

The Lame One

An Operetta in Three Acts

Word and Music

By

Frank Bentley

Freely adapted from the poem

“The Pied Piper of Hamelin”

by

Robert Browning

Suitable for scholars aged 11 to 13 years

Rats parts can be a younger age group

The operetta has been written so that the action and songs

Are spread over the major characters

Written for and

first performed at Robert Carruthers Junior School, Witbank,

Republic of South Africa on

26th, 27th and 28th October 1971.

List of characters:

Lame boy (with crutch)

Charlady (lame boy's mother)

Mayor

Councillors (six):

Penelope	- hippie
Fritch	- Old maid
Harry	- injured foot
Sam	- working class
Joe	- hypochondriac
Alf	- clergyman

Town Clerk (Fred)

King Rat

Vendors:

Fisherman
Vegetable Sellers (two)
Bonnet Seller
Fruit Seller (two)
Bakers (two)
Butcher
Housewives

Citizens:

Men (six)
Women (ten to twelve)

Children (twelve to fifteen)

Rats (twenty to thirty) – a few are required to enact short sequences in the song of the King Rat

Total cast: 72 to 87 (depending on number of scholars available and size of stage)

ACTS

ACT ONE

A Market square with a view of river and hills in background (backdrop)

Left – an alehouse, bench outside, sign – next to house.

Back centre – stalls, fixed and on wheels, some having goods already on display

Right – Hours, then Mayor's house (imposing with curtained windows), door with pillars and short flight of steps in front.

Front – stalls, barrows etc strategically placed

ACT TWO

Council chamber, inside mayor's house. To avoid scene change, a mid stage backdrop can be used in a colour to denote a wall, on which hang portraits of earlier mayors.

In front is a long table (with cloth overlapping to the floor) at which the mayor, councillors and town clerk sit.

There is a hat stand in the corner and a sideboard – right.

Door left.

ACT THREE

As act one but omitting stalls and barrows.

PROLOGUE

To be said by the Lame One or another scholar
(extract from the Pied Piper of Hamelin by Robert Browning)

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladle's,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

ACT ONE

The Market square

Stage in darkness as clock strikes 6 (see music)

As it slowly become lighter, one rat enters (right) and indicates to rats in turn from:

- Left
- Right
- Audience

Each group making their way on stage during the music of the **RATS DANCE** until all rats on stage when the dance commences with squeaking and actions germane to rats. This dance can be developed according to the ability of the younger scholars.

The dance is brought to a halt by the entrance of the King Rat from the back, white costume, black waistcoat, black top hat and gloves. He raps on the floor with a long cane (with silver rounded top or something similar). All the rats immediately form in a group around him, showing respect and obedience (some kneeling, others standing).

Somewhere in all this sequence there should be a lame rat who is alone, always behind the others.

KING RAT Gather round and let me tell you about my life and some of my adventures.

Song: **KING RAT SONG** (enacted throughout)

KING RAT	<i>I was born at a very early age Of excellent parentage. And nothing was spared As I was loved and cared And acquainted with my great heritage</i>
ALL RATS	<i>Yes acquainted with his great heritage</i>
KING RAT	<i>Of course I went to school And was trained in the golden rule: That though my blood was blue In fact quite through and through If ever I'm sought I must never be caught I must nibble and gnaw With my teeth and claw With my eyes so alert And my whiskers pert I must never, no never No never, never, never be caught</i>
ALL RATS	<i>That though his blood was blue In fact quite through and through</i>

*If ever he's sought
He must never be caught
We must nibble and gnaw
With our teeth and claw
With our eyes so alert
And our whiskers pert
We must never, no never
No never, never, never be caught*

KING RAT (spoken)

And then, of course, to keep up with tradition, I was required to marry a lady of my own social standing.

KING RAT (sung)

*Oh, she was the cutest little maid
Her poise like a figure of jade
With eye shadow blue
And a tail kink too
She was something I could not evade*

ALL RATS

Yes, something which he could not evade

KING RAT

*I called on her one day
In the sewer that adjacent lay
But as I peeped inside
At my intended bride
With a rolling pin
She was practicing
And a ball and chain
Was attached to a drain
And I realised then
That like enlightened men
I must never, no never
No never, never, never be caught*

ALL RATS

*But as he peeped inside
At his intended bride
With a rolling pin
She was practicing
And a ball and chain
Was attached to a drain
And he realised then
That like enlightened men
We must never, no never
No never, never, never be caught*

KING RAT (Spoken)

The only escape was to go to sea

KING RAT (Sung)

I joined a ship at the nearest port

ALL RATS
KING RAT

*It required a great deal of thought
To leave the solid land
Was something not planned
But a handy rope I sought
Yes, a handy rope he sought
Then the new life entered my blood
Life was "taken at the flood"
But, in a raging gale
I turned quite pale,
I felt quite ill
And hadn't got a pill
Couldn't nibble and gnaw
Use my teeth or claw
But my only thought
As the side I sought
Was I must never, no never
No never, never, never be caught
But, in a raging gale
He turned quite pale,
He felt quite ill
And hadn't got a pill
Couldn't nibble and gnaw
Use his teeth or claw
But his only thought
As the side he sought
Was he must never, no never
No never, never, never be caught*

ALL RATS

KING RAT (spoken)

Then one day we saw pirates

ALL RATS (spoken)

Yo ho ho and a piece of smelly cheese!

