

# Plague

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*This story is about a man who goes back in time to a small village that is about to be over taken by the Black Plague that hit Europe in the mid-thirteen-hundreds.*

*He meets his 'distant relatives' and keeps his family alive.*

*please read it, and comment*

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# 1 - Arrival

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, I arrived in the small village chosen to help us in our investigations. The year was 1348, and the end of spring was coming to make room for summer. I was there to study the horrid disease that was plaguing the people at that time. I was chosen for this escapade after some extensive research was done on me and my colleagues; I am immune to this horrible pestilence.

I reached this doomed village not long after sunrise, and as I entered, everything seemed normal enough. This day was chosen for my adventure to begin because it was the first day that the plague arrived in this particular area. In order to gather the information I needed, I had to be there to see the entire course of the disease. It was also very necessary that I was accepted by these people, even though I couldn't let them find out where I was really from and my true purpose.

My first order of business was to find the doctor of this town and position myself with him. I found his residence easily enough, and knocked carefully on the bare door.

Hello, he said plainly, as he opened the door and look up at me, can I help you with something?

Good day sir. I believe you can help me. I am a doctor from a small town to the north and was wondering if there was anywhere in this little village that I could stay.

Yes, well, come in please. I entered his small house and he led me to a table where he sat down. I did the same in a wooden chair across from him.

What did you say your name was? he asked me.

I didn't, but it's Ackerman. Shey Ackerman.

Shey. Well yes, you said that you needed a place to stay?

Yes, but I realize that I should find an inn keeper and find a temporary place there. Although, I haven't got much money and nothing really to give. We talked for a bit, about my journey and arriving upon this village.

If you would like, I have some room to spare here, that my brother used to live in with his family, but his wife's parents recently passed away from old age and he moved into their home with his family. You are welcome to stay here.

That is very generous of you, although I have nothing that I can give you in return. I adjusted my bag on my shoulder, the contents of which could not be revealed until the most opportune moment. After eyeing my bag he said, You say you are a doctor, would you care to help me treat our people here in exchange for your stay? I nearly jumped with excitement, but firmly held myself to my chair and calmly

replied, I'd be glad to. I shook his hand and he showed me where I would be staying. It wasn't exactly another house than his, more like a second room in his home. It was small, but this was a very important part of my plan. I thanked the doctor again and he left to answer another knocking on his door. Unlike mine, this knocking was frantic. I heard his door open and then shut again, and then another voice aside from the doctor's. It was a worried voice, speaking fast, with much anxiety. I went to the front of the house, taking my bag with me.

As I entered the room, I was surprised to see a third person standing in my presence. He was a young boy, no more than ten, who seemed slightly dazed as he looked me up and down. In such a small town, even the children knew everyone else, and he knew that I wasn't from around here.

There is nothing you can do? the boy's mother asked the doctor, he cannot control his shivering, despite the warmth outside. And he is sweating at the same time. There must be something wrong with him. Her voice was nervous and she was speaking quickly.

There is, I'm just not sure what we can do about it for now. The doctor was thinking. In deep thought, he walked around his small home and moved something small from in front of a window. As he stepped from the window, the light shone suddenly upon the boy's face. He quickly covered his eyes, and jumped behind his mother. I quietly stepped around her, trying to see the boy. Nothing the doctor had said had scared him. The light had done it. The wonderful spring sun made this boy's head hurt, another sign of the plague: intolerance to light. I found myself kneeling and the boy's eyes peering straight into mine, as he had moved his hands slowly and carefully from his face.

Who are you? he asked me with the inquisitiveness of any small child.

You can call me Shey, I told him, I'm a doctor too. He looked at me harder still, puzzled. The doctor said, This is Shey Ackerman. He's from a small village in the north and is going to help me with the sick

people here! He's very nice. I stood up and broke the boy's gaze, only to meet his mother's. She looked at me the same way the young child had, only for a second, as though bewildered, but then quickly asked me, "Do you know of anything to help Josh?" I looked down again at the boy, and told his scared mother, "I'm sorry, I don't know what is wrong with your boy. I'm sure it's nothing serious, I quickly glanced at my bag which I had placed on the floor, but take him home and let him rest. Maybe he has simply been playing too much in the sun, the heat can do that to you." She nodded at me, and thanked the doctor and I. She took Josh by the hand and they walked out of the house.

I watched them walk out, thinking to myself. This was the boy that I was here for. This was the boy who would give his entire village this horrid yet inevitable pestilence.

## 2 - "It's the Plague"

After Josh and his mother left, I was talking again with the doctor. You really don't know what is wrong with this boy? Has anyone ever come to you with these same symptoms before?

No. I haven't seen anything like this personally. Although recently I have been a bit paranoid. I received a letter from a close friend the other day, saying that a horrid sickness had reached her village. She didn't describe it to me, and when I sent her a letter in response, she never wrote another return one. I fear that the worst has come to her. But you seemed to know what to do with the child. How?

