

“SLEEP FOREVER YOU DIRTY RAT!”

FRIDAY EVENING SUMMER, CIRCA 1960: The evening is moving so slowly, I polished the stainless steel sink and every dark brown glass apothecary bottle on the shelves at Nicastro's Pharmacy. Joe Nicastro just remarked that we have had only two customers in the last hour. Joe says to me, "How about cleaning the inside of my new car for me, the outside was cleaned earlier today." I am happy to have something to do. And to sit behind the wheel of a beautiful black Ford Galaxy hardtop convertible and fantasize, is even a bigger treat. About thirty minutes later just as I finish Turtle Waxing the dashboard, I notice Joann Robey walking diagonally across 24th and Indiana from Benny's Grocery Store. I took my eye off her for a split second and suddenly she let out an extremely loud scream and frantically stops in the middle of the street. I lean my head out the window knocking my eyeglasses on my lap. I see this very large animal dart across the street toward the 2900 block of 24th Street. My first thought is that her scream is from the dog biting her. At this point Joe Nicastro comes running out of his pharmacy and shouts, "It's a rat!" Joann is still standing in the middle of the street frozen stiff and I decide to stay in the car. I can see Virgil Procaccino and his father Tony through the window of the car. Tony is carrying a shovel twice his size and chasing after the huge sewer rat. Tony smashes the shovel down several times to hit the rat, but his attempts are in vain. Virgil, in his blue cord suit looking like an ad for Esquire magazine, is standing on the steps of the pharmacy with Joe Nicastro and Eddie Trignani. Johnny Peditto who was sitting on his porch gets his garden hose, turns on the water, and aims it at the rat. The water grazes the rat and it scurries for the sewer. I get out of the car and Joann finally moves from the middle of the street. A crowd begins to gather on the street corners. The remainder of the Procaccino family, the mother Frances, the daughters Joanne,

Diane, Rita and Linda, are all watching from their porch. On the corner of 24th street outside of Dr. Madonnas office are the Doctor, John Cenci, Domenic Mateo, Edith Montone and her daughter Arlene. Lucille "Olive Oil" DiSantis and her side kick Evelyn, are laughing and joking with Petchy as he shouts to me, "Aaron, what did you do scare the rat?" Horn, standing on the pharmacy steps chimes in with, "You're right Petch! He took one look at his face and decided to go home." All the guys are now laughing. Now I have to defend myself. "It wasn't my face that scared him away it was the playing of Ernie Gallo's accordion!" More people are coming from all directions and the corners are crowded with neighborhood people apparently attracted by the loud scream of Joann. Margie Santone is talking to Frances Marino who is with her son Joe, and sister Micky. In an instant the mood of the crowd changes as Joanne Trignani lets out a huge scream followed by Sheila Cutillo who shouts, "The rats back!" The entire crowd starts to retreat as the rat resurfaces and makes a mad dash for the middle of the intersection then turns and runs toward the pharmacy. Even the guys on the steps shout and step inside the store. The men start back in action: Tony with his shovel, Blue White with his large rake and Vince DiPiero with a broom. They begin to chase the rat and corner him near the house next to the pharmacy on 24th street side. The rat jumps into the hedges surrounding the small lawn of the house. The hedges are thick and the rat cannot be seen. Everyone is keeping a good distance away from the hedges. I think to myself this has developed into a real dilemma! Most of the guys begin to make suggestions about what to do to get the rat to surface. Vinny Chang and Dewey Q suggest that Dooner use his foot as bait! Everyone laughs and Sal Davino is held by Tac, who makes a move like he is going to feed him to the rat, but lets him go. The situation has

lightened up a bit since the rat resurfaced, but no viable solutions have been rendered on how to catch this rat. Freddy Chiralanza suggests using water to flush the rat out of the hedges. John Peditto uses his hose to try and flush the rat out, but this doesn't work. It is now starting to get dark and Olive Oil says, "I hope they get this rat or else I won't be able to sleep tonight!" Someone shouts from the crowd, "Call the SPCA!" Then Jules Cappriotti comes across the street and says, "How about if I get some provolone cheese?" Everybody laughs and Joe Nicastro says, "We don't even know if the rat is Italian!" There is more laughter from the crowd. Then Joe looks at me and says, "I have an idea!" He quickly walks into his pharmacy and disappears behind the counter in the back of the store. Joe returns in a few minutes with one of the shiny brown apothecary bottles in his hand. He motions to every one to back off from near the hedges, he reaches into his pants' back pocket and pulls out a clean white handkerchief, puts it over his mouth and cautiously uncaps the bottle. He begins to walk along the pavement in front of the hedges and begins to pour the liquid over the top of bushes. Saying as he walks and pours, "Sleep forever! You dirty rat!" Those of us who are not too far away can smell this sort of sweet aroma in the air. Joe walks away from the hedges after capping the bottle. I ask him what is the liquid. He turns around to me and shows me the label. It reads "Chloroform!" Within a few minutes there is stirring in the hedges and everyone near the hedges backs off. The rat emerges from the hedges crawling very slowly. At this point Tony hits it with the shovel and Joe kicks it. The rat rolls up against the maroon tile of the pharmacy wall and lies over on its back. The crowd cheers and Vince sweeps the rat onto Tony's shovel and he throws it down the sewer. Dewey Q makes a remark, "This should be a lesson to any rat rodent or human don't mess with our neighborhood!"