1 The Pied Piper of Hamelin

Robert Browning

Synopsis

The Town Council of Hamelin is worried because the town is infested with rats. The Pied Piper is hired to rid the area of rodents. He plays an irresistible tune on his pipes and leads the rats into the river, where they drown. The Council refuses to pay the agreed fee, so the Piper plays on his pipes again and lures away all the children of the town, except for a crippled boy who cannot keep up with the others. The side of a mountain opens magically to admit the Piper and the children, and then closes for ever behind them. They never return to the grieving citizens of Hamelin.

Scene 1  A street in Hamelin
Characters: Townsfolk, rats, members of the Town Council
Action: The townsfolk go about their business on market day, singing songs, playing musical instruments and telling jokes, only to be interrupted by an invasion of rats, who overturn the stalls and chew at everything, before running off again. The townsfolk are furious. When several worried members of the Town Council come on, the citizens shout at them and insult them, demanding action over the rats. Someone mentions the Pied Piper and his magical abilities. The councillors agree to send for him at once.

Scene 2  A street in Hamelin
Characters: Townsfolk, soldiers, members of the Town Council, the Pied Piper
Action: It is a week later and the citizens are gathered amid the market stalls again. Stall-holders noisily try to sell their wares. The town band is practising (miming to a tape or playing actual instruments). Street performers recite poems. Soldiers from the town force are drilling clumsily. The colourfully dressed Pied Piper strolls on. He asks the way to the Town Hall. At first the assembled people pretend that they are not afraid of the rats. Then they hear the dreaded squeaking in the distance. Everyone flees, leaving the Piper alone on the stage. He shrugs and walks off.

Scene 3  A street in Hamelin
Characters: Members of the Town Council, the Pied Piper
Action: The councillors are holding a hastily-convened meeting in the street. They argue fiercely, insulting one another as the Mayor tries to establish order. The Pied Piper enters. He tells them that he has a magical method of ridding any town of vermin, and that his fee for the task will be 1000 guilders. The councillors agree eagerly and send him off to perform his task. After the Piper has left, the councillors relax and even sing a happy song to express their relief that good times are coming.
Scene 4  A street in Hamelin
Characters:  Rats, the Pied Piper
Action:  The rats are gambolling through the street, wreaking havoc, gloating over the loot they have
taken from the town, and engaged in all sorts of anti-social activities, pausing only to sing a
song of triumph. They make eager plans to torment the townsfolk even further. The Pied
Piper enters. The rats jeer at him and make threatening rushes in his direction. The Pied Piper
takes it all calmly, until he judges that it is time to act. He raises his pipes to his lips and starts
to play. At once the rats are entranced. They line up behind the Pied Piper as he leads them
in a twisting conga-line up and down the street. Finally he leads them off-stage. The sound
of a series of splashes and despairing squeaks can be heard as the rats plunge into the river.

Scene 5  A street in Hamelin
Characters:  Town Councillors, the Pied Piper
Action:  The councillors are smug and contented, congratulating one another on the departure of the
rats. They tell jokes and sing songs in a party atmosphere. The Pied Piper enters and politely
asks for his money. The attitude of the councillors changes at once. They say that times are
hard and that 1000 guilders is a lot of money. They offer the Piper 50 guilders instead. In
vain the Piper protests. The councillors order him to leave, saying that now the rats are
disposed of they have no further need of him. The Pied Piper threatens them but they ignore
him and he stalks out. The councillors laugh and sing a happy song.

Scene 6  A street in Hamelin
Characters:  The children of Hamelin, the Pied Piper
Action:  The children are happily playing and singing. The Pied Piper strides on angrily. He plays his
pipes. The children, entranced, gather round him. They laugh and joke with the Piper and
sing as he plays. The Pied Piper tells them that he is going to take them on a magical journey.
He plays his pipes again and the children form up in a line behind him. They sing and dance
as he plays on his pipes and leads them off.

Scene 7  A street in Hamelin
Characters:  Members of the Council, bandsmen, citizens, crippled boy
Action:  The councillors are under furious attack from the citizens, who are demanding to know
where their children have gone. To distract them the councillors order the band to play a tune
for everyone to sing with. The band is howled down. The crippled boy appears and everyone
is silent. He tells them of the music which seemed to promise so much and how the Piper and the other children had disappeared into the side of a mountain before he could catch up with them. There is a long silence. Someone says that the dreadful occurrence would never have happened if only the councillors had kept their promise to pay
the Pied Piper. The assembled townsfolk sing one last sad song.
15 Hiawatha

H W Longfellow

Synopsis

A young Native American boy grows to manhood and becomes a great leader of his people. He learns the lore of the forest and the languages of the birds and animals. He marries the beautiful princess Minnehaha and brings peace to his tribe.