I usually work with things that can be cured by herbs, the people in the village I am from don't get very sick most of the time. And there are many doctors there, so sometimes I didn't even catch a glimpse of some patients.

Of course& I told the mother to bring the boy-

Josh

-yes, Josh. I told her to bring him back if he became worse.

Good. We should probably keep an eye on him. But it's getting late, and I had a very long journey. Thank you again for your hospitality, I think I'll retire to my room.

Alright, good night to you. I walked back to my room with my bag over my shoulder. I sat down on a small cot that lay along one wall and took up half of the room. There was also a small table with a candle on it in the corner, and a chair that the doctor had brought in for me in case I needed space to work. And I did. I made sure the door was closed to my quarters and lit the candle in the desk. There was a small window in the room, but it wasn't letting in much light. I opened my bag carefully and took out a small pad of paper. I found a blank sheet and wrote down the symptoms that had already taken hold of the boy. I knew that the worst was to come for him, but I had to let the disease take its course, at least for the time being. After flipping through some papers I had, I quietly rearranged the things in my pack and put it under the table. I blew out the candle and put myself to sleep on the cot. As the sun went down outside my window, I could only think of when it would rise. Soon I would be brought face to face with Josh and his horrid disease once again.

I awoke to the poetic sound of a rooster's waking call. Only, it wasn't so poetic as it is in cute southern movie from back home. It made me jump, and I quickly got to my feet and instinctively checked my bag. It hadn't moved or been moved, and my heart began to slow to a normal pace. I walked out of my room and into the doctor's place. He was there, talking with a man who had broken his toe while plowing fields.

&so take this and tell your wife that I send my regards. Good day, Trevor. Oh, good morning Shey, the doctor said to me as Trevor waved and walked out of the house.

Good day. You usually have people visiting you all during the day? He gave a quick chuckle, Yes, even when they are not sick! This village is a very open place, everyone knows everyone. You will be picked out as a visitor very quickly! Even Josh could tell that you were a new comer.

Josh, has he come back yet?

I told his mother to bring him only if things became worse, we may not see him again so soon.

Oh, of course, yes.

Would you care for some food?

That d be wonderful, thank you. He handed me some bread and vegetables which I ate readily and thanked him once again for.

Would you like some chicken? he offered. I nearly choked on my bread, but then caught myself, and had to remember that these people had no idea of the horrible things that chickens would eventually bring to our world. I then laughed to myself, thinking of how foolish I had been.



Please, I said. I hadn't eaten chicken in a very, very long time. After the rise of the Avian flu, no one had eaten any birds in years. But those years were not to come for a while. I knew that I would be fine.

I finished off the food he gave me and asked the doctor what he normally did throughout the day.

I have to be here most of the time, to care for those that come seeking help. But we don't have to both be here. If you'd like, you can take a walk down to the village center and buy some more fruit for when lunch arrives. Of course, the doctor loved food and I could tell. He was a bit large, and reminded me of a friend who I hadn't seen in quite some time. I told him that I'd love to run to the market. He gave me some money and pointed me off, said it was only about a moment's walk away.

I started off down the road, and soaked up the sights of the village. The houses were so small and the people were all busy. Adults worked as the children played around their feet. The laughter was wonderful, and purely innocent. It almost hurt me to know that most of them wouldn't last much longer, but I couldn't change that. I had to let things take their course. I knew the outcome and couldn't change history if I didn't want to destroy the future.

I came to the center of the village and there were people bustling about around me. A young boy came right up to me and said, hey mister, who are you? The boy must have been about 13, but obviously thought he was older. He came across to me as a boy who could get in trouble, as he was acting all giddy and was sweaty from playing around with his friends outside.

My name is Shey, and I'm a doctor staying with your doctor up the road there. I pointed towards the

direction I had come in.

You're the new doctor! Oh, my mother told me about you, said you're pretty nice.

I only arrived yesterday, am I that well known already? What's your name?

I'm Jackson. Jackson William Cartwright. I was very puzzled. I had been sure that Josh was the boy. Could this be him? He was too old. Could I have made a mistake? This young man wasn't showing symptoms like Josh had been&

Nice to meet you Jackson William Cartwright, may I ask how your mother heard about me?

You met her yesterday, when she took my kid brother to the doctor's house. Of course! This was Josh's older brother. I sighed, as, in my mind, pieces of my plan slowly fell back into place. I needed to find out more about this family.

Of course, good to meet you. How is Josh now?

