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Opening extract from

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

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I could still play my penny whistle, I could still beg. My leg — or perhaps my crutch I should say — helped a bit too. Some days, a few of the townspeople seemed to take pity on me as they passed me by, and I'd get quite a few coins dropped in my hat, enough sometimes to buy myself a bread roll and even a bit of cheese too, if I was really lucky. In spite of everything, I was all right.

But then came the rats — not just a few. No, this was a plague. Like locusts, they ate everything in their path, and there were hundreds of them, then before we knew it, thousands, then tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands. The Mayor and his corporation did nothing about it, nothing whatsoever. It shouldn't have been a surprise to them, nor to any of us, not with the huge mountains of rubbish piling up around the town. I mean, rats and rubbish — they go together, don't they?



Of course we all knew that. We were used to rats. After all, we lived where they lived, in and around the rubbish tips. We ate what they did, and we ate them too — when we could catch them, that is. The trouble was that quite suddenly these rats weren't like normal rats any more. They were massive, as big as cats some of them, honestly. And they were everywhere, running all over us while we slept, eating up every scrap of food on the rubbish tips, so that there was scarcely a thing left for us. Worse still, these giant rats were beginning to attack us. A cornered rat will always go for you, but these were hunting now, in packs. They had a dangerous look in their eyes, and we knew what it meant. We knew that they would kill us if they could.

Soon they had chased us out of our shacks, out of our shanty town, and off the rubbish tips altogether. We had nowhere else to run to, but

