### Viral

**Summary**

The Black Death and the Common Cold meet.

As it turns out, they really like each other.
Infection

Jack was severely wishing that he had chosen Sharon as a carrier and not a victim. Had that been the case, he would most definitely not be in this position right now.

The virus behind him tightened his grip upon Jack's throat, sharp claws digging into the membrane there, and the pale white cell whined softly in fear.

"Who are you?" it snarled at him in a raspy, underused voice. "What are you doing here?"

The young rhinovirus strain was terrified. He had no idea what this other virus was and how it operated or what its overall purpose was.

It could be the sort that hijacked other cells in order to reproduce itself! What if it mistook him for one of the cells native to Sharon? It might inject its DNA into him and use him to make copies of itself, causing him to undergo apoptosis and die; or worse than the lytic cycle, it could put him through a lysogenic cycle and keep using him over and over again to make copies, forcing him to live through it until it finally saw fit to kill him!

Without realizing it, Jack had begun trembling like an autumn leaf in fierce gale, whimpering a steady, frightened mantra of, "I don't wanna lyse, I don't wanna lyse, I don't wanna lyse..."

He suddenly heard a rough sigh behind him and the claws around his throat retracted, the brawny arm coiled around his middle pulling away. Instantly, Jack ran forward clear to the other end of the Hypothalamus Control Room, waiting until his back was pressed flat against the wall before turning to face the other cell.

What met his gaze was a virus of impressive stature, dressed in boots, breeches, and a peasant-style shirt. His membrane was a dusky golden color, shifting into a very dark shade of black at his waist-length mane which so dark a shade, in fact, it seemed to shine green. Sharp-looking eyes, similar to the virus' membrane but brighter, glimmered at him sternly from a handsome, masculine face.

"Who are you?" he repeated calmly, his voice smoother now as he took the opportunity to give it use. "What are you doing here?"

It took a moment of opening and closing his mouth like a fish out of water before he was able to actually speak. Eventually, he managed, "Jack, my...my name is Jack! I'm a rhinovirus: I just...I just came here to fuck with the temperature a little and...and y'know, cause a fever."

The other virus' stern expression softened at the information. "A common cold?" he questioned. "Then, you are no threat to me."

Jack nonetheless remained tense and pressed firmly against the wall, staring warily at the other cell for fear of apoptosis.

The virus saw this and scoffed. "You can relax, Jack," he assured. "My name is Chase. I am a bubonic plague virus: I can do you no harm."

At the virus' self-identification, red eyes went wide but from awe rather than fear. "Oh my God," Jack gaped, "you're...you're the Black Death..."

Chase cocked an eyebrow. "Yes..." he slowly confirmed.
"Holy crap, no way!" Jack squealed in glee, all fear forgotten in a second. "You're like, my idol! I've followed your whole career!"

Golden eyes blinked, surprised. "You have?"

"Of course!" Jack exclaimed. "Why wouldn't I? You're, like, the baddest virus ever! You're like AIDS but without the gross infection method and less-wussy killing style. You've got old-school class! You're totally awesome!"

Chase offered a serious gaze to the starry-eyed cell singing his praises. "I... Thank you," he replied after a moment. "It has been...a very long time since I was given praise..."

This seemed to surprise Jack. "Huh?" he less than eloquently inquired. "Why?"

Chase sighed, his face turning away from his current cellular companion for a moment. "If you have followed my career as closely as you have claimed, you know the reason why. I am dormant."

"So what?"

Startled a bit by the statement, Chase turned to the pale, white cell, making a noise of curiosity in his throat.

"Who cares if you're dormant?" Jack elaborated. "That doesn't change the stuff you've already done—which is awesome, by the way, two-thirds of Europe!—so who gives a fuck if you can't do it anymore? You're still the baddest virus ever!"

Chase let out a bitter-sounding chortle. "Yes, well...if only all cells thought like you do, Jack."

Jack frowned, staring almost apprehensively at the older virus for a long, drawn out moment. "Hey are you gonna be in Sharon for awhile?" he abruptly inquired.

Chase blinked. "I..."

"'cause if you need a place to stay," the pale cell continued, not waiting for an answer, "I've got a pretty nice setup down by the Fallopian Tubes. This body's already hit menopause, so it's pretty vacant there. There's no cops, and I've been lurking around Sharon for a couple of days already, so I know the layout and stuff if you wanna see the sights. What d'you say?" Jack entreated with a dazzling smile. "Us viruses gotta stick together, right?"

The bubonic plague considered this for a moment. In most cases, he preferred to be alone. However...he really didn't know anything about the city of Sharon, most importantly where the leukocytes of this particular woman most largely grouped.

While he loathed admitting it, being dormant not only negated his ability to infect a body, it made him vulnerable. Should so much as one white blood cell get ahold of him, he was quite literally dead.

Chase had been living since before the Renaissance and had no urge to undergo apoptosis anytime soon. If this younger virus was able to help him avoid that fate, he was all for allowing the nonlethal to drag him around a bit to at least get some lay of the body he was currently inhabiting.

Besides...Jack was clearly a fanboy of his, something he hadn't had in centuries. The ego-boost he'd surely get with this rhinovirus around might do him a bit of good.

"Very well," Chase said at last. "I will take you up on your offer. Show me the sights this body has
Jack had proven himself truthful in his promise, Chase mused to himself, sitting across from the cell at a plain but nonetheless sturdy carbon table within his home.

Jack had taken it upon himself to first of all drag the Black Death to a relatively nice retail outlet for the purpose of buying him new clothing, because medieval fashion, while all well and good, didn't quite fit in amongst the modern denizens of Sharon. He'd also insisted upon paying for what was bought, to which Chase offered no protest— he'd no proteins to exchange for the clothing, anyways.

Jack had encouraged him to pick out whatever he wished, and the Chase had eventually settled upon a more modern style of boots, a dark pair of dress slacks, and a comfy dark grey turtleneck, all of which the white cell assured him looked positively dashing. This opinion was only reaffirmed by the looks given by the various other cells in the city the two passed on the way to the Fallopian Tubes district.

It had made Chase a bit uneasy at first, the stares. He was a virus, recognizable as one (or at least he'd thought so) and the more cells that knew of his presence in this body only increased his odds of being fatally introduced to a white blood cell.

That unease had passed when a female blood cell had approached him, saying she knew his category of cell didn't really divide but was he willing to give it a shot for her?

She'd mistaken him for a neuron! Not too great a leap, he supposed, considering the length of the membrane that formed his hair (message-relaying dendrites, apparently) and his rather impressive height even for a virus (potentially making his torso a long, myelin-coated axon). If one cell in the body had made that error, chances were good that others would as well.

Apparently, it had been so long since he'd last infected a body that he was no longer recognizable by even average cells as a threat.

How sad.

Regardless, the Black Death was currently undetectable within Sharon so long as he was able to avoid contact with any leukocytes, and thanks to Jack, that would likely be no issue.

As Jack had promised, the Fallopian Tube district was now a largely deserted neighborhood in comparison to the vital center of activity it must have been when the woman was actively menstruating and bearing children every few years. With what Chase'd been told of Sharon's husband's aversion to touching her since menopause, he safely assumed the Vaginal district would likely be similar.

Very few cells took up residence in this part of town, and those that did were the seedy, less-than-reputable types, only leaving their run-down dwellings to enact their seedy, less-than-reputable transactions, whatever they may be.
Chase was positive this area in particular had been abandoned by the lymphnode's task force long ago, so he was safe here.

Jack's 'sweet setup' was essentially more of a dive, in every sense of the word: no ATP, no running hydrogen, and a distinct lack of all but the most basic and necessary carbon furniture. However, it was better than all the other houses and apartment complexes Chase had seen in the area, and at the very least, there was a solid roof to the place and none of the walls were caved in. That was a good thing.

The nutrients that were kept in stock, too; those were very good, as well.

"Do you hydrolyze glucose every night, Jack?" he found himself inquiring, watching the colorless cell engage in said activity.

Jack looked up at his guest's question, choosing (to Chase's great pleasure) to swallow his mouthful first before replying, "Yeah, pretty much. I mean, I tend to change bodies quick, so I usually end up with more stolen protein than I know what to do with. I don't stay in one place for too long, so instead of wasting it on a really nice place to live, I spend it on really high-end nutrients. You can use those no matter what body you're in, y'know?"