Not so good, but mind you, he's a little faker. He was complaining this morning that his head, back and

arms hurt. That little whiner. He mimicked his brother, and I was taken aback at the site of this boy's tongue. There was a white coating- a sign of the Black Plague. I hid my excitement and inquired of the boy, Where do you live? I'd like to check on your brother, please show me. Jackson told his friends he'd be back, and started walking away. He called me along. We started down the road that I had come from. We passed the same houses and we were nearly to the doctor's home where I had started when Jackson turned left down a small road that I hadn't noticed on my way to the village center. He turned to the second small house on the right and walked inside.

Mother! he called as he entered the home. A man carrying a young girl walked into the room.

Your mother is in the bed with Josh. He is feeling even worse now Jackson, what are you doing at home.

This is Shey, the new doctor. He wanted to check on Josh and I ran into him at the village center when I was with Maxwell and Thomas.

Good day doctor, you saw my son yesterday, did you not?

Yes, he and your wife came to the doctor's house that I'm staying at.

Thank you for seeing him, you are welcome here any time.

Thank you sir, may I see Josh now? To check on him? The man nodded, and Jackson started to leave the house to rejoin Maxwell and Thomas in the village center. I almost stopped him, but I had to let the disease take its course on him as well. I knew it was starting to develop, thanks to his sweating, giddiness and the white coating on his tongue. I turned away from Jackson and followed Josh's father, who was still carrying Josh's sister, into the room where Josh was laying on a bed. His mother was sitting with him and whispering to him, trying to sooth him. Jackson mustn't have seen his brother recently, as he was most definitely not faking this. I walked up to the bed and his mother stood up.

Shey, good day.

Good day to you too. Is Josh feeling any different?

He's been complaining of more pains, in his head, arms and his back too. And his armpits, his groin, and neck, he's been saying they hurt. I've had him lying here since yesterday. He got up once because he was going to be sick, so I led him outside and he began vomiting. Can you please help us? As I said yesterday, I'm not sure what is wrong with your son, I knelt down by him, and his brilliant green eyes had less shine than those of the children I had seen in the streets. He asked me, after coughing a few times, am I going to be okay, doctor? I looked at him and whispered so that only he could hear, Tell you what. Let me come and see you everyday. Let me talk to you and you tell me how you feel. You should be okay. He nodded, and I rose and looked at his worried parents.

I'm not sure what's going to happen. Let me go and talk to the doctor and see if he has any ideas for now.

Alright, thank you. I left the house, and took the same route that Jackson had directed me upon to get back to the doctor's house. I opened the door and saw him reading a book at his table. Hello again, he exclaimed as he saw me enter, didn't you find the market okay?

Yes, I found it. But then I was found by Josh's brother, you remember, the boy who was here yesterday? He nodded, so I continued. I asked him how his brother was doing and he told me that he was in pain. I had him bring me to their house and I saw Josh and talked to his mother. The boy is only getting worse. He has been vomiting, and complaining of pains all over his body. He looked at me and slowly closed his book. I looked at the book, only it wasn't a book it was a journal with the name Christina on the cover. He saw me looking at it and sensed my curiosity. He looked down at the book and back up at me. It's a journal, he said, It belonged to my friend that I told you had sent me a letter recently. I got this today from her sister. Christina died the day after she sent my letter. I looked at him and he saw that I was still confused. She sent me this because Christina was my best friend. And Shey, she died of the Plague. What you are describing to me is the Plague.

### 3 - A Small Resistance...

Do you know what to do about it? I had heard of the Plague through my travels, but&

This child has the plague&and you&you gave it to him. The doctor was in tears now, and had gotten up from his chair. The day that I arrived, he had looked up to me, as I was taller. But now I felt considerably insignificant.

No. I didn't.

You must have! You came from a village in the distance, and the Plague hadn't stricken our village until you arrived. He began to approach me.

No. I told you, I came from a village to the north. We haven't been hit by the Plague there. It's south of here, and it IS moving, but I did not bring it upon you. I stood up taller, standing my ground. He walked right up to me and grabbed me. I tried to get away, and realized that he was holding me and crying, he wasn't attacking me.

I'm sorry, he said between sobs, I know you didn't bring the Plague. My mind is simply blaming you

for my lost Christina. The Plague is a horrible thing.

It is. Let me go to the next town and try to figure out what we can do. I had with me things that could help the plague, but I couldn't use these. I had to use what the other villages were using.

Yes, go. I'll take care of the boy.

Mind you, his brother is sick too. They share some of the same symptoms, so treat them both.

Yes. You go to the next town, it's about one day to get there and back. Find the doctor there and tell them that you need to know what to do about the Plague.

I will. I ran to the other room, and got my bag. I opened it and looked inside. It was still untouched. The doctor told me where to go, and I set out right away.

