

Dullie and the Piper

by

Vixxy Fox

“I never told anyone... quite simply because they would not have believed me.” Dullie Mouse sighed deeply. “Mon Dieu... thinking back upon it; I don’t believe me.”

The little Church Mouse dressed in his best vest and cap looked around the bar at the other patrons; all were Rats. Some were passed out, some were close to passed out, and the rest were singing some damned Rat song he’d never heard before. It was a deplorable place where one might have an ear bitten off because of a misplaced word or two.

“And you came to me because?” asked a bass voice barely discernable among the din of the bar.

Dullie turned back to the Rat sitting in the corner booth... the one who he couldn’t quite see as he carefully sat well back within the shadows. The most he was able to view was the rat’s paw, laying placidly on the clean table cloth. There was an ornate ring on each of his twisted fingers.

“I had to talk to someone, and word in the village says that you’re a good listener.”

“For a price I listen damned good,” the rat told him with a chuckle. His large beret moved slightly as he talked; but there was still no face.

Dullie had been warned against curiosity. ‘Talk all you want,’ his cousin advised him, ‘And then listen real good to what he tells you. Le Grand Papa Rat is well respected for his wisdom. He will know how to advise you. Just be sure to pay what he asks for or...’ Here his cousin made a motion across his neck with one finger. ‘Trust me... you’ll have the answer you need no matter how strange your story.’

The Rats hand turned over and the fingers made a motion that a payment should be passed over. Dullie reached into the bag next to his chair and took out a brick of cheese. “I was told you preferred sharp cheddar,” he said apologetically, “I’m sorry, but all I could manage was mild.”

“It’ll do for starters,” the Rat said gruffly. “I’m hungry... hunger makes my ears twitch and my whiskers wiggle. Pass it over and talk... I will listen while I eat, yes?”

The Mouse thunked the cheese onto the table, and pushed it over to the shadow shrouded figure. For just the briefest of moments, the Rat leaned forward and Dullie saw a wicked scar cutting across a completely white eye.

“I... I...”

“Lost it during the fight for Rue de Rogueford,” the Rat rumbled. “I headed up the resistance to humans back then. We fought with what we had... rolling pins, forks, spoons and kitchen knives.” He pulled the cheese towards himself and sat back into the shadows again. With a satisfied grunt, he bit into the cheese.

It must have been terribly hard Monsieur,” Dullie replied.

“Was rough... Oui... very rough.” The Rat talked with his mouth full and his words sounded almost as gibberish. “We lost many Rats that day, and twice as many again the following day; but we beat the villagers back and laughed at them too. Then came the Piper with his great bag’o’wind tucked under his arm. Fool Rats... and they was fools, just like this lot. They came forward and met the bastard head on... and that was a great mistake. The Piper played and they danced to death’s own music. Talk now... I’m listening.”

Dullie removed his hat and held it to his chest. He was large for a mouse, but he was still no match for a Rat of any size, and so was a bit intimidated. “It’s about...”

“Speak up, I can’t hear you,” Le Grand Papa shouted.

“It’s about...”

A drunken Rat, dressed solely in a naval pee coat, staggered close to the booth. Bowing low, he said loudly, “Gotta pee Grand Papa!” Winking at the mouse, he said, “Begg’n yor pardon o’course Gov.”

His breath stank so badly that Dullie cringed; though the Rat seemed not to notice.

Straightening slightly, he continued his staggering walk past them and through the door to the side of the booth.

“The loo’s just there mon ami,” the Rat in the shadows told him in between chewing sounds. “Talk now.”

There was the sound of retching, and Dullie felt the bile in his own stomach rising. “I... “ he tried, but the rest of his words stuck in his throat.

In a moment the door banged open again and the drunken Rat staggered out, wiping his chin and mouth.

“I thought you went for a pee, Pierce?” Le Grand Papa questioned.

“Changed my mind,” he muttered in response. He blinked a few times and then staggered back to his mates.

“He’s a Brit Rat,” the Rat in the booth said loudly, “Works the channel ferry... Brits don’t drink wine well. They should stick to small beers.” The paw reached out of the shadows and made a small back and forth shaking motion. “Continue then... you were saying?”

Dullie opened his mouth to speak, but a dull droning sound began, accompanied quickly by the shrill staccato pulse of a chanter.

“Mierde!” the Rat in the booth cursed, “Run little mouse... run like Hades has opened to swallow you! It is La Musette de cour! The Piper... he again brings us to battle!”

Standing from his place at the booth, The Rat in the floppy beret yelled to his compatriots,

“ALORS! ALORS! ALORS!”

But it was too late... the music had them and they were dancing... dancing... dancing... right out the front door of the bar.

The big rat twitched and jerked, his old frame beginning to respond to the music. He vainly attempted to run, but it was too late. Giggling like a child, he spun about and then wobbled like an off center top in a dance he could not control. “I think,” he yelled to the mouse, “It is a good day for a swim in the city’s moat. Goodbye little mouse! I hope our little chat was a help... your cheese was quite delicious.”

And with that, the bar was empty.

Dullie might have heard all that’d been spoken, but as soon as the music began, he’d stuffed his fingers into his small ears as tightly as possible... just as the kindly gentleman he’d met the day before told him he must.

That was what he so wanted to tell someone about. A human had spoken to him; and he’d understood. The man held him in the palm of one hand after the evening prayer service and gently stroked his fur with a huge finger. He’d then told him many and many a thing... and Dullie understood his every word. He had whispered, ‘I am Death’s Piper, little one... do not listen to my music or you will surely die.’

Surely no one living would ever believe a story like that.