KING RAT (sung)

*Lying in the galley one day
"Ship approaching" I heard men say
'Twas a pirate ship
And it did outstrip
Our little boat without much delay
Yes, his little boat without delay
We were boarded and did fight
Although I dodged right out of sight
The sight of blood you know
Did affect me so
And when all was lost
Down the plank they were tossed
But I couldn't let fate
My life to dictate*

ALL RATS

KING RAT

ALL RATS *So I hid myself under
 The pirate's plunder
 For I must never, no never
 No never, never, never be caught
 The sight of blood you know
 Did affect him so
 And when all was lost
 Down the plank they were tossed
 But he couldn't let fate
 His life to dictate
 So he hid himself under
 The pirate's plunder
 For he must never, no never
 No never, never, never be caught*

KING RAT (spoken) *And then I became your leader!*
 ALL RATS (spoken) *Hooray!*
 KING RAT *Fearless and bold!*
 ALL RATS *Yes! Yes!*
 KING RAT *Afraid of no-one*
 ALL RATS *No! No! (retreating)*

KING RAT (sung) *I ascended to the throne of King Rat
 When my father met a sleek cat
 Which he tried to befriend
 But it really was the end
 When he disappeared and that was that (use
 hands)*

ALL RATS *Yes, he disappeared inside that cat*
 KING RAT *It became necessary
 That a change there should really be
 For the horses and the games
 With the wine and the dames
 Then the cards and roulette
 Losing bet after bet*

*Meant that taxes had to grow
 To accommodate me so
 For to run short of cash
 Would be very rash
 For I must never, no never
 No never, never, never be caught*
 ALL RATS *For the horses and the games
 With the wine and the dames
 Then the cards and roulette
 Losing bet after bet
 Meant that taxes had to grow (show anger)*

*To accommodate him (pointing) so
 If he thinks he'll take the lot
 We'll have him on the spot (pointing and
 emphasising)
 For we'll never, no never
 No never, never, never be caught*

<i>KING RAT (Ending)</i>	<i>I will never, no never</i>
<i>ALL RATS</i>	<i>We will never, no never (disagreeing with king)</i>
<i>ALL</i>	<i>I(We) will never, never, never No never, never, never be caught</i>

It is now light and the clock chimes are heard striking 7 o'clock (see music).

Rats hear clock, see folk approaching, a maiden shoos off a rat with a broom, a gun shot is heard and repeated, followed by a scream, and the rats disappear quickly (King Rat with dignity). One or two rats remain hidden on stage.

Song: **WHO WILL BUY** (as per music)

<i>FISHERMAN (off stage)</i>	<i>Who will buy?</i>
<i>FISHERMAN (enters)</i>	<i>Fresh fish today Who will buy Come, come and buy. Fresh fish today Who will buy Come, come and buy.</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 1</i>	<i>Look at the cabbages, carrots and onions So very fresh and lovely to eat</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 2</i>	<i>Pray you king sir to buy some potatoes Oh! Madam these peas are so very sweet</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 3 (girl)</i>	<i>Won't you buy my lovely bonnets Silks and ribbons for your hair</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 4 (boy)</i>	<i>Bread! Bread! Fresh warm bread.</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 5 (girl)</i>	<i>Oranges, grapefruit and lemons Squash and paw paw and sweet melons</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER 4 (boy)</i>	<i>Scones! Scones! Fresh warm scones.</i>
<i>STALLHOLDERS 3, 4 and 5</i>	<i>sing parts as a round (per music)</i>
<i>FISHERMAN</i>	<i>But who wants to buy when the fish have been eaten</i>
<i>STALLHOLDER</i>	<i>Who wants to buy when my goods have been bitten</i>
<i>OTHER STALLHOLDER</i>	<i>Who wants to buy when my plates have been smashed</i>
<i>THIRD STALLHOLDER</i>	<i>Who wants to buy when my clothes have been gashed</i>
<i>ALL STALLHOLDERS</i>	<i>Who want to buy? Who wants to buy? When they, they, they destroy everything</i>

*Who wants to buy?
Who wants to buy?*

HOUSEWIFE 1 Some of this food is not worth buying, and we know why – don't we?

(Knowing nod to another housewife)

HOUSEWIFE 2 (Holding up a loaf of bread from a stall)

Look at this! What would my hubby say if I took this home? It is a disgrace!

HOUSEWIFE 3 It certainly is a disgrace – and what does he (pointing to the mayor's house) do about it. NOTHING!

STALLHOLDER (coming forward to join the group)

Many times I have lost things from the stall – stolen when my head was turned for a moment.

(more and more join the group, so that it spreads from centre to right)

FISHERMAN I see them when I'm going through the town when it's still dark.

HOUSEWIFE 1 And you see them on the roofs.

HOUSEWIFE 2 And in the kitchens.

HOUSEWIFE 3 It's disgraceful!

HOUSEWIFE 1 And in the bedrooms.

HOUSEWIFE 2 And in the basements.

CHORUS Disgraceful!

HOUSEWIFE 1 Why I Once found one in .. (whisper)

CHORUS Oh! Lordy, lordy – disgraceful!

(door opens in mayor's house)

FOOTMAN Quiet please. Your attention please. The mayor!

Crowd falls back slightly to right. To a marching song councillors one at a time appear at the door, move down steps and form a guard.

Song: **HERE COMES THE MAYOR**

COUNCILLORS

*Here comes the mayor of our town
And he is a man of great renown
Good folk stand clear
And he will appear
The mayor of our great town!*

As song finishes, the mayor, tall and fat, finely dressed, with chain of office, appears in the doorway and attempts to execute an imposing and regal entrance down the steps, but trips and careers a little way across the stage before recovering his dignity with the help of his councillors.