"Intelligent thinking," Chase complimented honestly, ingesting a bit of the meal himself. "So, what is said of your adaptability being the method of your survival is true."

"Oh, definitely," Jack agreed. "If I didn't genetically change myself just a little bit, like, every day, I'd have had a vaccine made for me by now. Gotta keep changing; keeping the humans on their toes so they can't get rid of you with a little injection, y'know?"

"Mm," the Black Death replied simply to that. "I certainly wish I was as adaptable as you are. If I had the ability to change my genetic make-up that quickly and make myself resistant to a cure as you do...well, simply put, the entire world would be reliving my glory days by now."

To Chase's confusion, the rhinovirus's cytoplasm gathered behind his cheeks, flushing the membrane there a pale-pale pink color.

"Yeah, uhm," Jack coughed awkwardly, desperately trying to think of somewhere better to guide the conversation than the implied genetic recombination (he'd only just met Chase, and the cell was implying things like that? How forward!) and eventually coming up with, "so, what brings a cell like you to Sharon?"

Golden eyes blinked once in mild confusion but thankfully, the change in topic was accepted. "This woman was visiting a pathology lab recently, yes?" Chase knowingly inquired.

"Yeah," Jack confirmed, "her husband works in one, so, she's probably been there to visit him recently."

"I was being studied in that lab," Chase said. "Apparently, I'm so small of a threat these days that the scientist researching me, I assume Sharon's husband, didn't even see fit to wash his hands of me before kissing his wife." Chase ignored the empathetic look Jack gave him and continued, "I ended up on a strand of her hair, made my way to the ear, and from there to the brain. At the time, the Hypothalamus Control Room was the only one empty, which is where I was when you happened to attempted that mild fever."

"Wow, you were in a lab?" Jack interestedly inquired. "How long were you there?"

"Several months at least," Chase informed him. "Before that, I was just barely surviving on the long-
rotted bones of former victims buried in the ground and was taken by archaeologists to the pathology lab for research purposes."

From such a statement, Jack deduced, "It's been awhile since you've been in an actual person, then. I'm curious: is Sharon any different than the medieval bodies you've lived in?"

"I have noted differences," Chase conceded, idly sampling a bit of the sucrose and finding it just as high-quality as the glucose. "This city is much larger than I am used to and...more high-tech. Too, I've never seen so many adipose cells in my life. They seem to make up a much higher population than they did in the Renaissance, but overall, I suppose bodies are roughly the same as they were."

"People have evolved to be taller since your heyday," Jack agreed. "Plus they've got way higher-fat diets on the whole along with a pretty sedentary lifestyle. Sharon's in pretty good shape comparatively—you'd be shocked at all the adipose neighborhoods you'd find in an obese person."

"Things have changed, it seems," the Black Death mused. Idly glancing around the room, golden eyes were for at least the hundredth time abhorred by the not only plain but shabby quality of the living space. While it was better than others in the neighborhood and he could admittedly understand Jack's logic behind taking such poor living conditions, it was a very far cry from what he was used to.

When he had been actively infecting bodies and remaining in individuals for very short periods of time due to how quickly his presence and wreaking of havoc resulted in their deaths, he had stayed in very high-end communities, and why not?

He was a monster-virus, a juggernaut completely unstoppable by any cell or immunity, and they could do little more than submit to his whims and let him do as he wished lest they be exposed to his claws and forcefully lysed!

Or at least...that was how things used to be.

Regardless, while Jack did not pack quite the punch the bubonic plague once did, he was still just as immune to immunity, so to speak, so long as he was not arrested or encountered after the standard 10-17 days the lymphnodes would need to recognize him and mount a counterattack. There was no reason he couldn't at least take advantage of the period during which he was untouchable and get himself at least something middle class to live in!

"Jack," he began, decided that he would be changing the rhinovirus' mind on this issue, "how is it that you can stand to live in such a manner?"

"Surely you have noticed the lack," Chase insisted.

"...of what?" Jack wondered when his idol failed to elaborate on his final word.

"Of everything," he clarified. "Granted, your environment is sugar-rich, but what if you require more hydrogen than you currently possess in order to break down your meals? You're quite out of luck without any hydrogen running to your dwelling."

"Well..." Jack considered this for a moment, acknowledging it as a valid point before arguing back, "That's what those hydrogen fountains in the park down the block are for: all the hydrogen I need to hydrolyze sugars, and I don't have to pay a single protein for it."

Chase scoffed. "So, in exchange for 'free hydrogen,' you are required to leave your own home for a
drink as if you were a lowlife canine cell and in such a lousy neighborhood that your chances of being mugged or forced to divide against your will skyrocket through simple existence?"

Jack responded to the statement with a sheepish look. "When...when you say it that way, I guess—"

"And what of the absence of ATP?" Chase demanded. "You're once more out of luck should you wish to be active after dark or if you need to keep track of the news to determine your own safety based upon the body's response to your actions."

"Well, I—"

"And surely your reputation is suffering from this sort of lifestyle," the virus informed his host. He immediately knew he'd struck a nerve at the suddenly-desperate and disturbed expression upon the white cell's face. It was quickly obvious to Chase that to Jack, reputation was everything and the swiftest way to do this was to call his 'rep' into question.

Smoothly, Chase continued, "No leukocyte will take you seriously living in such a hovel as you do. Neither will any other cell, for that matter. It makes you appear weak and insignificant, dwelling in such a place. It causes the assumption that because you do not have anything but the worst the body has to offer, you cannot have anything but the worst the body has to offer: you are too weak to take the best by force in the eyes of others."

"That's not true," Jack immediately protested, a dark, bitter vehemence lurking in his voice as he said it. "I'm not weak. I'm sick of people telling me that just because I'm not fatal. I can knock any world leader I damn well want of their goddamn feet for two weeks and nobody can fucking stop me from doing it. I'm not weak."

"I'm well aware of that," Chase placatingly promised. "It is others you should be seeking to convince. You must show them you are not guilty of inferiority by association. Wouldn't you like to be respected, maybe even feared to an extent?"

"Yes," Jack answered honestly and immediately, fists subtly clenching at his sides. "I've always wanted that."

Chase grinned. Even after all these years of isolation, his skill at manipulation was as powerful as ever. "Then, perhaps you should seek a nicer dwelling than one such as this," he suggested. "Something away from the ghettos and slums of run-of-the-mill germs and illnesses and into a higher class of neighborhood, a place fit for a self-respecting virus."

Jack gazed blankly down at the carbon tabletop, thinking the issues over seriously. Eventually, he agreed, "Yeah...yeah, I want... I think you've got a point."

"I'm glad you think so," Chase smiled. "Does this at all influence your plans for the rest of your stay in Sharon?"

"No. Yes. Well, kind of," Jack eventually settled with. "I've been here for almost two weeks already. I've only got, like, two days at best to hang out here before I'm in danger, so it probably wouldn't be any good to get a nicer place now. I doubt I could even find a property in time to live in it any more than five minutes before having to leave. Still, there's some pretty nice hotels over by the Cardiac district we could check out. I can totally afford a two-night stay at one of those pretty easy." Jack glanced back up at the older virus, uncertainly inquiring, "Would...that still help my rep, or...?"

Highly against the idea of remaining in this dump, Chase confidently assured, "Of course it would. When can we leave?"
Chase appreciatively eyed the large and lavish-looking building that now loomed before him, finding it a far preferable alternative to the run-down shack of a mere thirty minutes before.

The Vena Cava Arms was a high-class hotel located near the aforementioned pathway to the heart-home, Jack had told him, to the innumerable affairs of the mayor herself.

Said estrogen cell had been elected by unanimous decision sometime after menopause, when the entire body had become fed up with the lack of sex and its beneficial properties. The female steroid's entire position had been romantic overtures and seductive actions in order to coerce Harold (Sharon's husband) into sex, sex, and more thankyougod sex, so of course, she'd been a shoo-in.

Since that had, so far, failed utterly and election day was once more rolling around, Ms. Eve Magdalena was now pushing a much more aggressive stance and was finding droves of loyal supporters in her emphasis for the need of an extra-marital sexual rendezvous. Sharon had already begun taking subtle, rudimentary steps towards piquing the interest of that sweet and handsome Leonard in the booking department in which she worked, already yielding bright smiles and engaging behavior from the blond and divorced forty-year-old.

Regardless, none of that information was relative to Chase as he calmly strode into the lobby of the fine hotel, head held high as if he owned the place and a lovely female cell hanging off his arm.

