

Giovanni, Jacobello, and the Plague

It was just after midnight in Florence, Italy. Giovanni moved quietly through the streets with his brother, Jacobello. They each clutched a small piece of cloth to their nose. This helped lessen the awful stench of death that filled the air. Bodies of those who had recently died from the plague were heaped together by the side of the road, waiting to be buried. Large boils covered the necks and legs of the dead.

Jacobello froze when a huge black rat crossed his path.

Giovanni patted his brother's arm. "Keep going. We must get out of Florence if we are to have any hope of surviving."

Jacobello nodded and started walking again. "But how do we know things will be better once we get home?"

"We don't," said Giovanni. "But if we're fortunate, the plague won't have made its way there yet. If our family is well, we won't allow visitors to the farm. Hopefully the plague won't touch us there."

They soon made their way to the stable where their horses were kept. The place was dark, and Giovanni didn't want to awaken the stable owner. But he didn't want to cheat the man either. He pulled a few coins from his pouch and laid them on top of the stall before he and Jacobello quietly eased their horses outside.

The brothers rode silently for many miles. After a few hours they came to their humble farmhouse.

"We can sleep in the barn so we don't wake the family," said Giovanni. They led their horses behind them. Once inside, they secured the horses in the stalls.

"We made it," said Jacobello. "It's so good to be home." He sat down in the hay.

Giovanni plopped down beside him without saying a word.

"What is wrong?" said Jacobello. "I thought you'd be happy."

Giovanni rubbed his forehead. "I am, but my head aches a bit, and I'm getting cold. I'm sure it's nothing."

"It was a long journey," said Jacobello. "Rest now. Lie down in the hay." He removed his cloak and placed it over his brother.

Giovanni slept for several hours. When he awoke, his sister, Florese, was standing over him. Jacobello was still asleep in the hay.

“It’s good to see you again. Come eat,” said Florese. “I’m sure it’s been many hours since you last had a meal.”

Giovanni struggled to his feet. His head was spinning and he felt feverish. Now his neck also ached.

Florese pulled his cloak from his shoulders. “It’s warm in the house,” she said. “You won’t need this.” She looked up at him and gasped. “What is wrong with your neck?”

Jacobello rolled over and opened his eyes. His eyes widen when he saw the apple-sized boil on his brother’s neck. He jumped up and pulled Florese away.

“Stay back,” warned Jacobello. “It is the plague.”

Questions

1. Why did Giovanni and Jacobello want to get out of Florence?
2. How did Giovanni plan to keep the plague from the farm?
3. What was the first sign that Giovanni might be ill?
4. How did Jacobello know that Giovanni had the plague?