MAYOR	(Smiling weakly at the sour faces) Oh dear – my new shoes – you know my chain got stuck ... (fades away). Good morning my good people.
ALL	Rats!
MAYOR	(Stretching to full height, appalled at this indignity) Wh .. wh .. wh .. ats that you said.
STALLHOLDER 1	Rats .. there is no other topic of conversation except rats!
SMALL GROUP	Yes, what are you going to do about it?
MAYOR	Me? Why pick on me?
FISHERMAN	You're the mayor aren't you? We've had this problem with us for many years – getting worse each year.
STALLHOLDER 2	At the last election <u>you</u> promised to get rid of the pests. What have you done?
ALL	Nothing!
MAYOR	Now, now you can't say that (counting on fingers). First we've had many council meetings on the subject (turning to councillors). Haven't we?
COUNCILLORS	(Nodding heads) Yes, we have.
ONE COUNCILLOR	Many long, long (spreading arms) meetings.
HOUSEWIFE 1	And what happened? (Mayor and councillors shake heads with downcast eyes)
MAYOR	(On second finger) Then we sent a letter to the government.
GROUP	And what happened?
MAYOR	Well our knowledgeable town clerk here (pointing to small wizened man) wrote a very knowledgeable letter, with the encyclopaedia in front of him, about the "rodent of the Rattus family". The government clerk wasn't sure where to direct the letter so he sent it to the Population Department. They wrote back asking what race were the Rattus family, and he (pointing to him) said "black and brown" and what do you think we got? Two identity cards! Not much use!
LARGER GROUP	And then?

MAYOR (third finger) Well ... we imported – at great cost – a consignment of cats.

ALL (mockingly) And what happened?

MAYOR The rats chased them away.

ALL And then?

MAYOR Harry here, decided to shoot them, but he had a misfortune (councillor shows bandaged foot amid laughter)

MAYOR (brightly pointing to fifth finger) (Face falls, shrugs shoulders)
Fifthly, we don't know what to do.

MALE STALLHOLDER Well something has got to be done.

ALL Yes, something has got to be done.

SONG: SOMETHING HAS GOT TO BE DONE

*MALE STALLHOLDER Oh, something has got to be done
Ere another day has gone
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

*FEMALE SHOPPER Yes, something has got to be done
A battle has to be won
They've eaten our hats and chase all the cats
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

*SMALL GROUP OF
STALLHOLDERS Yes, something has got to be done
For this we cannot shun
They recline on chairs and eat our éclairs
They've eaten our hats and chase all the cats
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

*ALL Yes, something has got to be done
Ere another day has gone*

*GROUP OF
YOUNGSTERS With a doo be doop
They formed a pop group*

*ALL They recline on chairs and eat our éclairs
They've eaten our hats and chase all the cats
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

*GROUP OF
HOUSEWIVES*

*Oh yes, something has got to be done
A battle has to be won
They use it would seem
Lipstick and face cream*

POP GROUP

*With a doo be doop
They formed a pop group*

ALL

*They recline on chairs and eat our éclairs
They've eaten our hats and chase all the cats
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

MAYOR

*Good folk (Crowd "Bah!")
My dear friends
Yes there's something that I must do
Ere another day is through
Ere the stars are high
My council and I
Will ponder the matter
With a great deal of chatter
A solution there must be
But
Now it is time for tea
Now it is time ...*

*GROUP OF
HOUSEWIVES*

*They use it would seem
Lipstick and face cream*

POP GROUP

*With a doo be doop
They formed a pop group*

ALL

*They recline on chairs and eat our éclairs
They've eaten our hats and chase all the cats
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has got to be done.*

ALL

*The rats come
Hurrying, scurrying,
Plundering, smuggling,
Whispering, scuffling,
Scratching, rustling
Oh! Please!
Get rid of the rats or we'll all go bats
Something has to be done.
Something has got to be done!*

Mayor and councillors retire to mayor's house and some shoppers move off stage. Lame boy has been mingling with crowd and now approaches a group of children.

LAME BOY Let me play (Lame One Song starts playing softly in background)
 BOY Go away
 LAME BOY But let me try
 ALL Go away

Song: SONG OF THE LAME ONE (Lame One standing centre, children in groups, talking)

<i>LAME BOY</i>	<i>When I was born My father saw in me The hopes and dreams He'd wished to be. His every aim His very all he'd give To make this life I'd live In all ways lucrative When I .. when I was born</i>
	<i>When I was small My mother saw in me The hopes and dreams She'd wished to be. My father gone She would with all her power My life to mould and flower And over all men tower When I ..when I was small</i>
	<i>Now I am lame And nought is seen in me All hopes and dreams Will never be. My only wish To be in quiet place And there to hide my face Now I .. now I am lame Now I am lame</i>

Lame boy moves around stage – rats head appear from under a stall, then another head.

LAME BOY	Look, there's a rat!
	(Children scream and run off stage, stallholders move off as rats follow. One rat, the lame rat, moves to mayor's house.
LAME BOY	What's that rat doing, scratching under the mayor's house?
	(moves over. Rat hands a box, Lame Boy opens.)
	Gee all this money from under the mayor's house. I wonder how it got there?
	(Charlady, Lame Boy's mother, comes out of mayor's house and down the steps. Stops part way.)
CHARLADY	Just what are you doing under there? Filthy place it is.
LAME BOY	Ma, look what I've found (holding out box)
CHARLADY	Can't you see that I'm busy! (Moving across stage)
LAME BOY	Ma, look
CHARLADY	Oh, go and play.
LAME BOY	Ma look. (But charlady exits)

Repeat last verse of SONG OF LAME ONE as curtain slowly closes.