I walked for hours, until my legs couldn't carry me any further. I came to a large hill and once I reached the top, I bent over and had to rest to catch my breath. As I lifted my head slowly I finally saw the village. I had made it. I looked along the road and saw a sign between the village and me. I walked to the sign. It read: DO NOT ENTER. QUARANTINED. I dropped to my knees. I had come this far and would not be able to get in. My mind was racing. I know that I already knew things that could be done but I had to follow the plan. My mission was to observe but I still had to be convincing. I stared at the sign and the village with hatred and frustration brewing inside me. I couldn't stop here at this dead end. I turned my back to the village after fuming for a few moments. I walked back up the hill towards the direction I had

come in. It was well into the afternoon now, but I had no idea of what the time was exactly.

I walked along the road for a while. I had to keep my mind occupied with other thoughts. I had to keep myself thinking and walking& Ring around a rosie, a pocket full of posies. Ashes, ashes, we all fall down& I sang to myself of the Black Plague. A child's nursery rhyme, and yet, such a dark and disturbing meaning. I kept walking, chanting to myself. After some time, I arrived again at the town. I had been gone for the whole day, and it was now night. Coming upon the village was much different as it had been the last time I had done so. There was almost no bustling, and the dark arrived with the cold. I entered the village and found my way to the doctor's house. I opened the door to see Josh and his father and brother inside sitting with the doctor.

Shey, you're back. Anything from the neighboring village? I had to catch my breath as I had lost it upon seeing the state of Jackson and Josh. Jackson had the beginning of what was going to become, by the next day, a large bubo. He looked terrified and I turned to Josh. He looked horribly sick, although I could see no buboes emerging yet. The disease seemed to have been moving through Jackson a bit quicker.

&Yes, I lied, there are a few things we can do with these boys. They must bathe in human urine to help with the swellings. Wash Josh with vinegar and rose water, and have them both eat bread and vegetables; do not feed them foods of bad smells.

The doctor hurried and grabbed bread and apples that he had in his home. I helped him, and we gave them to Josh and Jackson. I pulled the father away to talk to him for a moment. I asked him, What is it that you do for a living? he looked at me puzzled, and didn't answer my question. It might help me figure out how I can help your sons. This of course, was a lie. I just need to know if he was the reason Josh and Jackson were infected.



I work in other towns, traveling from village to village selling goods. He was still puzzled as to why I might need this information. Why is that important? I couldn't tell him that he was the reason why they were sick because he would want to know how I knew. But I knew it was because he must have brought infected fleas home with him. Oriental rat fleas were how people got the plague. They would bite an infected black rat, and begin to carry the Yersinia pestis bacterium. When they then bit a human, that human would become infected. And people could then get this horrid sickness.

The father had brought home a blanket made by a woman in a town that he had stayed at recently, and the town had no knowledge that the plague was there. He was the reason for his own children's pain. And yet, he hadn't come down with it.

I brought him back to where the boys were and the doctor was feeding them the suggested food, and finding some vinegar and roses to make special water to bathe the boys in, particularly Josh.

Doctor, let him feed the boys for now, I said to the doctor and he gave the boys' father the food. The doctor stood up and walked towards me. He was going to say something, when there was another knock on his door. He and I both went to answer the knocking. The doctor opened the door and a man stood there. He was short, and he was losing some of his hair. He looked up at the doctor and I, and said 'Your village has the Plague.' He said it so matter-of-factly, that I had nothing to say in return. I turned to the doctor who looked as bewildered as myself.

I am from a town near here, and looking in your windows I noticed that you have some boys in this house that have fallen to the plague.

We do, actually, what can you do about it? this man was not going to be treated very nicely, as he had been peeking in our windows! He glared at me, but said the he knew what to do.

What is that? asked the doctor, pointing to a giant, bird-like mask that the man was carrying with him. He was also carrying a large bag.

It keeps the bad smells away, the doctor looked at him puzzled, and I played along. The plague is caused by bad smells. I m a doctor, and this mask lets me treat my patients without getting myself sick. There are herbs in this bag that I put in the mask and they protect me. He began to put the mask on.

What is your name, doctor ? I inquired of the small man.

Wright, he said, walking into the house under my arm that was holding open the door. I turned around and watched him approach the boys. What are you doing to cure them? he asked me.

We re feeding them good foods, and not foods that smell bad. We re going to bathe them in rose and

vinegar water and-

Good, good. Those are all good things. This one, he said, pointing to Jackson, we're going to need leeches. Jackson looked at his father in utter terror, and his father looked up at the doctor and I with the same look.

It's okay, leeches will help, I told them, Wright knows what he's doing. I was very suspicious of this character, but leeches were something that was used to help the disease. I knew that it wasn't going to help the children, but it was a method that was used to try and cure the Plague. I also knew that Wright's mask wouldn't help him, but I let things go along. I turned to the doctor, you think we should let him help us? He seems to know what he's doing.

Yes, let him help. We need it. He walked up to Wright who was examining the boys and watched him closely. I watched the whole room. The boys were both filled with anxiety and didn't know how to react to this new man, poking and prodding them. Their father looked like he really didn't want to be there.