A common method of avoiding detection when you didn't belong was to act as if you did belong and the once-deadly virus followed this method precisely, waltzing up to the front desk and asserting, "Excuse me, miss, but I'd like to rent a suite for two nights." The girl beside him giggled and squeezed his arm affectionately, and with a smirk, Chase added, "My date and I wish to make the most of the time we have together."

The young muscle cell behind the front desk looked the handsome male neuron up and down, sparing a brief thought to how she'd like to make the most of two nights with someone like him before allowing her eyes to fall momentarily on the lucky woman who was being allowed that privilege.

A pale membrane, short pixie-cut hair, and bright red eyes to go with a highly curvy body (tiny waist, wide hips, and a chest so large she had to have had cytoplasm infused) and blatantly trampy clothing.

Pfft, of course—such a hot cell would go for the floozy-type.

"Of course, sir," she nonetheless replied, smiling brightly. "Two nights here will be 200 proteins." The woman held out her hand for the male's credit card and was given pause as the precise amount was instead handed to her in bills.

"I insist on paying, baby," the girl with the neuron cooed, pressing her ample chest seductively against the cell's body. "It's the least I can do."

The cell behind the front desk grimaced upon noting the majority of the bills to be either very low or singles and, seeing the female they'd come from, she was subject to an unwanted knowledge as to the sort of undergarment these had likely been stuffed into at a strip club. "Ah, thank you," she stiffly spoke, gingerly placing the proteins away from her. "Before I give you your room key, I'll need a
name to put in the register."

"Chase Young," the neuron casually informed her and, eager to get the classy male and slutty female out of the lobby where the other guests would see them, she quickly wrote the name down and handed over an available access card for one of the rooms.

"There you go, sir," she said courteously. "Your room is number 806, on the fourth floor. I hope you and your...date enjoy your stay."

Chase gave the muscle cell a winning smile. "Oh, don't worry," he assured, "we will..."

"Oh, gawd," Jack groaned in discomfort as the door to the suite clicked shut behind him, "could chicks wear any more uncomfortable stuff?"

Chase chuckled in amusement at his companion. "Uncomfortable or no," he said, "you make quite the convincing woman, Jack."

The white cell blinked as he kicked off the thigh-high stilettos he had deemed 'hooker boots' before glancing down at himself. The miniskirt he wore barely concealed the fact that he had male genitalia and he'd only just managed to cram his chest into the tube-top.

"Well," he admitted, "if I were narcissistic and stupid enough to not know I was me, I'd probably tap my ass."

Raking his gaze over the male virus' currently female-looking body, shapely and attractive, Chase had little doubt that he, too, would divide with a woman so lovely as Jack was masquerading as.

"Sexy as I am," said common cold declared, "this is uncomfortable as shit."

That said, Jack squeezed his large, feminine chest until the cytoplasm that'd earlier been displaced there mercifully returned to his waist from whence it had come, letting out a relieved sigh as one might upon unbuttoning their pants after a Thanksgiving feast. The nonfatal then did the same to his wide, curvy hips and proceeded to smooth out his torso to his liking; shaping his malleable body back to the way it'd been and was supposed to be.

Recalling how Jack had earlier cinched his middle with a tight hiss of discomfort at the displacement within his own form, Chase inquired, "So, this is how you manage to avoid detection and treatment for so long?"

"Mnhmm," Jack affirmed, slipping off the tube top that had lost its purpose along with his loss of breasts and removing a black sleeveless shirt from the small bag he'd brought along to the hotel. "It's all about confusing Immunity with me. I can't kill my host, so I've gotta change my appearance a lot to keep the leukocytes from catching on before I'm ready to split." He turned to the elder virus. "I'll bet you had a more, 'make 'em suffer as much as possible and kill 'em as quick as you can' kinda strategy, right?"

Chase had a brief memory of laughing with a purely wicked mirth as he took off into the air and infected a new host, watching as the old host, dead and covered in boils and lesions, was tossed into a burial trench filled with at least twelve of his other victims and set ablaze. "Something to that effect," he answered Jack's query.
"Mmm," the white cell hummed, slipping on a pair of boxer shorts and pants before sliding off the skirt. "I wish I could do that," he spoke with a definitive tone of want. "I mean, yeah, I'm still active and everything, but...I'd give just about anything to be fatal, even if that meant I'd have to go dormant."

Immediately, Chase wanted to call the younger virus a fool and tell him he should never wish for dormancy after the ability to kill, as it was the bubonic plague's own personal hell and had been for far too many years now. What else could one call having had a taste of near-limitless power and then being cursed to never possess it again?

But then he stopped to think about it.

Jack's situation was not his. Unlike Chase, who had from the very beginning of his career been deadly and respected, the rhinovirus had always been nonfatal.

Among the virus community, nonfatals were treated poorly and looked down upon: only nonfatals that, instead of killing, crippled their hosts were given so much as the time of day, and it was a pitiful body that couldn't survive a common cold. Jack had quite likely been ignored or treated unkindly for his entire life, despite the fact that he was essentially unstoppable, because who would truly find it a top priority to stop him? At the most, he was a temporary inconvenience to whatever body he happened to inhabit—a petty, inconsequential criminal.

From his perspective, it was natural to want a taste of that limitless power, to want to be able to kill for just a little while so that he might prove himself to the peers that had seen him as weak and inferior his entire life, even if that meant he would be doomed to an eternity of dormancy and would only have a legacy to live on.

"We...are a bit alike, Jack," Chase decided after a bit of thought. "At the least, we strive for similar goals."

If there had been any doubt in his mind as to Jack's intelligence, they were dispelled immediately when the rhinovirus considered every thought Chase had taken several moments to think about in a split second and agreed, "Yeah...I guess we do."

Jack then proceeded to unceremoniously flop onto the king-size bed of their suite, announcing, "I'm tired. I know there's only one bed, but I stay mostly to one side, anyways, so, I don't care if you wanna join me later."

"As if I would've slept in a chair for your comfort," Chase snorted. "If anything, I would remove you from the bed."

Jack took no insult. On the contrary, he chuckled good-naturedly, throwing the blankets over himself in a haphazard manner. "Well," he said, fluffing one of the pillows to his liking, "if you kick me out, at least let me get a couple of hours sleep before we switch. I get seriously loopy on no sleep and I'm thinking you won't wanna deal with that later."

Chase watched as the youth rolled over, back to him as he chirped, "G'night!" before promptly going to sleep.

The bubonic plague scoffed in mild derision as Jack fell asleep within a minute. A brief glance at the clock beside the bed revealed it to only be about 6:30 in the evening.

Some five hours of watching television (the programs near constantly interrupted by Mayor Magdalena's ad campaigns) and idly flipping through the staple copy of 'On the Origin of Species'...
placed in all hotel room bedside drawers later, Chase decided firmly that to remain awake any longer was a complete and utter waste of time.

Chase flicked off the television, changed into the more comfortable clothing Jack had lent him (baggy on the slender cell but of a nice fit on Chase), and turned off the lights before slipping into bed alongside the common cold.

Jack was not an elegant sleeper, one that lie down at night and woke up in the same position in the morning, but at the very least, he hadn't been lying earlier and did indeed remain of the side of the large bed he had chosen.

The snoring and relatively consistent movement were mildly agitating, but to a patient cell such as Chase, it was tolerable.

And yet, as he settled down to get a bit of rest, sleep proved oddly elusive.

Within moments, a strange compulsion took the virus, an inkling towards an action that niggled at the back of his mind and made his arms feel stiff and uncomfortable as he denied it.

He wanted, inexplicably, to drag the sleeping rhinovirus from the left of the bed over to the right— to his side of the bed.

Chase, instead, did no more than roll over to his side, facing away from his bed-mate, and dismissed it entirely in favor of much desired sleep.

It was forgotten until approximately 2:00 AM, when the Black Death was awakened by a particularly loud snort, a vicious yank of the blankets towards the left side of the bed, and a dull thud.

Gold eyes blinked open, adjusting to the darkness immediately and glancing over to ascertain the reason he'd been woken up.

It wasn't a very good one.

Jack, in some dream-fancy or other, had managed to roll over and fall off the bed, dragging a pillow and a good deal of the covers along with him.

He'd somehow remained asleep.

The compulsion to drag Jack closer to him was pulled back to the forefront of the virus' mind as Chase realized he cared as to whether or not Jack remained on the floor for the rest of the night.