<i>LAME BOY</i>	<i>Now I am lame</i>
	<i>And nought is seen in me</i>
	<i>All hopes and dreams</i>
	<i>Will never be.</i>
	<i>My only wish</i>
	<i>To be in quiet place</i>
	<i>And there to hide my face</i>
	<i>Now I .. now I am lame</i>
	<i>Now I am lame</i>

ACT 2

Mayor's parlour

Scene begins with Charlady cleaning the room.

CHARLADY SONG

CHARLADY

*Sweeping, dusting, polishing the room
Needing brush and pan and good strong broom
My how it occupies my time
Clearing up this mess and grime.*

*Why do I do it, you may ask?
Why undertake this menial task?
Tennis elbow and housemaid's knee
Chapped hands and aching back for me*

*Sweeping, dusting, polishing the room
Needing brush and pan and good strong broom
My how it occupies my time
Clearing up this mess and grime.*

(Lame boy enters)

*It's all for him, but don't tell him so
He's touchy about it as I well know
With his crutch and the leg that won't grow
It's hard to understand why it is so.*

*Sweeping, dusting, polishing the room
Needing brush and pan and good strong broom
My how it occupies my time
Clearing up this mess and grime.*

*Cleaning and polishing the big broad table
Must keep it up as long as I'm able
It's a difficult life with no one at hand
No father for him, or for me a husband.*

*Sweeping, dusting, polishing the room
Needing brush and pan and good strong broom
Tennis elbow and housemaids knee
Chapped hands and aching back for me
My how it occupies my time
Clearing up this mess .. and .. grime.*

CHARLADY

What's this

(picking up a paper from under the table)

(reads the paper)

Town council of Hamelin

Expenditure for September

Rat poison – R15.75

Labour for putting down rat poison – R2 950

Improved salaries for councillors – R 300 000

Miscellaneous – R4 000

Now I wonder who she is?

Anyway, what I say is this: There isn't any bigger rat in this town than the mayor himself.

Sloppy old fool! Full of promises but never does a thing. Now if I were mayor of this town I'd show them a thing or two. Just up with my mop and wham, wallop, slam (moving around stage brandishing her mop).

(she finds a rat – a stuffed one – and flings it behind her into the audience, then another and another. Then spots a small rat – a child – hiding and shoos it off stage)

CHARLADY

There, that's the way to do it – no rats in my house, I can tell you. Fussy I am.

Ha hiding heh (finding another rat)

(This sequence can be adapted to suit the character playing the Charlady)

Lame boy enters

CHARLADY

What have you been doing?

LAME BOY

I tried to play a game with the others but this (lifting crutch) got in the way.

CHARLADY

(Brightly) Never mind, help me to put these chairs straight for the important meeting.

Now what's this sticky stuff (pulling fingers away from underneath chair)

Chewing gum!

(Stands with hands on hips looking fiercely at son)

LAME BOY

No I didn't put it there.

CHARLADY

(counting chairs) Never mind. I know who – well she's going to

miss it this time. (throwing it through the window)

LAME BOY

Ma, can I tell you about something?

CHARLADY

Well, I'm very busy at the moment but what is it about?

LAME BOY

About some money.

CHARLADY

(Hands on hips looking angry) Money, money. Don't you talk to me about money, as if I haven't got enough trouble already; working my fingers through to the bone and now you want money.

LAME BOY

But Ma.

CHARLADY

Not another word! Off you go, here comes the mayor.

Lame boy exits, mayor enters opposite, looks at disappearing lame boy.

MAYOR

Come, come, isn't the room ready yet?

CHARLADY

Soon your worship. (bustling around)

MAYOR

Now we've got time for a little chat, now that that brat of yours is out of the way.

CHARLADY

(Backing away) Oh no you don't! I know these little chats of yours. Always leading to something. What about my salary? I haven't been paid for last month yet.

MAYOR

(Grandly) Oh money, money, money. Everyone's clamouring for money. They should learn how to save – like me (glancing towards his house)

Exit Charlady shaking her head.

MAYOR

Talking of money I'd better check the cash box before old Fred comes in.

(Moves over to table where stands a cash box. Helps himself to a note)

Just as well old Fred's as blind as a bat.

(Puts note away in pocket)

Can't count either

(Closing lid of cash box)

Mayor moves over to sideboard, picks up mayoral chain and puts it on, looking at mirror on hat stand. Adjusting it, clothes and hat.

Lame boy enters, moves centre stage, admiring mayor.

MAYOR

(Turning and noticing lame boy)

what are you staring at?

LAME BOY

How grand you look, the fur, the golden chain. How I wish that I was as old as you.

MAYOR

Now, now lad, don't wish your life away.

SONG: WHEN I WAS VERY SMALL LAD

MAYOR

*When I was very small, lad
Half the height of you
I wanted to be tall, lad
Smallness would not do.
Tall men seemed so high
With heads stuck in the sky
When I was very small, lad
Half the height of you*

*When I was very tall, lad
Twice the height of you
I wanted to be fat, lad
Tallness would not do
Fat men seemed to be
Such jovial company
When I was very tall, lad
Twice the height of you*

*Now I am very fat, lad
Twice the size of you
And even more than that, lad
If all they say be true
Now I'm getting old
And suffer when it's cold
I'd give you all my wealth, lad
To be the height of you*

*But now I'm getting old
And suffer when it's cold
My life is losing it's hold
I don't want to be fat
Oh! No not like that!
Don't want to be tall
Oh! No not at all!
Just want to recall
My life and be small
About the height of you!*

(Mayor turns away, wiping away a tear)

MAYOR

(Pulling himself together)

Ah well, too late now. No use crying over spilt milk.