We can watch the boys if you'd like, I told him, if you'd like to tell your wife what's going on. I figured that he might want to inform her of the latest news. He nodded, and said to Josh and Jackson, I'm going to go and see your mother and Anna. You'll be okay here with the doctor and Shey, he'll take care of you. Josh pleaded, but Jackson told Josh things would be okay, and their father turned to me and nodded. He walked out of the house to break the horrid news.

We re going to have to quarantine these boys, Wright said to me.

We can t! They re only kids! the doctor exclaimed.

Isn t it too late anyway? I asked, I m sure that others in this town have already caught it, shouldn t we try to help them? Wright looked at me as though I was a madman.

Are you crazy? All those who are sick MUST be quarantined! Do you want to get sick? Do you want your families to get sick?

No, I replied, feeling slightly defeated. I looked down at Josh and knew that I had to do something; I couldn t let these boys be quarantined. They were only children&I knew that I shouldn t be interfering this much, but the site of the two of them made it hard for me to think clearly.

The doctor and I watched as Wright did what he could for the children. He gave them more fruits and bread, and washed them with more rose and vinegar water. The doctor and I tried to help, but I still felt helpless. This wasn t going to anything, and I was more concerned about Jackson. I knew of Josh s fate, but had no idea there had ever been a Jackson. Or an Anna, the boys younger sister.

I think I'm going to go and check on their parents and sister, and make sure that they're doing alright, I told the doctor. I looked at Josh, and got up and walked out the door.

News of the Plague had obviously spread rapidly throughout such a small village. There were no more children playing in the street, and the adults were bustling around, worried and anxious. I found the road to the Cartwright's home and continued down, walking slowly and thinking to myself about how horrible things were for the town, and the plague had only just arrived. Chances were that this sickness was going to take at least half of them, and quarantine was one of the only good ideas that Wright had had, but to quarantine those children? It seemed so utterly cruel. There had to be another solution & I had one, but I knew that it wasn't something that I should do. It was for emergencies only, and even though this seemed like an emergency, I had to let the disease take its toll.

I arrived at the house and knocked carefully on the large door. Josh's mother answered it, and she was holding Anna, who was crying. She had to be only a year at the most. Was she to be struck by this disease too?

Shey! How are Josh and Jackson?

They're alright, another doctor from a near-by town arrived this morning and is helping take care of the boys & certainly your husband told you that?

Jack? He's not here. Isn't he with you at the doctor's place? I looked at her then at Anna and my mind was racing. Had Jack abandoned his family? How did he know to leave? Was he running from the Plague?

He was going to come back here and check on you and Anna. I was coming to make sure you were all okay. She looked at me like I had just slapped her. She adjusted Anna on her hip, who had stopped crying by now. She must have been beyond tears. She was silent for a few moments, then said to me, He's gone. He left. How sick are the boys?

They've both got the Plague. I am so sorry. Wright said-

Wright?

He's the doctor that arrived this morning. He said that we should quarantine them because the whole village could get it and-

No! You're not quarantining my only boys, no! There has to be another way. I looked at her and could tell there wasn't any way we were going to be able to take Josh and Jackson away from her. Of course, the only other idea that I had was impossible. But she was a mother whose husband had just left and her two sons had just been stricken by the Plague, practically a kiss of death.

This, I decided, was an emergency.

I can do something. But you have to trust me. You have to really, really trust me. She was patting Anna on the back and stopped when I said this. She looked at me as she had when she met me, with as much inquisitiveness as Josh had had when he recognized me. The look was gone from her eyes as quickly as it had appeared, and she said, Yes. I trust you. I could tell that she meant it.

I&, I started, First off, I can't do anything for your sons, but I can help you. The tears finally came to her eyes.

Why can you not help them?

They have already been hit by the Plague, but I have something that I can give you and Anna which will keep you from getting the Plague. You can then stay with them and not have to worry. She took the idea in, her mind spinning.

Okay, she said, I trust you. I reached into my bag and pulled out a small wooden box. It had a syringe

in it. As I brought it out of the box, slowly and carefully, Josh's mother squirmed. What is that for? she asked, her voice shaking.

This is going to save you both, I told her, putting the plague vaccine into the syringe with as much precision as I could. She watched me, disturbed.

How? I couldn't blame her for her questioning me; it must have been oddly curious seeing something like a syringe and having no idea what to do.

This is a medicine. It's from where I come from.

Which is? You never told us where it is that you're from.

That doesn't matter. You trust me, right? She took a deep breath.

Yes, I do.



Put Anna on the ground for a moment. And let me see your arm. She put Anna on the floor, and Anna looked puzzled. She grabbed her mother's foot and sat there.