How odd, he mused to himself.

Regardless, this current compulsion was stronger than the one previous and would not be ignored as easily, and so Chase soon found himself scoffing quietly as he stood from the mattress and walked around the bed to where the pale cell lay in a heap of white and black amongst the red of the blankets.

Chase easily scooped the youth up from the ground and was forced to pause, as Jack slumped unconsciously against him, at how warm the common cold virus was!

The warmth was largely to ensure the ability to cause fevers, Chase knew, as he too possessed a bit more heat than the average cell for precisely that reason, but Jack was far warmer than he. Perhaps it was because while the bubonic plague could cause a fever, it was in addition to many other worse symptoms that required much more of the virus' attention.
In Jack's case, fevers were accompanied by much fewer symptoms comparatively, and ones that
didn't need all that much focus to enact. Maybe that allowed Jack to concentrate his efforts into
making the fever he gave a bit worse?

Chase had the brief, fleeting desire to not let the common cold out of his arms, to keep that pleasant
warmth all for himself.

Instead, he resettled Jack on the bed, threw the covers back over him, and returned to his side of the
bed in order to get back to sleep.

Luck was not on his side in that department because around 4:30 AM, he once more awoke and this
time, for no reason whatsoever.

His frustration was immediate: why in the hell could he not simply sleep?

Annoyed, the virus glared at the ceiling for several long moments before a slight rustling of the
blankets called his attention to the left side of the bed once more.

Jack slept quietly now, in complete contrast to the snoring and movement of before. He lay partially
on his side, inclined towards Chase in such a way that he could see his face and chest clearly. He
exuded an...innocent and fragile aura, as if a single touch could shatter him in the same way one
might shatter a porcelain doll.

Quite unlike his waking demeanor, Jack appeared very much like a porcelain doll, Chase reflected—
silent, easily damaged...lovely, even.

Jack shifted minutely in his sleep, his hand that had previously rested at his hip sliding upwards to the
middle of his chest.

That would've been all well and good if his lax fingers hadn't caught the bottom hem of his tank top
and dragged it upwards to where the hand now lay.

Chase found himself staring unabashedly at the sight of the pale cell's middle. Of course, he had
known Jack's membrane lacked pigment indefinitely and that he would surely be just as white as
refined glucose beneath his clothing, but...simply seeing that paleness on only Jack's hands and face
allowed for the sight-assumption that it was makeup; that the rhinovirus had simply painted himself
that way as some sort of fashion statement.

There was no mistaking what Chase saw now as a fashion statement.

The membrane of Jack's stomach was as pristine and as shockingly white as the rest of him, the
moonlight streaming through the barely-open curtains casting it in an entirely different, entirely
brighter perspective. Contrary to Chase's own well-defined body, Jack had no prominent abdominal
muscles, a 'six-pack' he believed it was called, to speak of, but neither was he pudgy. This led his
middle to be flat, the membrane taut and nearly concave as it sloped down from his ribs into his hips
that just barely peeked out from the waistband of the dark pair of sweatpants Jack wore.

Why is he still clothed? Chase managed to wonder before abruptly realizing just what he had
thought.

And suddenly, everything made sense

It made sense why he had allowed Jack to be his retainer despite the fact that he was normally wont
to be alone. It made sense why he'd found the young virus's falsely-female body attractive when, as a
rule, he tended to find females unattractive. Too, it made sense why he found himself sympathizing
with Jack's struggle, why he had been delighted to find his intellect keen, and most recently, why he'd wanted the rhinovirus close to him and preferably without clothing.

Chase wanted to divide with Jack.

Honestly, the revelation was...far less surprising that it probably ought to be. After all, Jack was a virus young in appearance and certainly attractive enough. His mind was sharp (Chase had never been fond of fucking idiots) and what with him being enamored of the Black Death already, it didn't seem as though it would be a struggle to seduce Jack to the point of willingness to incubate.

To add...it had been a long time since Chase's glory days when he could divide with whomever he wished. To date, the last time he'd been with another cell was several hundred years ago.

It made sense for Chase to be attracted to possibly the most perfect candidate.

Unfortunately, now was not the time nor the place to be shaking Jack awake and demanding he conjugate with him. Jack would surely balk at the sudden prospect and not only deny him, but flee Sharon and leave him behind, as well.

Dormant or not, the Black Death was not a virus to be refused or rejected: he simply would not stand for it. Jack would be seduced.

But for now, Chase pulled the bottom hem of Jack's shirt back to his hip, gently so as not to wake him and once more concealing the lovely expanse of white-white membrane with cloth. The crimson comforter was then pulled upwards to drape over Jack's slim form, keeping him warm for however much longer he would sleep.

Confident in his decision on what to do about his current bed-mate, Chase was finally able to get to sleep and remain asleep.
Jack was quite obviously on the last legs of his immunity.

The first day in the Vena Cava Arms had seen the nonfatal enthusiastic, still untouchable by Sharon's white blood cells and excited to cause as much mayhem as a common cold could. He'd spent very little time in the hotel room, preferring to go out and make trouble.

This left Chase alone to entertain himself with bland television and the fast food and magazines Jack had been considerate enough to drop off for him.

The second day, however, brought a drastic change to the young virus and Jack had not left the room even once. He also made a point of keeping the shades tightly drawn over the window and the 'DO NOT DISTURB' sign slung over the door knob.

Jack's very aura spoke of nerves and anxiety, so much so that Chase had ordered a glass of tryptophan for his companion to drink in order to forcibly calm him down.

"Do leukocytes truly scare you so much?" he wondered aloud.

Jack, currently rifling through drawers and gathering up his meager belongings to leave, looked over at the calm virus on the bed. Not for the first time, he noticed just how beautiful Chase was and both lust and jealousy burned his heart for all of a split second.

Then, the fear returned and he resumed packing. "Uh, yeah," he confirmed, "they really do."

"Why?" Chase inquired. "You were so confident before this morning."

"That was before I saw this," Jack declared, tossing a newspaper in the direction of his companion's head.

Chase, with his excellent instincts, caught it easily and looked it over. He had to pause in surprise at the sight of Jack on the front page.

The Black Death scanned the black-and-white print to read the story accompanying the photo.

"Citizens of Sharon can now rest easy," he read aloud. "The brave men and women of the local police force have at last identified the culprit of recent heat waves, congestion of nasal highways, and seismic activity near the Respiratory district. Name unknown, the perpetrator is none other than a rhinovirus, AKA, a common cold."

"They're onto me, Chase," Jack murmured nervously. "They know what I am, what I can do, how to stop me..."

Chase eyed the article for a few more moments, picking up the warnings that advised cells to be on the lookout for individuals with exceedingly pale membranes not wearing a police uniform and to alert law enforcement officials immediately should they spot him. Despite the fact that he was a nonlethal pathogen, civilians were still advised to avoid confronting the rhinovirus themselves as he could be in possession of a weapon.

Having seen enough, Chase set the magazine aside and stood, going to Jack's side. "Don't be so anxious," he calmly soothed. "It shouldn't take long for the two of us to safely move to another body."
"...the two of us?" Jack echoed dumbly. "You're coming with me?"

Chase snorted in response. "Of course I am," he declared. "I don't know this body nor do I feel safe in it. Why in the world would I want to stay?"

"I dunno," Jack shrugged, "I guess I—"

"Besides," Chase cut in, "was it not you who declared yourself my retainer? You'd be doing a poor job of that if you simply left me here with no one I know and no one I can trust!"

Cytoplasm darkened Jack's cheeks. "Sorry," he sheepishly apologized. "I, uh...I guess I just didn't think you'd want to stick around..."

Recalling his decision from the night prior, Chase spoke up with the intent to begin making himself clear to Jack. "Why wouldn't I want to remain with a cell like you?"

Jack looked up. "A cell like me?" he asked.

"Yes," the once-deadly virus confirmed. "You—"

There was a loud knock on the door of the room.

Chase frowned, annoyed at the interruption. Jack flinched and zipped up his bag, nerves on edge.

"Yeah?" he called past the door.

Chase saw the immediate flood of terror on Jack's face as a gruff voice responded, "Immunity, open up!"

"Shit," Jack cussed under his breath, "that bitch at the front desk must have ratted us out." Jack put on a dark black trench coat and obligingly replied to the man outside the room. "Alright, officer," he said, his voice docile and compliant, "gimme just a second and I'll let you in."