(Pulls out a large watch on end of a chain)

Here I am recalling my life and it's time for the meeting. Run along now lad, run along.

(Exit lame boy)

MAYOR Where are the councillors (shouting) Mary, Penelope, Joe, come on, there's little time left.

VOICES (off stage) Coming!

(Councillors enter to entrance mayoral music of first act. Each one must be dressed differently to identify their occupations and behaving in like manner. Harry fires gun at rat scampering across the stage. They fill three sides of a long table.

Enter Secretary of the meeting with a large minute book. He wears funeral clothes, spectacles.)

MAYOR Are we all here (glancing around).

Right Fred, (Banging gavel on table) read the minutes of the last meeting.

FRED (Placing spectacles on slowly, coughing dramatically, carefully opening minute book and finding page)

SAM (Impatiently) Hurry up, Fred – the pub closes in half an hour.

(Fred reads the minutes, which should be short and due to interruptions will be unfinished. This sequence can be developed to suit characters. The following is the original Robert Carruthers School sequence)

FRED Minutes of meeting held on

Present: His worship the mayor

Apologies: Penelope, Fritch, Harry, Sam, Joe and Alf

PENELOPE I was present – I was here (pointing under the table)

FRED Quite so, quite so, but I meant present at the meeting.

Arising out of the previous minutes: All efforts of Sam to construct a trap to catch rats have been hindered by Mr Shootem, that's you Harry, who persisted in shooting at the creatures as they approached the trap. A letter of complaint has been sent to Mr Shootem.

SAM What's the use of sending a letter to him – he can't read anyway. And as for blooming gun he couldn't shoot a rat if it was crawling down the barrel!

HARRY Now you watch your words Sam. We aren't spending any more money on your traps. And as for my reading, what about your spelling (pointing to an elaborate trap brought in by Sam with the words RAT CACHER (sic) on it)

No wonder the rats won't go into your trap.

JOE (Rising quickly with a bottle of pills in each hand taken from case

he carries)

All this arguing has given me a headache. I simply can't stand it!

(hands shaking) I simply can't stand it! (holding head in hands)

PENELOPE

(Interrupting him)

Ag man, stow the scene and sit down, kiddo.

MAYOR

Enough, enough. Now to business. The first and most important item on the agenda (as he speaks councillors murmur "rats, rats, that's what it is")

Yes, the most important indeed – the Mayor's salary.

(all sit up straight)

Fred, read the note.

FRED

(swallowing hard, stands up)

It has been recommended ..

(murmurs of 'by whom', and Fred glances at Mayor who, throughout, sits glancing up at ceiling, fingertips together)

.. that, in view of his meritorious service to the town ..

(councillors whispering and shaking their heads violently)

.. his salary should be increased by fifty percent ..

(subdued noises of disgust)

.. and be paid monthly (pauses) in advance.

(Fred sits down)

(all councillors mutter to each other, shaking heads until mayor glances down gloweringly at each one, when shaking heads change to nods)

MAYOR

Good, unanimous vote. The next item is 'rats'. Has anyone got any good ideas.

LADY COUNCILLOR

(Standing up and gesticulating)

Gentlemen we must use our brains – what about hypnotism.

(all look towards her)

You get the rats to look at your eyes ..

(councillors are riveted to her face)

.. and then you wave your arms at them. After that they'll do anything you ask

(councillors stand up and sit down with her arm movements – this can be developed according to actor's abilities. Mayor bangs gavel on table which breaks spell)

MAYOR

There are thousands of rats in this town. How are you going to get

them to look in your face (grimacing)

PENELOPE She could wear a veil with slits cut in for the eyes.
(All laugh and lady councillor sits down annoyed)

MAYOR Come now, what can we do?
(Lame boy enters and tries to attract attention of mayor)
No, my lad, it's not time for tea yet. I repeat, has anyone any brilliant suggestions.
(Lame boy remains on stage. Alf attracts the attention of the mayor)

MAYOR Well, who do you represent?

ALF I represent the rat payers (Mayor strikes gavel on table)

MAYOR Well, what is it?

LAME BOY Please sir, there is a man outside who can rid the town of the rats.

MAYOR (Standing up)
Why keep us waiting, bring him in.
(Lame boy hobbles off stage)
I hope that he isn't a rat exterminator. The last one was so successful with his experiment that he exterminated himself while the rats watched him.

(Enter Lame Boy with Pied Piper, dressed in a two-colour costume, green and brown, skin-tight trousers and tunic, with a suitable cap, halved colours. The pipe is hanging from his belt)

MAYOR Good morning. I understand that you could help us with the problem of our rat population.

PIED PIPER Yes sir, I can.

MAYOR Do you have any references?

PIED PIPER They are not necessary.

MAYOR Where do you come from?

