

THE SONG OF THE RAT—A BALLAD

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

(Translated from Faust, Scene 5.)

Once upon a time a rat,
Kitchen-bred on cheese and fat
(Till his paunch had swollen smoother
Than its counterpart on Luther),
Having carelessly mistook
Poison set out by the cook
For his dessert, took to his feet,
As if he had been in heat!

All about the house he scurried,
Back and forth; he scratched and worried
Furniture in his despair,
Bristled and begrimed his hair—
Still, despite such desperate flurry,
Nothing could allay his fury!
Pranksters, sneering, would repeat:
'This poor rat is sure in heat!'

Hiding in a furnace, there he
Thought he would find sanctuary.
But, alas! he was mistaken,
And was cooked to rodent bacon!
Hans, the cook, sans penitence,
Rather, joked at his expense,
Quipping, 'Such a tasty treat!—
'Now this bugger is in heat!'

—Translated by Eric Martin

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