
How John Became a Hero

John ducked behind a brick wall. Getting home from school was a constant race for escaping a slow and painful death. The infected were to stay home, but from time to time they would walk outside, breathing in their last breathes of fresh air and infecting others. Passing by was a man with black toes and bluish black all the way up to his thighs. His breath seemed to stunt the flowers nearby. Limping past the brick schoolhouse, the man continued his limp-walk back to his house.

Finally, he arrived home to his humble little cottage. The disease was a silent killer which had no known cure. Once someone gets infected, coughing, headaches, bleeding, and a blackening numbness creeping up from foot to head becomes the norm. After two days, the conditions become so severe that the victim dies. John had witnessed this happen to his sister, who died three years ago.

Inside, John's parents were not doing their usual chores. He found them lying on the bed, coughing. Their feet were bluish with black toes. Immediately John's eyes filled with tears, for he knew that they would not survive the disease. Even though he loved both of his parents, he liked his father more because his father was an anthropologist.

"John, John, can you hear me?"

"Yes, father, I'm here."

"In my work, I found a map while working with others. It was made recently, and it shows the location of the cure to the-" John's father then succumbed to the coughs.

Although his father didn't finish the sentence, John knew he was talking about the cure. "Where is the map now? Let me find the cure and bring it back to you."

"Here," his father pulled out a worn sheet of papyrus with strange markings on it. "Take this and bring the cure back here. Save your village, your friends, yourself. It is your destiny."

With these last words his father crawled back under the covers and started coughing again. John took the map and studied it. It seemed to be a map of the coastline, marking an x at the middle of the map. Above the x was an inscription of a wooden bowl with a white substance inside. According to school, his village should be half a day's travel to this supposed cure.

With no time to waste, John put on his cloak and brought some bread and coins for the journey. Then he went to the rider's shop and rented a horse with the money for a day. Looking out into the ocean, John set off towards the eastern horizon. Halfway there, when the sun barely touched the horizon, John heard a faint rumbling noise. He looked behind him, and about 5 miles behind him were bandits wearing black handkerchiefs over their mouths.

John urged his horse to gallop faster. When he almost reached the town, the bandits overtook him and stole his map and bread. He barely got away by bargaining with them for his map back,

and while two of the lead bandits were arguing John quickly galloped away to avoid capture. It was dusk when he finally reached the town. Fires were being lit to provide light. Then, John went to find the mayor of the town.

“I am here to seek a cure for the killer disease,” said John.

“Welcome. Many people like you have come in search of such a panacea. This we shall give to you, as our laws command.”

He collected the cure from the local apothecary. However, it was too dark to ride back home, so he decided to stay at the town for the night. When he woke up, John felt an itch in his throat. It was the urge to cough. Soon, John was coughing out blood. In a frantic effort he pinched himself to escape from the nightmare, but to no avail. Now John decided that he had no choice but to ride back home.

Arriving at his house once again, John took off his boots and notice that his feet were turning a darkish color. Searching for his parents, John found a note pinned to the front door. It read, “We are sorry to inform you that your mother and father passed away this evening.” Frustrated, John tore the note off of the door. His only family had died, making him an orphan. He was even more afraid of dying, so in between coughs he drank the cure that he had risked his family for.

“Where can I go?” John asked himself. He couldn’t stay here, for if people found him they would try to enslave him. No, he couldn’t go back to the town, because the place served no further purpose to him. Then an idea occurred to him; What if I became a bandit? In a deteriorating society, the other side of the law became more appealing, so he might as well jump on the bandwagon with the other outlaws.

Using the horse that he failed to return, John rode to the bandit camp up north, towards the bandits that stole his bread and map. Upon reaching the camp, he met with the lead bandit and discussed his future...