PIED PIPER SONG: PIED PIPER SONG

PIED PIPER

*I come from a far away isle
Where the sea and the sky come together.
Where the volcano sends
Out it's flames which blend
With the hovering clouds that enshroud it.
From a distance the land looks forbidding
With the sea mist embracing the headland.
The stark black rocks
Withstanding the shocks
Of the sea which relentlessly pounds them*

*'Tween the rocks and the roaring summit
Lies a green belt that looks so inviting.
But try to get through
To gain a good view
And the creepers and thorns will prevent you.
At night when the throb of the ocean
Is joined with the sway of the moonbeams
And a ghostly hue
And mystery too
Adds a sinister air to this island.*

*There's a secret way on to this island
That only a few are aware of.
And when you are there
You become aware
That peace and contentment surround it.
Oh! The joy of the life that is happy
Oh! The rest for the soul that's despairing.
'Tis the land of your dreams
Of your hopes and your schemes
That Shangri-La land of fulfilment.*

*I came from that beautiful isle.
How I long for that faraway isle.*

MAYOR	Very nice. Now to business. How do you propose to rid us of the rodents?
PIED PIPER	With this pipe.
COUNCILLOR	Does it shoot poison darts? That will take time as we have thousands of rats.
PIED PIPER	No, I play a tune on it.
MAYOR	What! What tune do you play? (smiles behind hand) (All councillors stand up and move towards Pied Piper)
COUNCILLOR	It must be Alexander's Rat time Band (laughs) Or maybe 'Kitten on the Keys' just to frighten them away (All laugh)
MAYOR	And what happens, my good man, when you play a tune on your pipe?
PIED PIPER	The rats follow me out of town, never to return. (Everyone laughing, hanging on to each other, or sitting at the table head in hands)

MAYOR (restoring his dignity)
And how much do you want for this marvellous feat?

PIED PIPER Twenty thousand Rand

MAYOR (Grandly and gesticulating)
I'll give you five hundred thousand Rand if you rid this town of the rats.

FRED (Loud whisper)
Your worship, we've only got one hundred and three Rand in the bank and fifty cents in the cash box.

MAYOR (patting him on the shoulder)
Safe as houses, it is!

PIED PIPER Two hundred thousand Rand is all I require. Do you accept my proposition?

ALL (Still laughing)
We do.

MAYOR (To a councillor)
Well the townsfolk can't accuse of not trying any method of removing the rats.

PIED PIPER I'll call for the money this afternoon.

MAYOR We'll be waiting, Goodbye.
(exit Pied Piper and the Lamé Boy)
Back to business. Any other brilliant suggestions?

(All start talking at once as mayor says to audience)

MAYOR Let's all go to tea!

ACT THREE

The Market Place

(As curtain opens it is deserted, then one rat appears calling rats from left and right and from audience as in Act 1 with suitable squeaks to shortened form of DANCE OF THE RATS. King Rat appears with his entourage and sings last verse of KING RAT'S SONG.

<i>KING RAT (sung)</i>	<i>I ascended to the throne of King Rat When my father met a sleek cat Which he tried to befriend But it really was the end When he disappeared and that was that (use hands)</i>
<i>ALL RATS</i>	<i>Yes, he disappeared inside that cat</i>
<i>KING RAT</i>	<i>It became necessary That a change there should really be For the horses and the games With the wine and the dames Then the cards and roulette Losing bet after bet Meant that taxes had to grow To accommodate me so For to run short of cash Would be very rash For I must never, no never No never, never, never be caught</i>
<i>ALL RATS</i>	<i>For the horses and the games With the wine and the dames Then the cards and roulette Losing bet after bet Meant that taxes had to grow (show anger) To accommodate him (pointing) so If he thinks he'll take the lot We'll have him on the spot (pointing and emphasising) For we'll never, no never No never, never, never be caught</i>
<i>KING RAT (Ending)</i>	<i>I will never, no never</i>
<i>ALL RATS</i>	<i>We will never, no never (disagreeing with king)</i>
<i>ALL</i>	<i>I(We) will never, never, never No never, never, never be caught</i>

Some rats gather round King, others in groups when Pied Piper appears left playing his pipe (recorder). Rats listen to music then, as if against their will, they fall in line behind him. Tune can be adapted to a swiny one as rats, with squeaks and clicking fingers move off stage behind Pied Piper – with the late one or two dashing off after them, lame rat hobbling after all have left.

(Lame Boy witnesses the sequence from side of stage.)

Lame boy rushes to side of mayor's house.

LAME BOY Mr Mayor, Mr Mayor, they've all gone! The rats, they've all gone!

(Mayor's head appears through window)

MAYOR What's that?

LAME BOY The rats, they've all gone!

MAYOR Bless my soul.

(Head disappears – shouts from within house)

Fred, Harry, Joe!

(Door thrown open and mayor and councillors hurry down the steps. Townsfolk enter as well)

You say the rats have gone?

(Councillors peer under stalls, round corners)

How did it happen?

LAME BOY The Pied Piper played a tune on his pipe.

MAYOR (Smiling) Oh no, not that!

LAME BOY ... and the rats followed him in along line, all very happy.

MAYOR (Rushing to side of the stage)

Which way did they go?

LAME BOY Towards the river.

MAYOR Can't see anything, Are you sure you didn't imagine the whole business?

LAME BOY It all happened. Look here is the Pied Piper again.

(Enter Pied Piper. Everyone stares open mouthed at him)

MAYOR Wh..wh..wh..where are the rats?

PIED PIPER All gone as I promised you. They were so happy that they just ran on and on as I played my pipe right into the river and were washed away.

(cheers)

I now claim the reward of twenty thousand Rand.

(everyone "Ooh")

MAYOR Good people, we are very grateful to our friend for his help. We
(pointing to councillors) were on the point of a breakthrough
ourselves but now it isn't necessary.

PIED PIPER Twenty thousand Rand please, as you promised.

MAYOR (In loud whisper to Fred)

How much did you say ...

PIED PIPER One hundred and three Rand fifty cents all told.

MAYOR Come my man, I will offer you fifty Rand, after all it only took you a
couple of minutes and that makes it (counting on fingers) one
thousand five hundred Rand per hour. Jolly good going I'd say!

PIED PIPER It was a contract between us. Do you intend to keep your side of it?

SAM What twenty thousand Rand for just tooting on a flute?