To Chase, he once more dropped the volume of his voice, his tone devious and almost playful. "We don't have much time. You're airborne, right?"

Wordlessly, Chase nodded, only to have an overcoat similar to Jack's thrown at him. He was quietly grateful that its ends were not tattered stylistically as the bottom of Jack's coat was, preferring his to have a touch more class.

"Then, you know how to use one of those." Jack smirked. "Follow my lead."

With that, Jack fanned out his coat and ran at the clear, thin membrane of the window. It burst easily and Jack's boots hooked into the hem just before the ripped ends of his trench, using it as a hang glider.

Chase chuckled and leaped out the window after him, gliding on the air currents with his own jacket. Behind him, he heard the hotel door slam open as the leukocytes on the other side grew impatient and their aggrieved cries to stop when they discovered their suspects escaping. He felt and saw the blasts of superheated plasma whiz by him ineffectively as the officers fired at he and Jack.

He paid them absolutely no mind and glided after the rhinovirus on the way from the Cardiac district up to the throat, thoroughly content to enjoy the view of Jack's lithe and slender body in flight.

By the time they touched down on something solid, the air was overwhelmingly humid, the ground was soft and moist, and petty criminals, inconsequential germs were to be found everywhere.
The mouth, Chase knew immediately. It looked the same in just about every body.

"Whoo!" Jack crowed enthusiastically. "That was easily one of the coolest getaways I've ever made! You think we lost 'em?"

Chase hummed in contemplation, inspecting the immediate area. "I believe so," he said warily. "Still, we should be cautious."

Jack nodded and began making a course for the teeth, Chase close behind him. They would scale the enamel, squeeze past the lips, and glide to another host, one where Jack would once more be effective and Chase would still be unknown.

"So, what do you want to do in the next person?" Jack spoke up, not taking his eyes off their goal. "I'm gonna hydrolyze some real food. I haven't ingested anything since this morning, and even then, it was just a donut with a jelly-filled nucleus."

"I'd like to find a bed to sleep in," Chase confessed, "and...perhaps someone to share it with."

Jack glanced furtively at his companion. Darwin, Chase was beautiful and so amazingly awesome, too. He honestly didn't care how long ago Chase's glory days were, just the legacy was enough to impress him.

And yet, here Jack was practically swooning and Chase was talking about getting laid.

"Oh, yeah?" he asked, feigning disinterest. "Got anybody in mind, or are you gonna just...pick up somebody when we get there?"

Chase cast a sidelong glance at Jack, eying his long, lean limbs in motion with each stride forward. How graceful the young virus seemed, how lovely he appeared now that he cared to look.

"I've already got an idea of who I want," Chase purred none too slyly, preferring to be obvious rather than subtle. His intended seductee was more likely to notice he was being seduced if it were out in the open.

Jack's step faltered slightly at the warm, inviting tone. That had sounded a little...almost like Chase...Could he really be interested?

Jack turned, facing Chase who was likewise looking at him. "Chase," he began, uncertain, "do you —"

A blob of superheated plasma zoomed past both of their noses and they turned to see where it'd come from.

Dread pooled in Jack's stomach at the sight of a police squadron approaching from the back of the throat, sirens wailing as several men shouted for the two of them to get down on the ground and surrender peacefully.

Chase snapped into action immediately, shoving Jack towards the teeth. "Go," he said calmly, "I'll catch up."

"What?" Jack yelped, staggering back a few steps. "Chase, you're not really thinking—"

"I am," Chase assured.

"That's crazy!" Jack declared. "You're nonlethal! They'll lyse you if you try to—"
"Go," Chase growled again, glaring darkly at his companion.

Jack took one look into those stern, gold eyes and knew he would not be told again.

"Fine," he reluctantly agreed, turning and running towards the teeth, "but if you get yourself killed, you're so not my idol, anymore!"

To himself, Chase grinned and murmured, "Then, I'd best remain alive, now, shouldn't I?"

The once unstoppable virus, now completely nonlethal, stalked confidently towards the leukocytes as if he still had the ability to force each and every one of them to undergo apoptosis with a single swipe of his claws.

Chase was only vaguely aware of the shouting at him, the demands to, 'stay out of this, neuron, it doesn't concern you.' He breathed deeply, centering himself and forcing down the instinctive urge to flee and remain safe.

He had someone weaker than himself to protect— this was no time for letting cowardly instincts get the best of him.

The first of the leukocytes to be felled was surprised, to say the least. He had not been expecting the unarmed, harmless-looking neuron to approach him casually only to grab his arm and twist it so far behind his back that he had to drop his gun.

Chase couldn't help his grin as he maneuvered the officer in front of him, a literal living shield. There was more shouting, demands to let him go, but Chase ignored them. "Drop your weapons," he ordered, "or I give this cell something much worse than a sore arm."

The leukocytes were obviously displeased about the situation, but with a fellow officer in danger, there was little else they could do. Their guns were dropped to the moist ground, their hands raised in a gesture of harmlessness.

Chase acted immediately.

The group of men and women grunted as the hostage leukocyte was thrown into them, knocking the breath out of them and pushing them to the ground. Those that remained standing were soon dealt with through a series of kicks and strikes, and soon enough Chase was the only one who remained upright.

The Black Death had originated in Asia, a land of many martial arts that were practiced even by cells. Considering his place of birth, his age, and his legacy, it was almost ignorant to assume Chase was unable to fight like the one cell army he was.

Nearly all of the leukocytes were subdued, now, though there was one who appeared to still be conscious. He was crawling to his squad car, broken and clearly trying to call for backup.

Chase let him. He had more important matters to attend to.

The virus was at the teeth in mere minutes, searching for a ridge or a crack; some sort of foothold so as to get over.

"Chase!"

Chase looked and blinked in surprise to see a disembodied hand waving at him. "...Jack?" he hesitantly inquired. A closer look revealed that the hand was not disembodied at all and rather was
wedged between two large, off-white teeth, the rest of the rhinovirus was undoubtedly on the other side. "Tell me you aren't stuck," Chase demanded.

"No, I'm not stuck!" Jack's slightly distant voice exclaimed. "I was waiting for you! Now, grab my hand." The fingers of said hand wiggled emphatically in a gesture that read, 'come on, already!'

A bit perturbed by the sight, Chase nonetheless approached and did as instructed, lacing his fingers with slender white ones that gripped him back firmly.

"You're gonna wanna hold on," Chase heard preceding the appearance of Jack at the top of the tooth he'd been behind. Chase noticed that the rhinovirus's arm was stretched impossibly long behind him, but that was all he really had time to notice.

With a grunt of effort, Jack jerked his arm forward, pulling it back through the crevice it'd been squeezed through in the first place. That would've been the end of it were his body not naturally elastic, but since it was, it immediately made an effort to snap back into its original shape.

Before Chase was fully aware of what was happening, he was being pulled upwards as Jack's arm shortened, effectively being slingshot over the tooth. The force of the movement had both viruses crashing into one another and falling over the edge of the enamel cliff, landing them in the small, dark space on the other side.

For the third time, Jack found his cheeks darkening with cytoplasm in so short an amount of time that it had to be a record for him when he realized that Chase, the big, bad, totally amazing bubonic plague virus was on top of him.

Hurriedly, he disentangled himself from Chase until there was a respectable distance between them. Curling his knees up to his chest, he watched out of the corner of his eye as Chase's silhouette, too, composed itself and sat upright.

There was a brief silence between them.

"That was really cool," Jack eventually said. "How you beat the crap out of those guys, I mean."

"It was nothing," Chase replied. "If I hadn't fought them, they might have gotten to you."

Red eyes widened in the darkness. "You did that for me?"

There was a snort. "Of course I did. If I hadn't, you would've been lysed."

"You could've been lysed, too!" Jack pointed out. "Why would you put yourself at risk to save me?"

Chase paused for a moment, then, "Because standing by and watching someone get killed is hardly any way to court them."

Jack's reaction to this statement was nearly lost to the darkness in the space between lip and tooth. It would've been completely lost if Chase's eyesight hadn't been so good.

As it was, the rhinovirus seemed...blank, for lack of a better word. His facial expression said absolutely nothing about what he was feeling and Chase felt a skirl of anger and disappointment sweep through him at the thought that Jack might be unhappy with this newest development.

"...you're not messing with me, are you?"

Chase blinked. "What?"
"This isn't...some kind of joke, is it?" Jack asked again. "'cause if it is, it's been tried before and it's not funny."