Now what? She extended her arm and I took rubbing alcohol out of the box too, and put some of it on her arm. Her eyes widened when she finally figured that I was going to put this needle into her arm. She jumped when I came near her.

Wait, what are you doing?!

I have to do this, trust me. It might be uncomfortable, but it'll be okay. And you can't tell anyone about this, or I'll be taken away. All I want is for your family to be alright. She looked into my eyes and realized that she couldn't deny it anymore.

You look so much like Josh. And Jack.

I know. She looked at me and relaxed her arm, letting me inject the vaccine into her arm, making her now immune. Afterwards, she looked up at me and without saying anything, reached down and picked

up Anna. She kissed her cheek and rolled up her small sleeve, exposing her tender, young arm. She held her tight, and let me go about my business. I did to Anna as I had done to her mother, and she began to cry, as children so often do.

I put the empty syringe back into the box and carefully placed it back in my bag. I closed it, and slung it over my shoulder once again.

Josh's mother quieted Anna down and after a moment, she had fallen asleep on her mother's comforting shoulder.

Let's walk back to the doctors and see everyone, I suggested. She nodded and we walked back down the road through the near-dead silent village.

## 4 - Another Taken

We arrived back at the doctor's house and it was now nearly nightfall. Josh had been showing symptoms for a few days now, and Jackson for almost as long. But Jackson's symptoms were increasing. His buboes were getting worse, and he now had some in his armpits. Josh was as sick as Jackson, but it was coming along a lot slower; he only had one bubo on his neck.

As soon as Josh and Jackson's mother saw them, she ran up and gave them both huge hugs.

No! Jackson yelled, Mom, you're going to get sick! She looked up at me.

It's okay Jackson, trust me, and she gave him another hug. I looked at the doctor and at Wright. Wright was still sitting with his mask on, and had backed away from the boys when their mother came up to them. The doctor was now wearing a mask also, which I hadn't noticed that Wright had brought with him. All of a sudden, there was a loud noise outside. I turned towards the door which had let so much devastation into this house. The doctor stood up and we both walked to door again. I opened it and looked out in horror. I had no idea this was going to happen. I guess things weren't going to go as perfectly with the plan as I had thought in the beginning. To my astonishment, outside the door stood a group of Flagellants.

Who are they? the doctor asked. I couldn't say anything. I just watched as they went through their self-punishment. It was nearly pitch black out, but it was definitely them. They whipped themselves to ruins to avoid being struck by the plague. They thought that they were being punished by God for their sins, and that if they punished themselves, God wouldn't find it necessary for them to become sick.

Are they whipping themselves? the doctor was totally taken aback. I regained my thoughts and replied, Yes. They are called Flagellants. I have heard of them before, but never witnessed their horrid actions. They are punishing themselves so as to not catch the Plague. How disturbing! He turned in disgust and walked back into the house. I took a step and found that my legs had led me towards the group. Although I was still a ways away, I could hear their cries as they whipped themselves. I turned and followed the doctor back into the house.

What was that?

Flagellants, Wright told Josh and Jackson's mother. She didn't seem to know what it meant, but wasn't about to inquire for anything more; the tone of Wright's voice told her that she wouldn't want to know.

It was nearly midnight, and everyone was tired from an exhausting day. Josh and Anna had already fallen asleep. Wright left the house to stay in a near by inn. I carried Josh back to his house with his mother carrying Anna behind me, and the doctor walking with Jackson behind them. They couldn't stay with the doctor and I, as his house was large, but not nearly large enough for all of us.

Mama& Jackson was on the verge of sleep, but still had some energy in him, where s father?

He went out to another village to sell some more things, go to bed now. Jackson nodded his head, already asleep. I put Josh in the bed with him, and said goodbye to their mother.

We ll be back in the morning, and we ll have Wright with us, if he can help.

Alright, good night. She gave me a huge hug full of gratitude for putting so much effort out to her and her children. I hugged her back, and then the doctor and I walked back to his home. Not a word was spoken between us until I reached out to open the door for him. But then he asked, are you and I doomed? The plague spreads so easily&are we done for? We had walked in the house and the light from a candle that had almost extinguished itself shone on his face. I looked at him. He was not an old man, maybe in his forties. But under the light, with all his energy drained from such a long day, he seem so old and sick.

I don t know, I told him, I just don t . He looked me in the eyes and then turned and walked to his bed. I followed suit and was asleep before I even realized I had reached my room.

I awoke the next morning, still as tired as ever, even though I had slept past the rooster s calling. I left my room and saw that the doctor was still asleep. I couldn t get back to sleep, although it must have been past nine in the morning. I decided to walk to the Cartwrights and see how the boys were.

I slowly walked to the door and opened it carefully. I stepped out onto the street and the silence was deafening. There were a few adults walking past on the other side of the road&well, more like carriage path, who were whispering to themselves. I kept walking, my hands in my pockets, again, humming to myself&. ring around the rosie&a pocket full of posies& I decided to stop at the inn that Wright was at, as I had said that I d be bringing him with me, even though I would have rather not.

