

## The Pied Piper of Hamlyn

retold by  
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(and much closer to the truth  
than you really want to know)

The sewage and garbage lay smelly and thick  
In a city so dirty it made the rats sick.

Where the people were filled with a sense of unease  
At a notable rise in the rate of disease.

But instead of just facing the problem -- for shame!  
They went looking around and found someone to blame.

The burghers of Hamlyn all spoke with high dudgeon,  
"What's wrong in our lives can be fixed with a bludgeon!"

"It's rats that are bringing us death and disease.  
They track in their filth and they give us their fleas!"

Now, the city magician, a man of great craft  
Knew enough of the world to see how they were daft.

He stood firmly up in the best of his poses,  
And stuck one long finger right under their noses.

"There's something quite wrong with what you want to do.  
For the rats aren't the problem. The problem is you!"

"You cannot blame the rats when you serve them all dinner,  
Just clean up the streets and they'll leave, or grow thinner."

"Our city is noted for business and wealth,  
But there's no sanitation, and no funds for health."

"If you don't rid the city of muck and of swill,  
Something awful will happen, I tell you, it will!"

"A great sickness will come, and if it does its worst,  
You fine burghers will die, but your kids will go first!"

"You're laid off!" they replied. "You're no longer required.  
We don't want to hear it, and therefore, you're fired!"

"We'll kill those black beasts! We will show them our mettle!  
Get rid of the rats! Then we'll be in fine fettle!"

They sent out the call for rat-catchers and trappers,  
Explosive technicians and miners and sappers,

For bulldogs and scotties and fine black retrievers  
And teams to set acres of nets, and their weavers,

For hawks from the heavens, for cats from the farm,  
For all they could think of to do the rats harm.

They chased after rats, but the rats went to hiding  
In attics and cellars, in chimneys and siding.

They dug and found out that the rats were too clever.  
They'd fled to new burrows: They found no rats, never.

The rats came up only at night, just for air.  
After weeks of rat-hunting, they all were still there.

The magician, at home, munched at cheese and dry bread,  
Fears of what was to come dancing wild in his head,

When from under his stool came a sound like a squeaking,  
And there was a rat, standing upright, and speaking.

"We heard what they said, and we want you to know  
That we'd leave if we could, but we've no way to go."

"We can't fix the problem, and we didn't make it,  
But things are so bad we can no longer take it."

"We can't see our whiskers, the filth is so thick,  
And there's nary a rat who desires to be sick."

"If this were a ship we'd dive over the side,  
But instead we are stuck in your city, inside."

"We are trapped, killed, and hunted by night and by day.  
You have got us surrounded; we can't get away."

"And since you want your job back, you might be a man

Who could learn to work with us. Now, I have a plan."

"It will make you look good. It will help us escape.  
And the burghers of Hamlyn won't know it's a jape."

"We rats have been thinking; we've thought it all through.  
And -- if you are willing -- then, here's what we'll do..."

Next morning the burghers looked up from their beer  
Disbelieving their senses, of what they did hear.

For from somewhere too close came an ear-splitting hoot,  
As if someone who shouldn't were playing a flute.

The magician had dressed in his best cap and gown  
And he stood in the square in the center of town,

With an old bent recorder he'd bought from a band,  
And he put down his music, and held up his hand.

"I beg pardon. You're right. We should do what you ask.  
I have dug up some magic to help with the task."

"With my magical flute I will make such a sound  
As will conjure the rats to come out of the ground."

"I don't doubt you, old man," the Most High Burgher said,  
"For with playing like that you may well raise the dead."

"You must trust me! I beg you! Just give me a day.  
I will bring the rats up and then lead them away."

"We will march to the river. It soon will be found  
That they've jumped in the water and -- surely -- have drowned."

"Well, a day cannot hurt much, or so it appears,  
But first let's put wax up inside of our ears."

"You have wax for your brains!" he said under his breath,  
"If you don't clean this mess it will soon be your death."

Then he thought once again of the children in school,  
And he spoke up again, "You must heed this old fool!"

"All the rats will be gone by the set of the sun,

But I tell you once more that the task is not done!"

"If you don't clean the city, the filth and the lice  
Will extract from your families the ultimate price."

"Go away!" said the burgher, "Get on with the job."  
The magician spoke softly, and now with a sob.

"Well, I tried." For the burghers had shut up their door.  
"I have tried. They won't listen. I cannot do more."

"Nothing closes so tight as the mind of a man.  
Thus I fear hope is lost. Well, I'll save who I can."

So he took up his flute and he wiped off the tip,  
Put it into his mouth and then gave it some lip,

To bring forth from the bell such a dissonant sound  
That it curdled the milk for a half mile around.

Cats and dogs fled in terror and roosters laid eggs  
And the people of Hamlyn made swift with their legs

As they came to see what was the cause of the racket  
And if they should send for a nice new strait jacket.

But as into the burrows the music was driven,  
It meant to the rats that the signal was given.

Their bags were all packed, they were all in the know,  
They were glad to be leaving and ready to go.

They came to the surface and into the street,  
They scampered from doorways beneath peoples' feet.

The men who killed rats all came running pell-mell,  
But the wizard called "Stop! You must not break the spell!"

The rats fell in line as if in a parade  
And all acted like zombies to make the charade.

The rat-catchers were eager to do what he'd bidden:  
Their ears hurt, their dogs howled, and the cats had all hidden.

The rat eyes were vacant, as if they weren't thinking,  
Except that one baby was almost caught winking.

They strode through the streets as he played his strange song,  
The rats lined up in files, twelve abreast, two miles long.

They marched down to the docks and turned left on the quay.  
There they jumped in the river... and all swam away.

The story gets sad now, you know how it went.  
The old man, for his troubles, was banished and sent

To live off in a cave on the side of a hill.  
And for all that I know he is living there still.

A few rats went to England, but most went to France.  
The worst of the rats had a happier chance

Than the people who lived in the city, and stayed,  
When the bill that the piper predicted was paid.

For the filth brought disease, as the piper had said,  
And the children of Hamlyn are gone

-- they're all dead.

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