"I'm not joking," Chase promised, even as a different sort of anger reared up at the thought of Jack being the butt of such a cruel joke.

"Why?" was Jack's next question.

The answer came surprisingly easily. "Because I like you," Chase said. "Because you are interesting and attractive and because I see a kindred spirit in you that I haven't seen in anyone in a long time."

Jack stared at nothing for a few moments, letting the statement sink in. Then, amazingly, he laughed.

The sound startled Chase, who watched the younger virus laugh and sincerely hoped he hadn't gone mad.

"Oh, thank Darwin!" Jack chuckled, a hand on his face. "That's...I mean, I thought..." He broke out into incoherent giggles again.

"You're...alright with this?" Chase wondered.

"Hell yeah, I am!" Jack immediately exclaimed. "Chase, you're hot and you're awesome! There'd be something wrong with me if I wasn't attracted to you. I thought all the sexual tension was wishful thinking, like I was imagining it or something. To hear it from you? Oh, man, it's just such a relief!"

Chase grinned and moved closer to Jack. "Is it really?" he asked quietly, his tone a low and very sexy rumble.

Thankfully, now that everything was out in the open, Jack did not hesitate to respond. "Yeah," he confirmed, getting close as well, "it definitely is."

Surprisingly, it was the rhinovirus that made the first move, pressing his lips inexpertly to Chase's.

Chase, naturally, kissed back with fervor. How good the beginnings of intimacy felt after so long...!

Jack made a sharp noise in the back of his throat as Chase shoved him down, kissing him as if his life depended on it. Briefly, the irony of what they were doing dawned on him: making out behind a lip, but he didn't focus on it very long as he simply didn't have the will or the time at the moment. Chase was very good at kissing though he did so as a man starved of it.

White arms wound their way around the older virus's body, Jack relaxing and signifying his acceptance of Chase's dominance. In virus circles, division (whether new cells came of it or not) was all about dominance and two could not proceed if one failed to accept a submissive role. In just laying back and holding on, Jack might as well have said, Do whatever you want, I'm up for it.

To Chase, who had not had anyone for centuries, this was the green light of green lights.

The kiss escalated much faster than any cell with patience would've allowed it to and Jack's fingers dug into the leather of Chase's overcoat in surprise as the famed bubonic plague delved past his lips and sucked, pulling his cytoplasm into their joined mouths.

The cell-equivalent of open-mouth kissing was much different than the human version and much more intimate. Whereas full-blown organisms like humans kissed with only their tongues playing, cells kissing with open mouths meant a mingling of cytoplasm, a literal example of the expression, 'sucking face.' Such an act was incredibly suggestive and to do it in public was considered one of the
most lewd, obscene things a cell could do because of how closely the act mimicked sexual reproduction, specifically the interchange of cytoplasm that was normally meant to remain in one individual.

Luckily, to Jack, obscene was a turn-on of epic proportions.

For a moment, Chase feared he might have erred in initiating an open-mouth kiss so soon into the proceedings and wondered if he was frightening away a perfectly willing sexual partner. Then, however, Jack had reciprocated the kiss, fervently sucking back and drawing Chase's cytoplasm up to mix with his own.

The taste of it was unbearably arousing for both, Chase's aged, robust essence combining with the flavor of Jack's spicy sweetness. The kiss broke and red and gold eyes met in the darkness.

Then, the scramble for nudity began.

Both viruses clutched eagerly at one another, doing their damnedest to lose their clothing while not separating from each other any distance great enough that they stopped feeling the other's body heat. The closeness made the removal of clothing difficult, but they were eager enough to couple that helping each other become naked was less a matter of charity and more a matter of similar interests.

They managed to shrug off their coats on their own, but Chase had trouble removing his grey sweater (that was now much too warm for him) alone and Jack appeared to be unable to undo with only one set of fumbling fingers the belt that kept his pants closed and therefore, his lower half hidden.

Chase and Jack were both about half-naked when the police sirens decided to start up again.

"Fuck," was the only thing they could think to say.

Immediately, they were up and reluctantly away from each other, redressing even faster than they'd stripped, if that were possible. Jack appeared to have a slightly more difficult time of it than Chase, his mind more affected by the cloud of lust occupying it, but even he was only an article of clothing or two behind in terms of getting dressed.

As Chase shrugged on his coat, Jack finished with his belt buckle and began fumbling around in the darkness for his own jacket while his almost-lover hazarded a peek in between a crack in a nearby tooth.

The situation was...less than ideal.

There was no fewer than six police cruisers rolling up the tongue and gathering beneath the uvula, lights flashing and hostility a certainty upon discovering their fallen comrades.

Internally, Chase cursed. If he'd known his companion was going to be eager enough to want to divide with him right here and now, he'd have taken the time to incapacitate that last leukocyte so they'd have had time to do so!

Now, it would have to wait.

"How bad?" Jack inquired from behind him, having at last found and put on his trench coat.

"Bad," Chase said simply.

Jack winced. "Yeah, I figured as much," he admitted. "We've definitely gotta make a break for it.
You're pretty kick-ass even as a nonfatal, but not even you can take on that many guys."

"You are correct there," Chase agreed. "A single squadcar of leukocytes with the element of surprise on my side is one thing. Six or more without it is quite another."

"Six?" Jack hissed. "Fuck, do we need to get out of here!" He looked up into the dark, dampness of the enclosed space, scanning for any ray of light coming from the outside and seeing none. "Okay, if we're gonna live to see another day, Sharon needs to open her mouth." It went unsaid that he did not require this with his malleable, elastic form that could squeeze through the large and heavy (for a cell) lips, but Chase, with his not-so-malleable body, did lest he be crushed trying to escape.

It was fairly certain that neither party wanted this to happen.

"So..." Jack began, instinctively glancing backwards at the teeth though he could not see through them, "how do we get her to open up?"

"We could always bait the leukocytes," Chase reasoned. "Provoke them into firing at us, hope they get sloppy and injure a tooth or the tongue. We would only have a few precious seconds to escape during a cry of pain before she clamps her mouth shut immediately afterwards, but it's better than just hoping for a mira—"

His words were cut off by a jarring force of impact that every cell in the mouth felt right down to their nonexistent bones. The was a rumbling sound as Sharon's mouth opened on its own, her tongue lifting up and causing screams as the blockade of white blood cells was essentially tipped backwards down the throat. The two viruses trapped between the mostly-stationary bottom lip and the definitely stationary teeth were jostled quite a bit, but they for the most part remained where they were.

Sharon had opened her mouth at a very opportune time. While it was unbelievably close to the miracle Chase had decided it wasn't worth waiting for, he was not about to look a gift-Sharon in the mouth.

While the mouth had been opened, there was no light streaming through, which could mean one of two things: either she was yawning with a hand over her mouth, or there was another mouth being joined with hers. Based on the forward motion of the tongue, it was a safe bet that it was the latter.

Chase took the slim chance and wordlessly seized Jack by the arm, pulling him along as he used his mostly-harmless claws to scale the inside of the lip. Jack caught on quickly and moved so that he piggy-backed Chase instead of hanging from his arm, allowing him the use of both hands to get them to the top much easier and quicker.

It was most largely a blur of adrenaline and motion from that point on. Jack was shrugged off of the plague virus's back and once again caught by the arm, dragged through the mouth of the man Sharon was currently making out with and up towards the brain. Briefly, it was noted that the Cerebellum Hall of the body was labeled with the name, 'Leonard' instead of Sharon's husband, 'Harold' and the woman got a quick internal cheer for at last ditching the uninterested jerk for somebody who might treat her better.

The two viruses made their way to Leonard's ear and jumped ship as soon as possible to a passing coworker, Julia. From there, they likely could've remained, but in the interest of throwing off any chance of being caught, they hid out in Julia's body for a number of hours, waiting until she got home from work and greeted her teenage son, Max before again jumping bodies.

Truly, they'd had plenty of time to resume their activities from just before their evacuation from Sharon, but it wasn't until they'd gotten settled in their semi-permanent home in the up-and-coming
Testicular district of Julia's son that anything was done about it. It was clean and new, heavily-populated and popular amongst young, lusty cells looking to meet people to divide with. As Max got older, the area would almost certainly become a, no pun intended, breeding ground for prostitution and sleazy clubs, but now, it was a perfectly reputable place with many hotels that didn't really ask a whole lot of questions about your name or your reasons for staying.