MAYOR (Grandly)

I'll be generous, I'll make it one hundred Rand

(Fred moves towards the Mayor who pushes him away)

Not a cent more. Take it or leave it!

PIED PIPER You will live to regret this day. (As he moves off stage)

(Silence for a while)

MAYOR Come let's be merry. The rats have gone. Our town is clean again.

(Mayor starts HAPPY SONG followed by townsfolk dancing. Lambe
boy looks on)

MAYOR

Let's sing a snappy, happy song good folk

Let's make it snappy

'Cos we're all very happy

Yes, we'll sing a very happy song good folk

Whilst we enjoy a good joke

Who will start the ball rolling (said)

A STALLHOLDER

At the municipal office just the other day

I saw a man waiting there with quite a load of hay

I asked him very quietly what he was doing there

It's lunch time he said

And I've come to feed the mayor (mare)

<i>MEN</i>	<i>Let's sing a sunny, funny song, yes, sir!</i> <i>Let's make it funny</i> <i>'Cos we're all very sunny</i> <i>Yes, we'll sing a very funny song, yes, sir!</i> <i>Whilst we create a big stir</i>
<i>A MAN (said)</i>	Who will start the ball rolling (said) <div style="text-align: right;">(Ladies behave bashfully)</div> Ah, well, what about you! <div style="text-align: right;">(Man steps forward)</div>
<i>MAN</i>	<i>When I was at the junior school no scholar was I</i> <i>I was bad in every subject</i> <i>'Cos I didn't want to try</i> <i>When even at the alphabet I stuck just after J</i> <i>Which will explain to all</i> <i>Why I couldn't pass Kay! (Stroking seat of pants)</i> <div style="text-align: right;">[Mr Kay was head of the school]</div>
<i>GIRLS</i>	<i>Let's sing a crazy, hazy song everyone</i> <i>Let's make it crazy</i> <i>'Cos we're all very hazy</i> <i>Let's sing a crazy, hazy song everyone</i> <i>'Till this lovely day is done</i>
<i>MEN (said)</i>	Now the ladies must tell a story <div style="text-align: right;">(Spinster councillor steps forward, coy to begin with)</div>
<i>LADY COUNCILLOR</i>	<i>Every night when it's dark</i> <i>And it's time to go to sleep</i> <i>I search through every cupboard</i> <i>And 'neath the bed I peep</i> <i>But I've never found a burglar there</i> <i>Be he fat or thin</i> <div style="text-align: right;">(Change from scared to saucy)</div> <i>But one day I'm hoping that my luck will be in!</i>
<i>ALL</i>	<i>Let's make it a potty, dotty song, my chums</i> <i>Let's make it potty</i> <i>'Cos we're all very dotty</i> <i>Let's make it a potty, dotty song, my chums</i> <i>To blow away the hum-drums</i>
<i>VOICE (said)</i>	Any more volunteers <div style="text-align: right;">(Man steps forward)</div>

MAN	<p><i>In President park (Change to local venue)</i></p> <p><i>Was a man with fork and spade</i></p> <p><i>He was digging up the grass</i></p> <p><i>and selling large holes he made.</i></p> <p><i>When he said that he was selling them</i></p> <p><i>I asked "Retail"</i></p> <p><i>"Of course not " he replied</i></p> <p><i>"They are going wholesale"</i></p>
ALL	<p><i>Let's sing a silly, dilly song, my pals</i></p> <p><i>Let's make it silly</i></p> <p><i>'Cos we're all very dilly</i></p> <p><i>Let's sing a silly, dilly song, my pals</i></p> <p><i>As we join with our gals</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Join hands for short dance)</i></p>
GIRL OR BOY	<p><i>I was stopped in the street by a youth rather big</i></p> <p><i>But all he wished to know of me</i></p> <p><i>was what was an IG</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(Stop to say it again, even spell)</i></p> <p><i>I pondered and I thought, but I hadn't got a clue</i></p> <p><i>"It's an Eskimo's house" he said</i></p> <p><i>"That hasn't got a loo"</i></p>
ALL	<p><i>Let's sing a snappy, happy song, Yippee!</i></p> <p><i>Let's make it snappy</i></p> <p><i>'Cos we're all very happy</i></p> <p><i>Let's sing a snappy, happy song, Yippee!</i></p> <p><i>'Cos we're so joyous you see</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>A snappy, happy song, Yippee!</i></p>
COUNCILLOR	<p><i>(After a while the elder folk are exhausted)</i></p> <p><i>Let's celebrate further elsewhere.</i></p> <p><i>(Lifting his arm up to indicate drinking. They all go leaving the children on stage playing games and dancing. Lame Boy tries to join in)</i></p>
CHILD	<p><i>Go away, how can you play with that thing (pointing to crutch)</i></p> <p><i>(Lame Boy moves off stage. Children continue playing)</i></p> <p><i>(Enter Pied Piper)</i></p>
CHILD 1	<p><i>Look there's the man who took all the rats out of town. Let's talk to</i></p>

him.

(Children surround Pied Piper)

CHILD 2 Why did the rats follow you?

PIED PIPER It was the music, special music.

CHILD 3 What did it tell them?

PIED PIPER All about the things that rats love: smells, filth, garbage, rotten food, sewers. The more they thought about it, the more the music wrapped round them and urged them to follow me.

CHILD 4 And where did they go?

PIED PIPER Into the river and were drowned.

ALL Ooh, how exciting.

ONE CHILD I wish I could have seen it.

(Pied Piper stands up, as a thought strikes him)

PIED PIPER Would you like to hear my music and let me know what you think about it as you hear it?