Do you have a man named Wright here?

Right here? Excuse me? I rolled my eyes at the naivet of some people. As I turned, i saw him. Wright! I began towards him.

Hello, I m sorry, I can t come with you, he told me, rushing out the door. I grabbed his shoulder, and he turned to me.

Why can't you come with me? Aren't you coming to help me with those boys from yesterday?

I would, he said, walking away, but this whole village is going to be sick. It's my responsibility to help the people. All of them, not just that family. You can help them, you're a doctor, aren't you? He looked at me suspiciously.

Of course, I just know so much less than you about this plague-

You'll figure it out. He ran out the door and I saw him enter a house across the way with his bag of herbs and mask in hand. I left the inn and headed towards Josh and his family.

After a moment of walking I knocked on their door. It was a hollow, depressing noise, which I hadn't noticed before. But it could have just been my mind, as the atmosphere of the town was depressing and hollow in itself. I could hear Josh's mother walking towards the door. She opened it slowly, but when she saw it was me, she opened it quickly. I could tell something was wrong. Well, more wrong than things had been the day before. She could tell I knew something was wrong by the look on my face. The house smelt like urine, as she had taken Wright's advice and had the boys both bathe in urine. Jackson, she said, and paused, he's not doing well at all. She turned to walk towards where he and Josh lay in their bed and I followed her close behind. I stopped in front of the bed and looked down at them. I almost jumped when Anna grabbed my foot, as I had seen her do to her mother. I reached down to her and picked her up, with her mother watching me. I held her and talked to her for a moment. I knew that I had at least saved this little girl's life. Even if everything else fell apart, I would know that she would be alright after I left. I looked at her, and noticed that she had the same eyes as Josh. They were emerald green and the same as their mother's. The same as mine. I handed Anna to her mother and looked back at the boys; they were the reason I was here.

Jackson had gotten worse, as his mother said. He had buboes on his neck and his armpits, and had black blotches on his arms and legs where blood vessels broke and blood dried. Josh wasn't as bad as his brother, but he still had some buboes on his neck and was violently ill. It was so difficult to look at them and know that they might not both make it past this. I gave the boys' mother some more advice, to wash them and keep them clean, rather than to have them keep bathing in urine. I had also noticed that they were keeping their goat and two sheep inside their home. I told her to put them outside to keep the area cleaner. I helped her bring them outside and tie them.

Do you know now if they are going to be okay? she asked me as we took the animals.

I'm still not sure about Jackson, but it seems as though Josh's is already wearing off. I can't stay here much longer, I have to make sure the doctor is okay; I left him this morning asleep, I didn't want to disturb him. Make sure you take care of the boys, I'll check on you all later.

Alright, good day. I left and started the walk towards the doctor's. My feet shuffled as I walked with my head down along the street, thinking about Jackson. The Plague was taking him. And his mother had to just sit there and watch&

I arrived at the doctor's home and found him bustling about inside the house.



Doctor? he seemed to be running around looking for something. I walked up to him, he looked really anxious. As he was running, I reached out to make him calm down. When he turned, I saw a huge bubo on his neck. I must have made a disgusted face, as he cried out, I knew it. I have it now. Those boys gave it to me. And we didn't quarantine them. We could have kept this from spreading, but no. I-I-I& He collapsed on the floor in exhaustion. I helped him up, and felt that he was all sweaty. I brought him to his bed and went and got him some fruit and bread. I knew it wasn't going to help him, but I thought it might make him feel better at least.

## 5 - A Pocket Full Of Posies

I brought them in to him and realized that the disease was getting to him even faster than it was getting at Jackson. He must have been ignoring the symptoms at first, so that he could continue to care for the boys. It seemed as though he missed the first symptoms, like the pain in the back, head, and limbs, and only noticed the buboes when they were huge. He had had the disease for a few days now; he probably got it the first time Josh was in his home. I let him rest, and went into my small room. I went into my bag again, and got out my papers. I documented my findings so far, about how the disease takes its course and how the people reacted to different treatments. The surgeon general needed those reports; I had to be sure to take close care of them. But it was late, once again, and time for me to get more sleep. I checked on the doctor one last time and then walked slowly back to my bed and struggled with my thought until sleep finally took me.

I, again, awoke to the rooster in the village. The first thing I did was to check on the doctor. He was doing even worse. I had no idea the disease could come this swiftly, it had literally knocked him off his feet the day before. I grabbed some food on my way out the door to the Cartwrights again. It was early this time, but I figured the house would be awake. As I walked, I could tell that the town was pretty much doomed. The smell of death and sickness wafted out of windows. The disease only took a few days to take over and ruin a small, tight village like this one.