Jack flopped down onto the clean, white bedspread of the room he'd rented, eyes slipping closed as the breath left him in a whoosh. "Good sweet Darwin," he sighed, "that was rough."

"Yes, it was," Chase agreed with his companion, idly staring out the window. Considering the fact that this particular hotel was in the city and there would be no spectacular natural scenery to look at, the room at least had a nice view of the Seminiferous Tubule expressway at night, the zooming lights of billions of spermatozoa driving past at great speeds.

Losing interest, he closed the shades and removed his coat, the weight of it disappearing wonderfully from his shoulders as he slung it over the back of a chair. Chase joined Jack on the bed and finally allowed himself to relax. A smile quirked his lips as Jack cuddled up to him, nestling close at his side.

"Next time," Jack proposed, "let's not cut it so close."

Chase laughed quietly and looped an arm around the other virus. "I could not agree more," he said. "I can't remember the last time I've been so exhausted."

"I'm half-asleep as it is," Jack confessed. "Get the blanket?"

Obligingly, Chase took hold of the bedspread's edge, maneuvering it out from under his body and sliding beneath it. When Jack neither opened his eyes nor moved to do the same, he jerked the blanket and watched as the rhinovirus grunted from atop it and rolled over a teensy bit.

"What?" he inquired. "You mean I gotta move?"

Chase snorted. "Yes," he insisted, "you most definitely do."

"Fuck," Jack muttered, even as he opened his eyes and grinned back at Chase. Slipping under the thick comforter, he scooted in close to the other cell, sharing space and warmth.

Chase was perfectly happy to snuggle back, holding Jack close to him as they both got some very well-deserved rest.

Jack awoke much later when a glance at the clock would reveal that the majority of Max's inhabitants had been up and about for at least six hours. Silently grateful that neither of them had asked for a wake-up call, the young virus rolled over and was greeted with the glorious sight of his slumbering bedmate.

He hadn't be lying or exaggerating in the least when he'd told Chase he was hot: the Black Death was positively gorgeous, even more so when he slept. Silky smooth darkness pooled around his face, as if he'd fallen asleep in a puddle of distilled shadow. His expression was relaxed into a perfect serenity, not a single wrinkle on his lovely, handsome face and his beauty drew Jack in like a magnet.
Chase, of course, was immediately awake upon feeling the result of that magnetism; lips against his
own, and realizing who those lips belonged to, he was soon kissing back, as well.

Despite the haze of sleep over them, it didn't take long for Chase to end up on top of Jack, both
swapping copious amounts of cytoplasm and tasting what the other was (literally) made of. They
rolled around on the bed like cats in heat, pawing and rubbing at each other's bodies with warm,
gentle strokes of their hands. By the time the kiss broke, Jack was panting hard for breath, clutching
the other virus's shoulders like his life depended on holding onto him and not letting go.

"Well," Chase purred to him, a grin on his face so charming that his soon-to-be lover felt like little
more than a puddle on top of the sheets, "is this about where we were...?"

By all accounts, Jack should have been too intimidated by Chase's beauty to respond with any
coherence, but one had to take into account that he was horny and here before him was a chance to
get laid. Instead of sputtering shy nonsense, Jack instead responded, "Almost: we had less clothes,
last time."

At this, Chase laughed. "Too right," he agreed with a chuckle. "Let's just see what can be done
about that."

Again, the pair was struggling for nudity, peeling off clothing and tossing it away with all the care of
a wealthy man for pennies. Shirts, pants, and undergarments were discarded with little to no concern
as to where they landed and if they would wrinkle, and soon enough, there was nothing left to
remove.

Chase eyed the rhinovirus beneath him with obvious pleasure. His body, now completely bared to
greedy, golden eyes, was soft and slender, wiry in a way that suggested Jack was built for speed and
stealth in contrast to Chase's own body-shape. He truly was the same, stark shade of white all over
and Chase idly wondered how easily he could litter that pretty membrane with marks. Then, of
course, his eyes moved downwards to the main event, so to speak.

Human scientists believed that bacteria were the only single-cell organisms to possess pili,
appendages protruding from the surface of a cell and most often used for conjugation. This was
untrue and many viruses had these. They tended to use them quite often as well, but because viruses
were less inclined to engage in sexual division under a microscope like the less-intelligent bacteria
that knew no better, it was widely believed that they simply didn't have pili.

It was also believed that viruses didn't have sex pili, either, pili used for the sharing of genetic
material between two organisms. Even when studying the process between bacterium, scientists had
decided that a sex pilus could not be equated with a human penis, but they, of course, had no
testimony from bacteria or viruses who could vouch first-handedly for the fact that they didn't know
what they were talking about.

Jack's sex pilus, Chase cheerfully noted, was surprisingly impressive in both length and girth and,
due to their arousing activities from moments before, had already stiffened between his legs.
Delighting in the startled gasp Jack gave when he curled a hand around it and squeezed, Chase
leaned down to the other virus's neck, pressing kiss after suckling kiss to the smooth membrane there.

Jack shivered in response and clutched at his lover, instinctively rolling his hips upwards and crying
out as he made delicious contact with Chase's own pilus. The Black Death snarled in reaction to the
sensation and bit down on Jack's neck, leaving a bright red mark amongst the pale pink ones he'd
already made.

"Eager, are we?" he growled upon pulling back, meeting Jack's half-lidded stare with his own.
"It's...it's been awhile," Jack sheepishly admitted. "We can...go slow later...right?"

Chase heard very clearly the hope that there would be a 'later' to speak of and he smirked. "Yes," he assured, "we can. If you're ready, now, though," a slight jerk of his hips had him grinding down against the younger virus again, relishing in his pleased yelp, "nothing says we can't make this quick..."

"Yes...!" Jack hissed. "Now, quick, definitely!"

Laughing, Chase happily obliged and Jack's eyes went wide as he felt the very tip of Chase's pilus pressing against his own. He immediately forced himself to relax to avoid unnecessary pain. Even so, there was a startlingly painful pressure as the most sensitive parts of their anatomy were pressed together, both of them groaning at the discomfort. There was purpose to the pain, however, and so neither pulled back from it, powering through until finally, finally...!

Jack shuddered and went limp as the semipermeable membrane of his pilus lived up to the 'permeable' part and joined with Chase's. He only vaguely felt the older virus panting on top of him, struggling to remain still as their mating bridge stabilized and created a direct contact between their bodies. Mostly, Jack was trying to hold himself still and had no time to worry about Chase doing the same.

A full minute passed before either of them could do anything but breathe heavily, and it was then that Chase reached down, laying his hand on Jack's flushed, white cheek and forcing their eyes to meet. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Y...yeah," Jack promised, "I'm fine. You?"

"Yes, I'm alright. Are you ready to...?"

Jack decided to display his readiness rather than speak it and daringly thrust upwards. Immediately, there was pleasure as their cytoplasm mixed within the mating bridge, stimulating the sensitive membrane there. Chase groaned at the wonderful feeling and got the message, thrusting back and beginning the age-old motions of sex. For a long time, they shared each other in the deepest way possible, enjoying the mindless pleasure that their single-cell bodies instinctively got from sharing genetic material. Rutting upon the sheets, the headboard thumped rhythmically against the wall behind them, joining the symphony of gasps and moans they made.

Were it a hotel in any other neighborhood, the front desk would have been called and they would be asked to keep the noise down. As it was, however, the viruses were not the only cells conjugating, and there were many other headboards banging against the wall to the point that nobody seemed to mind.

It wasn't too terribly long before both organisms were practically burning in lust, clutching at each other and making noises of such satisfaction as to indicate neither would be lasting very long. Chase knew this, of course, and decided an experiment was in order. He had had sex before and he had kissed before, but he had never attempted to do both at the same time.

The idea having just occurred to him, the Black Death bent down and tried it.

Jack arched wildly as his mouth was taken, a muffled scream tearing through his throat with his cytoplasm now meeting Chase's from both ends. Their bodies practically formed a circuit, their innermost components mixing thoroughly between them and bonding them in a perfectly lewd and intimate way.
For two viruses who hadn't had anyone to divide with in a very long time, it really was too much all at once.

Chase tore his mouth away from Jack, jerking his body off of him and falling to the bed as their mating bridge separated. Trace amounts of cytoplasm stained the once-pristine sheets, the viruses returning to two separate, exhausted beings.

