

Henry Schmidt: A Tosher's Tale

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. VICTORIAN LONDON - DAY

From above, smog envelops the dirty buildings.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Victorian London. What image does
it conjure...?

COBBLED STREET

High society MEN stroll by with their top hats and canes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Aristocrats with their splendour
and grandeur?

A peasant CHILD sneaks up behind and picks the pocket of one
of the men.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Maybe scrooge? Twist? Creations
from Dickens. How about Sweeney and
his psychopath killin's.

The men walk past a dark alleyway, one of them is SNATCHED by
a FIGURE and dragged into the shadows. He SCREAMS as a knife
slashes his throat.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
But like a heart, another story beats,
deep down under the old cobbled streets.

We move below the street into...

INT. SEWER TUNNEL

Brick built and just big enough for a man to pass through.
Water drips from the curved ceiling into the water below.

HENRY SCHMIDT (40's) wades in the knee-high sewage in peasant
clothes, his sinister grin shows a few teeth short of a full set.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
This is the untold story of Henry
Schmidt. Whose fortune was made by
sifting through shit.

Henry holds a large circular sieve to a small outflow pipe, catches the flowing sewage. He uses his free hand to push the sewage through the small holes of the sieve.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 you would be shrewd to think there must
 be another way. But wading through piss
 made him six shillings a day.

Henry pulls a coin from the sieve; wipes it clean on his clothes and grins as he sees the shine of the shilling.

Henry makes his way further down the sewer tunnel.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 To put that in terms you might
 understand, it's equivalent to a
 salary of twenty-five grand!

Henry spots something at the sewer edge, he picks up a long thin cylindrical object. He cleans it on his clothes - a penny whistle.

Henry tucks it into his trousers. Up ahead, daylight shines from a grate to the street above.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 But life in slop was not always
 sublime, for entering the sewers
 was a punishable crime.

Henry walks beneath the grate into the stream daylight. A SNITCH peers down through the grate - her eyes light up as she sees Henry.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The beggars and strumpets would
 peer down to see, poor Henry
 Schmidt up to his ballocks in wee.

EXT. STREET ABOVE GRATE

The Snitch stands, cups her hands around her mouth.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 They'd put their hands to their
 mouth and shout--

SNITCH
 --Hey copper! There's a man down
 'ere who's actin' improper.

EXT. STREET ABOVE GRATE - MOMENTS LATER

Two POLICEMEN drag a wet and filthy Henry from out of the grate. One of the officers hands the Snitch some coin.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
To avoid another night down at the nick,
smart Henry Schmidt developed a trick.

INT. SEWER JUNCTION - DAY

A larger area, four smaller tunnels lead off.

On a dry brick bank, Henry lays out the pelt of a dark black pig - It's hollowed out head and legs still attached.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
He donned the skin of a pig, all
covered in gristle...

Henry throws the pelt over him, the pigs head over his, he holds on to the feet with one hand, with the other he pulls out his penny whistle.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
And to his mouth he brought the old
penny whistle.

Henry brings it to his mouth; blows into it to produce an eerie note.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Like a Scotsman with the pipes, he blew
a melancholy tone, and the snitches
peered down with faces of stone.

Faces of onlookers appear above the grate.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The stage was set, audience
anticipation alight. Step forward,
beast, enter stage right.

Henry strides beneath the grate, spreads his arms wide.

EXT. STREET ABOVE GRATE

Gasps from the onlookers.

THROUGH GRATE

As down below a beastly black hog thrashes around with a GRUNT and a GNARL.

BACK TO SCENE

SCREAMS from the onlookers, they flee in terror.

INT. SEWER

Henry looks up to the grate, no one there. He throws off his hog coat with a hearty chuckle.

Beat.

Composing himself, Henry retrieves his sieve from the side and begins sifting through the sewage.

INT. TAVERN - DAY

Bustling, crowded with DRUNKARDS and PROSTITUTES - The lowest of the London classes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
From gossip and tales, a legend
would grow...

A large CROWD gather around a table as a SCRUFFY MAN tells them a tale. He pretends to play a penny whistle.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
...Of an army of bovine born from a
terrible sow.

Scruffy Man pulls his best pig face impression and snorts manically - The onlookers gasp.

INT. SEWER TUNNEL - DAY

Henry wades through the sewage. Up ahead, light shines through a grate, highlighting the shadows of people up above looking down into the sewer.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
With his creation, Henry was over
the moon. For he could elicit
terror with a sinister tune.

Henry puts the penny whistle to his lips, plays a melancholy tone.

SCREAMS from the onlookers above, their shadows disappear as they flee.

Henry chuckles to himself, he strolls past the grate, confident no one will see him.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 But with gears in motion, cause and effect would reach the deep. For whatever a man sows, this he will reap.

INT. TAVERN - DAY

Two SHIFTY MEN chug tankards of ale, one places a PENNY DREADFUL on the bar.

ON PENNY DREADFUL: The cover depicts a horror cartoon of a large black pig under the title "*The Black Swine of London*"

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Rampant fear of the "beast down below", provoked fools to seek out the malevolent sow.

One of the men pulls a pistol from under his patchwork jacket, shows it to the other. They exchange a grin.

INT. SEWER TUNNEL

The Shifty Men carefully traverse the sewer.

Henry, dressed in his pig outfit, rounds a corner in front of the men- stops short as one of the men point the pistol at him.

Henry turns, struggles through the sewage-- BANG.

Henry drops face first into the sewage. Floats.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Poor old Henry Schmidt was killed where he stood...

One of the men trudge to Henry's body, turn him over- his face drops as he sees Henry is human.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 ...so, heed this warning! one can be too clever, for one's own good.

It dawns on the men- murder. They hasten out of the sewer.

FADE OUT.