CHILDREN Yes please.

ONE CHILD This will be the best game yet.

PIED PIPER (Plays a few notes and children come closer to him)

Now what did you think about?

CHILD 1 (Excitedly) Cool drink

CHILD 2 (Excitedly) Ice cream

CHILD 3 (Excitedly) Cream cakes

CHILD 4 (Excitedly) Beautiful country

CHILD 5 (Excitedly) Lovely flowers

CHILD 6 (Excitedly) Happiness

ALL (Excitedly) Yes Happiness

PIED PIPER Would you like to hear some more?

ALL Yes, yes more and more and more!

PIED PIPER AND CHILDREN SONG

(Pied Piper raises pipe to lips and slowly moves off stage as children sing, lining up behind him)

CHILDREN

Lead on, our friend

To the land of delight

Where everything lovely is waiting.

Lead on.

We follow.

We follow. We follow.

LAME BOY	Wait for me, wait for me!
	(Children move off stage, music getting fainter, bright light appears from where children have gone)
	(Stage deserted for a moment)
HOUSEWIFE 1	(Enters)
	Where are the children? Clive, Mary?
	(Others enter questioning)
HOUSEWIFE 2	What's that over there? Listen to that music.
	(All shade eyes towards bright light)
HOUSEWIFE 3	I can't see clearly for the bright light, but I'm sure the children are there.
	(Shortly after there is the sound of something closing, bright light disappears abruptly. Some housewives are weeping)
HOUSEWIFE 1	I saw them then, all the children went into a cave.
CHARLADY	There's no cave on the hillside.
HOUSEWIFE 1	Not anymore!
	(All weep. Enter mayor from his house, followed by his councillors)
MAYOR	What's amiss my good people?
HOUSEWIFE	It's all your fault! That man has spirited away the children.
STALL HOLDER	And nobody knows where they've gone!
CHARLADY	(Cries out)
	My son, my son.
	(Lame boy enters dejectedly)
	What happened, my son?
LAME BOY	I was too late. The door closed before I could get to it. I had a glimpse of a wonderful place; all was good and perfect. I'm sure that my leg could have been healed there.
CHARLADY	(Advancing on Mayor)
	Yes, you wretch! It's all your fault! Why didn't you pay the Pied Piper his fee?
STALLHOLDER	Yes, you swindled him like you've swindled us and we've all been punished as our children have gone. Down with the mayor I say!
ALL	Yes, down with the mayor! Off with his head, and the councillors too!
	(Mayor and Councillors retreat before advancing townsfolk and Pied Piper enters between the two groups – all stand still)

PIED PIPER	Ah, Ah! I see that the master rat has been run to earth. Fear not, good folk, all is not lost. Fear not for your children. There is always hope in the hearts of honest men.
STALLHOLDER	But we cannot pay your fee. The mayor has whittled away our treasury and we are penniless and ashamed.
LAME BOY	Ashamed yes, but penniless – No! (Walking towards Pied Piper with box) I'll pay your fee, sir, and more if you wish.
CHARLADY	And from whom did <u>you</u> get that money? Not out of my handbag I hope!
LAME BOY	Here it is, bundles of it! I tried to tell you about it but your wouldn't listen. I found it under the Mayor's house. (Gesticulating at Mayor)
ALL	Ooh, the villain! (Gesticulating at Mayor) (Lame boy hands all the money over to the Pied Piper who takes his fee and hands back the rest to the Lame Boy)
PIED PIPER	No more than what is just. You will require the rest of this money to put the town in order. But this lad should have his reward. (He plays his pipe and during it the Lame Boy drags his crutch, tests his leg and then jumps for joy and runs around)
LAME BOY	My leg, my leg. It's healed and I am free to run, to skip, to dance!
CHARLADY	(Running towards him) My son, my son, how wonderful! Can it really be true? (Hugging him)
PIED PIPER	One more duty to perform (Pied Piper plays pipe and children return running to be reunited with their parents. After happy scene, regroup on stage) (Turning to mayor) And now you, sir! I've something in store for you. A place of retirement where you can do no more harm to this town. Go where the music bids you. Wander from town to town, seeking employment from whoever will have you. Go.
ALL	(Pointing to backdrop of distant hills) GO, GO (Pied Piper plays pipe as Mayor leaves)

(All group around boy in centre of stage)

SONG: FINALE

LAME BOY

*All my life I've been lonely
Friends have been hard to find.
Who wants to play with a cripple
Struggling far behind*

*Now the curse has fallen from me
Love and joy will be all mine.
Life has many thing to offer friends
Around now all will be fine*

CHILDREN

*Oh yes, we're gathered all around you
Honesty has played a part
Evil lost and now is vanquished
Now's the time to make a new start*

STALLHOLDERS

*Children your life's just beginning
There's much more for you ahead
Forget the past, it's behind you
Accept the challenge instead*

CHILDREN

*As life unfolds in years to come
Through school and in the world outside
We must strive and be made ready
For the remaining doors are open wide*

(Remaining cast comes on stage, rats filtering on Pied Piper)

(Mayor appears on stage with suitcase, walking left to right wearing chain of office. Councillor takes chain)

COUNCILLOR

Oh no you don't!

(Places chain around neck of Lame Boy)

The only person who deserves to wear it!

(Lame Boy adopts a regal stance and all laugh)

ALL

*Walk into the unknown future
Full of hope and full of cheer
You can make this world much better
By being strong and showing no fear*

*The future is yours
Use it wisely*

*Look ahead, the way is clear
Face its challenge
Grasp it firmly
On into life
The future is yours.*

THE END