cassia. It would be another rut. Another rape, because he couldn’t trust someone else to do the job right with the king and control him properly. It would mean being as bad as the foxes that had enslaved them all in the first place.

Anastus was blabbering. He tried to stop, tried to find some way to speak sensibly, but Lidochka marched right up to him and –

Crack.

She slapped him, and he stopped talking. Instead, he held a hand to his face, staring straight ahead as the female poked him in the chest.

“We can’t keep hiding. If we stop now, then we’re never coming back up again. You’ve been holding back since the start; that first meal, you were ready to back out of it the minute that you got blood on your hands. When Cassia defied you, you almost let her kill you instead of taking charge. And now, when we have the chance to get the king himself on our side, you want to pretend that it never happened.”

“I don’t! I just...I just...”

“Either we’re going to die in slavery that never, ever, ever ends because *you* are too afraid of pushing too far, we die because we tried, or we live and get free. I’m going to try for the third, but I’m willing to accept the second. Are you willing to stick with the first?”

Anastus shook his head. It wasn’t that way. He just...

He just didn’t want them to go so far. He didn’t want to be like the masters that they had dealt with for so long. He didn’t want to turn into them, and he didn’t see any way to take over that didn’t involve treating the foxes the same way that the foxes had treated him and his people. Even when he had been about to die, he had been willing to take the fall and the plunge and keep Cassia alive rather than let her pay the price for trying to kill him.

It meant that he was always cautious. He was always playing it too tight, too weak, and he was only now starting to realize it. Lidochka was right, and it took being in the street getting slapped by someone that might have only been pretending to be his master to get it through his head. Pretense or not, it was still a reminder of what they had all been through, and what none of them wanted to go back to.

Change had to happen. Even if it was risky, they had to do something instead of going back again.

“Alright... alright.” He nodded. “What do you have in mind?”

“You’ll listen to me this time?”

“I’m listening now.”

“Alright... this is what I think we should do...”

The End