

# THE COMMEDIA PIED PIPER OF HAMLIN

**A Play in One Act**

***By Lane Riosley***

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### **THE STORY**

A commedia dell'arte troupe wants to perform the story of "The Pied Piper of Hamlin." The four actors are the traditional dell'arte characters: Columbine, a common but athletic girl who is the troupe leader; Arlequin, the clever mischief-maker, Punchin, bombastic and proud of his great nose; and Rosetta, a country girl who fancies herself a lady. Their zany antics are hilarious as they try to play a multitude of roles *and* create the show's scenery, atmosphere, special effects and magic. They even try to make their own props and costumes from things they find along the road, and it looks like it!

### **THE CAST**

**COLUMBINE:** A common girl, but very good at dance and tumbling, she is the troupe leader.

**ARLEQUIN:** The mischief-maker, clever, athletic.

**PUNCHIN:** Bombastic. Proud of his great nose.

**ROSETTA:** A country girl, she fancies herself a lady.

### **THE SETTING**

Bare stage and the sets and props are brought in by the players. The Commedia dell'Arte troupe, or mountebanks, are traveling players who perform the story of "The Pied Piper of Hamlin." These players make their own props and costumes from things they find along the road, and it looks like it. Their clothes are castoff finery and everything fits into a bag and a trunk on wheels, a kind of little cart. The cart has a small barrel on the side with the words HAMLIN TOWN lettered on it. The show's scenery, atmosphere, special effects and magic are all created by the performers.

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*(AT RISE: The TROUPE enters, two women and two men: ROSETTA, the lady, she is dressed in ragged finery and affects manners; ARLEQUIN, the trickster, he wears a patched suit and peaked hat; COLUMBINE, a common girl and very clever, she is the leader, a good dancer and athlete; PUNCHIN, a bombastic, egocentric fellow with a large nose which would make wearing masks a real trick if not for the fact that it is a false nose he wears because he believes all great men have great noses. The players enter chanting, dancing and pulling their cart.)*

**COLUMBINE:** *(Steps forward, the others jingle bells to announce her. She takes a crate from on top of the cart, puts it on the floor and stands on it. She calls out loudly)* Players! Players! Players, ho! Welcome, everyone! I am Columbine! *(Players applaud)* Here is Punchin! *(He steps forward)* And Rosetta! *(She steps forward)* And Arlequin! We are here to perform a wonderful story for you!

**ALL:** Hurrah!

**COLUMBINE:** A wonderful story with lots of adventure and comedy! *(Hands pages to the players.)*

**ALL:** Hurrah! *(THEY read and cheer.)*

**COLUMBINE:** A new story to amaze and delight you!

**ALL:** Hurrah! This sounds very good! Etc.

**ROSETTA:** *(Goes to the cart and pulls out a big book.)* A story from the great book of stories!

**COLUMBINE:** A story that is NOT in the great book of stories!

**ALL:** Gasp! No! What? Etc. *(THEY all drop the pages and step away from them.)*

**ROSETTA:** *(Hugs the book protectively.)* What do you mean, Columbine?

**PUNCHIN:** *(Dramatically puts one hand on the great book, one hand on his nose.)* How could you?!

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**COLUMBINE:** Punchin, this is a wonderful story that my cousin sent me! Her troupe of players have played this story many times!

**PUNCHIN:** We never do any stories that are not in the great book!

**ARLEQUIN:** Oh! I cannot hear this! *(Pulls his hat down over his head.)*

**COLUMBINE:** Arlequin, this is a good story. *(Shows them a handful of pages.)* Rosetta, Punchin, Arlequin, listen to me! This is a very old and true story that takes place in the distant land of Germany a long time ago.

**ARLEQUIN:** Germany?

**PUNCHIN:** I don't know of any place by that name!

**ROSETTA:** I think you made it up!

**ARLEQUIN:** If this story is so wonderful then how come no one ever put it into the great book of stories?

**ROSETTA:** That's right, Arlequin! It sounds very suspicious to me!

**PUNCHIN:** What is this story about?

**COLUMBINE:** This story is about a town that hires a piper to get rid of all of its rats.

**ARLEQUIN:** Rats?

**PUNCHIN:** A piper? To get rid of rats?

**ROSETTA:** Well, there you are! Who wants to hear a story about rats?

**PUNCHIN:** Not me!

**COLUMBINE:** But there are such wonderful costumes!

**ROSETTA:** And just where did you get those costumes?

**COLUMBINE:** From my cousin.

**PUNCHIN:** In Germany? *(He laughs.)*

**ARLEQUIN:** Columbine got the costumes from her cousin, eh? Sounds very, very suspicious!

**ROSETTA:** And who is Columbine's cousin that she has costumes?

**COLUMBINE:** She is a player, like us! Look! *(Holds up costumes one at a time.)* There is a costume for a mayor and here is the Piper and the king of the rats and the fortuneteller...

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**PUNCHIN:** Shall a great actor like myself wear someone else's cast off costume?

**ROSETTA:** Wait just a minute, I like that skirt!

**ARLEQUIN:** No!

**PUNCHIN:** No!

**ROSETTA:** No?

**ARLEQUIN and PUNCHIN:** NO!

**ROSETTA:** NO!

**ARLEQUIN:** We have our reputation to uphold and we will perform no story that is not in the great and respected and wonderful book of stories!

*(HE and ROSETTA clutch the great book, and then PUNCHIN joins them.)*

**COLUMBINE:** Oh, Arlequin! None?

**ARLEQUIN:** None!

**COLUMBINE:** Punchin?

**PUNCHIN:** Never, ever!

**COLUMBINE:** Rosetta?

**ROSETTA:** If it were in the great book of stories, we would be happy to perform it. But, well, no!

**COLUMBINE:** I see. Well, there it is. You are right.

**ARLEQUIN:** We are right!

**COLUMBINE:** Of course, you are right. Let me just take the great book and see what other story we can perform today. *(Takes the book and turns her back.)* I will look for another story. *(While the others silently congratulate each other, she jams the loose pages into the center of the book and turns around.)* Oh! Well! What do you know? I'm such a silly person! Here is the very story right in the middle of the book and we all missed it!

**PUNCHIN:** What? *(THEY all crowd around the book.)* She's right!

**ARLEQUIN:** We did all miss it!

**COLUMBINE:** Who knew?

**ARLEQUIN:** Isn't that a coincidence?

**COLUMBINE:** Well, now that we have found the story in the book, let's begin!

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