I came upon the Cartwrights home and saw the animals still tied outside. But the smells of destruction didn't stop when I arrived at their door. I had a horrid feeling in my gut and knocked on the door. This time Josh opened the door. His face was wet with tears and Anna was hanging on his pants leg. I could tell he was beginning to recover already. But when I looked down to him all the luster was gone in his eyes, the last bit had been diminished. He was crying again now that he saw me at the door. He opened it so that I could walk in without saying a word. Anna then ran to me, and I picked up the young, healthy girl. I heard the crying and sorrow as soon as I took a second step into the home. I carried Anna into the room that Josh brought me to. Their mother was there, and I saw Jackson on the bed. Jackson had died that morning, about an hour before I arrived.



I didn't get any good sleep that night. I woke up before the sun rose and the smell of death reached into the house and crawled into me. It stung my mouth and made my eyes water. I didn't want to leave my room, but it wouldn't have made anything better to stay, the smell was unavoidable no matter where I was.

I wandered into the room where the doctor was. Wright had left the night before, after caring for the doctor some more. I saw the doctor, who was asleep again. He would most likely never leave the bed again, it was probably going to be where he died, never to be heard from again. Someone would find him, and bring him to one of those mass graves that would soon surround the village. All these people were most definitely doomed. There were the few that couldn't carry the disease, like Josh's mother and sister and I, and Wright, I suspected, as he had been around infected people for some time and hadn't gotten it yet.

Today was most likely going to be my last day here, I planned to leave the next day to bring my report back to the surgeon general of 2049. I took a walk to Josh's home, and knocked on the door, as it seemed I did every day now. His mother answered again. The door made a groaning noise as it was opened, and she invited me inside. I walked carefully through the house again, I now even knew where the bed was that held the remaining boy. I was expecting Anna to jump on my leg, as she did. I picked her up again. Such a naive child, she had not a worry in the world. I looked at her arm, at the scar from where I had given her the vaccine. It would go away soon enough, and the vaccine would only last her a few years. But the disease would leave, and life would eventually become more normal again for those struck by the Black Death. I tried to hand Anna back to her mother, but she held my neck, giggling, like it was all a game. I smiled and adjusted her weight so that I could see Josh. He had been asleep, but then awoke to his sister's angelic laughter. He saw me there and sat up in his bed. For being a boy with such an unimaginable sickness, he certainly had a joyful disposition.

I'm feeling better now, he told me, looking up and smiling with his emerald eyes. I smiled back.

That's very good, it means you're almost well again. His mother asked him if he wanted any food, and he asked her very politely for some bread. I sat down with Josh and Anna crawled off my lap and onto the bed, playing a game with her brother's blanket. We watched her play.

My dad gave me that blanket, he told me, when he was out working. He's out working right now, and I bet he's going to bring me back even more brilliant things! I nodded, and replied, I'm sure he will. I looked at the blanket. It was orange and maroon; it was beautiful, and warm. But this had brought death to this young boy's brother. Small, insignificant fleas had been on this gift. The boy had hugged his father when he received it, and then he wrapped himself up in it. Such a wonderful childhood had now been scarred by the death of this child's older brother, and the horror of having the Plague.

I leaned over to Josh and gave him a hug. I then picked up Anna again, tickling her under the blanket.

I have to leave now Josh, I have to go back to my village, I told the young boy as I rose from the bed.

Why do you have to go? We really like you here.

I have many, many things to do back at home, and my family misses me.

You travel around for your work like my father does? I smiled at him.

Yes, I do. Bye Josh. Take care of Anna, she needs you. I handed him his baby sister, and turned to see their mother.

You have to leave now. She said more matter-of-factly than as a question.

I m afraid I do. But you re all going to be okay. I gave her a hug also and headed towards the door.

Goodbye, I said, waving at the family. As I walked out the door, I took one last look at Josh. Nearly all the luster had returned to his eyes. But they would never be as emerald as they had been; some of their shine died with his brother. But Jackson would never die in the hearts of him family. Nor in mine.

I walked along the street towards the doctor's house, my eyes stinging again. For the second or third time, I almost walked into Wright.

Where are you going? he inquired of me.

Home, I answered, not looking up from the ground, it's time for me to leave. He watched me walk away. I didn't look at him, but I could feel his eyes.

I stepped into the doctor's home, and saw him still lying in his bed. Dead or asleep, I couldn't tell. But he seemed peaceful. I whispered, Goodbye doctor, thank you for your hospitality and caring. I nodded in his direction, as though he could see me.

I walked back onto the street, up the path towards where I had come from. I continued, looking at the ground, ignoring the foul smell of death and eerie silence that floated around the outside of the village. As I walked, thinking, I hummed & ring around the rosie & a pocket full of posies & ashes, ashes & we all fall down.