Heavy breathing filled the air for several long moments, just long enough for Jack to come back to himself and snuggle close to the older cell. "Wow," he sighed when the ability to speak returned to him. "That was great."

Chase grinned and allowed the snuggling, pulling Jack over so that he lie half on his chest. "Glad you enjoyed yourself," he said.

Jack snorted. "Oh, like you just hated it."

"And what if I did?" the plague virus challenged, obviously not sincere. Sex, as many agree, is like pizza: even when it's bad, it's still pretty good, and sex with Jack had been fairly spectacular for a quickie. He hoped to have many more opportunities to share genetic material with the lovely young rhinovirus in the future.

"Well, if you hated it, then, I'm way out of practice," Jack smirked. "Mind being my practice-dummy?"

Honestly amused, Chase laughed and bent to kiss his lover, chastely with lips only. Jack eagerly accepted the kiss and then proceeded to roll over, arms behind his head as he looked up at the ceiling.

"I'm thinking maybe I'll head up to the Respiratory district and overload the pressure on some phlegm tanks after a shower," he informed. "You wanna come with?"

"To the Respiratory district or the shower?" Chase wondered.

A naughty glint in his eyes, Jack asked, "Why not both?"

Grinning, Chase stood from the bed and waltzed over to the bathroom, making absolutely sure the younger virus got a wonderful view of his lean, very much naked and muscular body on the way. "I'll meet you there," he decided, slipping coyly past the doorway.

"No need to tell me, twice," Jack smiled playfully, instantly on his feet and after the Black Death.
"Jack," Chase frowned at the lump of covers on the bed, "it is noon. You cannot possibly still be sleeping."

"Mmph," grunted said lump of covers, obviously dismissing his lover's statement.

The virus scowled further at being ignored and snatched up the edge of the blanket before tearing it away. "I will not tolerate—......"

The second the covers had been thrown off, Jack gasped and tried to hide himself, but it was too late. Chase had seen, and now had his wrist in hand, staring in shock at the bright red splotched across the white.

"Jack..." he murmured, all but stunned silent at the raw-looking membrane. "What...?"

The rhinovirus looked something a combination of frightened and ashamed. "I...last night, I couldn't sleep, so I went out. I figured giving this body a sore throat wouldn't be a total waste of time, 'cause that kind of thing usually helps with restlessness..."

"What happened?" Chase demanded firmly. "Who did this to you?"

"I got caught," Jack admitted. "I mean, that's not usually a problem, because white blood cells can't hurt me, but they had... They had a pill with them."

Jack tugged his arm from Chase's grasp, looking at the damage with a slight grimace. "I wasn't careful, because pills aren't supposed to hurt me, either, but then it got me in the arm with...whatever the hell that goop that pills shoot is, and...this."

Chase looked at the younger virus' left arm and commented, "It looks like the membrane was eaten away."

"It burned, Chase," Jack said. "It felt like my whole arm was gonna fall off." His form trembled slightly, and he looked up at the older being with wide, red eyes. "I think...I think they figured out how to cure me, Chase."

Chase sighed and stood, retrieving some bandages and quickly returning to the bed upon which his lover waited for him.

Taking the injured limb by the hand, he began spreading a salve over the damaged membrane. When Jack hissed and tried to pull his arm away, he chastised, "Hush, Jack, it only stings for a moment, and it will heal you all the quicker. I have had my fair share of encounters with white blood cells, especially after...they had become immune to my fatality. This type of injury must be treated quickly if you want the damage to only be temporary."

Jack was silent, watching strong hands finish spreading the salve and then binding his arm with care.

"What's gonna happen to me...?" he softly inquired. "If the humans can cure me, now, what'll happen?"

"Most likely, you shall meet my fate," Chase answered. "You will have to give up infection. Become dormant."
"What?" Jack gasped. "But—but I can't!"

"You must," Chase said flatly. "If you don't, you'll be killed."

"But I've always be active! What the hell kind of quality of life is it if I can't even make a person sick anymore?!"

Chase stilled, and Jack belatedly realized the sensitivity of the topic. Before he could take it back or try to talk about something else, a stern golden gaze was on him, pinning him down.

"Jack," Chase said. "Do not talk that way."

"I... I'm sorry," he immediately apologized, "I forgot—"

"It's not that." Jack paused as his hands were taken in Chase's, mildly uneasy. He had a feeling he was about to get a talk. "I don't want you to speak that way because you remind me too much of myself when I went through the same."

Called it.

"When I began to discover that bodies were becoming immune to me, I had the same thought," Chase confessed. "I thought, 'What good is life if I can't be fatal? What's the point?' Despite the fact that I am a...stale malady, now, I can see that such thinking is foolish— there is always a reason, Jack."

Chase's eyes suddenly seemed softer and Jack could only listen as his lover continued, "I did not give in. I did not do something foolish in an attempt to end my life because I could no longer do what I was meant to do. I lived on anyways, Jack, and do you know how I was rewarded?" Jack shook his head. "Fate gave me you: the love of my life. Jack, you are the only reason I continue to exist. It is for you that I live."

"Oh, Chase..." the younger virus murmured in touched awe.

"I can only hope," Chase spoke, "that I mean enough to you to prompt the same courtesy."

Jack tackled his lover with a hug and promised, "No, Chase, you do mean that much to me! I...I wasn't thinking of... I wasn't thinking. I wouldn't do that to you."

"Good." Chase sighed. "Without you, I am not sure I would have the will to keep going. Besides," he smirked at his rhinovirus, "you will always have your legacy."

"Psh," Jack scoffed with a grin, "what legacy? You have a legacy, Mr. Took-Out-Two-Thirds-of-Europe. I got nothing."

"You think so? I disagree. I believe the humans will always remember that you were the last, the only germ to resist their medicine longer than full-blown viruses like AIDS, and that they were even able to cure cancer before you."

"Hmm." Jack considered it. "I think I can live with that. Who the hell needs to get people sick when you're fucking the Black Death, anyways?"

Chase laughed, nudging his lover onto his back and straddling his waist. "Well said, Jack," he purred, "well said..."
"Freeze, infectants!"

Jack gasped as he saw the same pill with the SPD (Susan Police Department) squad that had gotten him a week ago fire a shot at his lover. His warning of, "Chase, look out!" was utterly superficial as there was no way Chase could dodge it. With not enough time to react, Jack found himself automatically moving to the Chase's side and taking the shot for him.

"Jack!" Instinctively, Chase snarled and his fingers lengthened into claws, claws which were unceremoniously forced through the membrane of the white blood cell he'd been grappling with. The officer turned black and died, even as Chase gave his full attention to the fallen rhinovirus. "Jack," he entreated, "are you alright?"

"...you totally killed that guy. You, like, disintegrated him!"

Chase seemed just as shocked to notice this and stared at his clawed hand as if it were foreign. "I haven't done that," he began, only to correct, "I haven't been able to do that since the Renaissance."

The police squad was gone, having realized that these were not ordinary, run-of-the-mill infectants they were dealing with and fled, which gave Chase and Jack at least a smattering of time to themselves before they would have to go elsewhere.

"Oh my god," Jack muttered. "Chase, don't you get what just happened?!"

"Enlighten me," he demanded.

"I was an active virus susceptible to antibiotics, but immune to white blood cells— now, I'm an active virus immune to white blood cells and antibiotics. You were an inactive virus immune to antibiotics, but susceptible to white blood cells— now, you're an active virus immune to antibiotics and white blood cells. Do you get it?"

Golden eyes went wide. "You don't think...?"

"There's no other way," Jack exclaimed, grinning broadly. "We must have exchanged traits by osmosis with all the incubating we've been doing since I got 'cured' because I've been home more!"

Jack's excitement was tangible as he crowed, "I'm invulnerable, again! You're lethal, again!"

Chase was stunned as white hands settled on his shoulders. "Do you know what this means?" he asked, and Chase certainly did, wicked thoughts of reenacting his glory days already running through his head.

"I know," he said, "but say it, anyways. I want to hear it."

"We're back in business, baby!" Jack exclaimed gleefully, kissing his lover full on the lips. "Care to make the world remember why the Black Plague was one of the most gruesome events in history?"

Chase spared a glance to his clawed hand, glowing black again like it always used to. At the very sight of it, a confidence he hadn't had in decades flooded his being and he suddenly longed to remember what it was like to kill.
"Gladly, Jack," he declared fiendishly. "Gladly."

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