Scene 1 The camp

Characters: People of the tribe, Nokomis, the baby Hiawatha

Action: The inhabitants of the camp celebrate the birth of the baby Hiawatha as Nokomis, his grandmother, displays him. The people of the camp celebrate in song and dance. They predict great things for Hiawatha when he grows up, and charge his mother with teaching him everything that he should know to become a great leader.

Scene 2 The forest

Characters: Nokomis, the young Hiawatha, birds and beasts of the forest

Action: Nokomis takes the young Hiawatha to meet the birds and beasts of the forest. One by one she introduces him to them and helps him to learn their language. At first Hiawatha is afraid of them, but soon he learns to trust them and become their friend. Nokomis presents him with magic mittens which will help him to crush rocks, and magic moccasins which enable him to cover great distances quickly.

Scene 3 The forest

Characters: Hiawatha, M udjekeewis, birds and beasts

Action: Hiawatha, now a young man, walks through the forest greeting the birds and beasts and asking them if they have seen his father M udjekeewis, the West Wind. He believes that many years ago M udjekeewis abandoned his wife, Hiawatha's mother. The birds and beasts are afraid of M udjekeewis and are unwilling to tell Hiawatha where he is. They try to distract Hiawatha by singing to him and telling him stories, but the young man will not be distracted. Eventually M udjekeewis makes his presence felt by stirring up a great wind. He and Hiawatha fight but eventually are reconciled. M udjekeewis tells Hiawatha to go back to his tribe and be its leader and law-giver.
Scene 4  The forest
Characters: Hiawatha, birds and beasts, Nahma, Pearl Feather
Action: Hiawatha decides to make a journey up the great lake, so he builds himself a canoe in the forest. The birds and beasts give him help and advice. At the side of the lake he is menaced by the sturgeon Nahma, but manages to defeat the creature. The birds and beasts start to flee because the spirit Pearl Feather, the bringer of disease and death is approaching. Hiawatha even overcomes Pearl Feather and brings his people freedom from disease for a while.

Scene 5  The camp
Characters: Hiawatha, Minnehaha, men and women of both tribes
Action: The people of Hiawatha's tribe are preparing a great wedding feast for him as the day for his wedding to Minnehaha of the Dakota tribe arrives. People of the Dakota tribe arrive for the ceremony but initially are hostile. People of both tribes sing war-songs and present war-dances. Then Hiawatha and Minnehaha appear. Hiawatha makes a speech in which he says that many changes are about to take place and all tribes must learn to live together in peace. The people of the Dakotas are swayed by his words and the wedding ceremony takes place.

Scene 6  The forest
Characters: Hiawatha, birds and beasts, people
Action: Years have passed. Hiawatha has been a great leader. Now that he is growing old he passes through the forest saying goodbye to the birds and beasts and the people he passes. Sadly they bid him farewell and sing songs to him. A flock of golden bees appears. Hiawatha says that this is a sign that a race of white people will be coming to the land, bringing their own religion with them, and that the great days of the tribes are over. Everyone begs him to stay, but Hiawatha says that his time, too, has come and that soon he will be departing for the islands of the blessed.

Scene 7  The camp
Characters: People, birds and beasts
Action: Hiawatha is dead and the people of many tribes and the birds and beasts of the forest have come together for one last time. People talk about the culture and civilisation that he brought to them, and the laws which he gave them. Songs are sung and speeches of farewell said before Hiawatha is carried off to his beloved forest.

Additional optional scenes
Prologue  All the people of the tribe meet to await the signal that Hiawatha, a great leader of the future, has been born. The news arrives and they rejoice.
Scene 2a  Hiawatha plays with the other children, but their mothers withdraw them, saying that Hiawatha is too great to play with them. Hiawatha experiences the loneliness of leadership.
Scene 5a  Disease has returned to the village and Minnehaha is dead. Hiawatha and the others mourn.

Scenery
General North American forest scene – trees, stream, birds, animals, etc.