

## Unite

*Achooo!* It all started with a simple sneeze. Pei-ya grabbed onto the door handle like a monkey on a bar and carefully slid onto the metal counter. He sat there for what seemed like an eternity but was only a few hours. A seemingly large human being, Mr. Accardi, touched Pei-ya with his hand. Then, he lifted his hand to his face, and that began the journey of Pei-ya the Germ.

Pei-ya made its way up the nose of the human-- a long spiraling tunnel. *Human noses are so disgusting with all of their slime and other particles.* Then he carefully slid down the throat like a firefighter down a pole into Mr. Accardi's lungs. There had been minimal research conducted on Pei-ya's species thus far, but he was determined to make a name for himself.

Mr. Accardi went to a large family gathering that same day to celebrate a cousin's birthday. He hugged and greeted many people. *Humans like to hug. Germs like it when humans hug.* Pei-ya lay inside of him excited that he could jump around from human to human like a flea from dog to dog.

After a few days, Mr. Accardi started to feel nauseous with a high fever. He lost his sense of taste and smell. Pei-ya, of course, like any normal virus continued to multiply with glee in Mr. Accardi's blood. Pei-ya called an assembly of all germs and they began forming an evil plan to wipe out the human race. "Guys, we MUST outnumber his white blood cells. If we can multiply and become many, Mr. Accardi will get very sick and sneeze most of us out. Then, we can get on with our plan... Remember: Always avoid hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes."

"Yeah! Let's get 'em! If we can wipe out the human race, then we will be the dominating organism on the planet Earth!" *Humans are very peculiar creatures. They help us ,germs, grow even though they know we are the enemy coming for them,* he thought to himself hoping this would be the victory he longed for after centuries of new plans.

"Guys! Hush! Be quiet! I think he's about to sneeze. Prepare for Operation Dominance!"

Pei-ya screamed. *Gosh! Germs can be so loud and tiresome!*

After a few hours of hard work and multiplying, perspiration dripped from Mr. Accardi's face, and he sneezed. Pei-ya and his new pals once again found themselves on a metal counter. *Germs LOVE metal counters. I have no clue why. Literally, they are so frickin' cold-- but then again germs are cold-hearted creatures.* The germs sat stunned by the long fall from Mr. Accardi's mouth. As they gathered their strength, Mr. Accardi continued to decline. He felt as if he couldn't breathe-- like his lungs shut off. All of a sudden, he slumped over and collapsed onto the ground. He faintly whispered, "Please help." His wife came running in, "Sweetheart, are you okay? Are you okay?" She called her daughter who was in her bedroom. "Alessia, come quicke! Call an ambulance!"

After arriving at the hospital, Mrs. Accardi and Alessia collapsed into sobbing and wailing for what seemed to be an eternity. Alessia wailed, "We went to a simple family gathering for a celebration and now my dad is dead?!?!" The doctor's face went as pale as a ghost's, "You guys were at a party?! Oh no! Please inform everyone at the party to quarantine for two weeks, and we will need a list as well for contact tracing"

One of the germs sarcastically stated, "Haha! Totally!! As if you can get humans to have discipline and follow-through!"

Mrs. Accardi could no longer hear anything still hypnotized by the death experience befallen upon them. Tears streamed down her face like water running down a rooftop after a torrential storm. Pei-ya and his friends sat on the top of the ventilator mocking Mrs. Accardi and Alessia with tears of joy.

“Ha! They think one person dying is bad... wait until they see how much horror we can cause them!”

“Yeah, I wish we would go gather into their lungs for our doomsday party, but we must go infect more people; Alessia and her mom most obviously have the virus already! If we infect at least one person a piece from different households, we do not have to worry about victory because they will naturally give us a ride to our next victim!”

“You’re right! Humans think they’re so smart, and they’re so full of themselves! We’ll show them who’s boss!” A cacophony of chatter arose from the gang of germs, until...

Suddenly, a big glob of hand sanitizer fell from above them. They quickly recognized it as the enemy. *Germs act like they’re IT, when really they’re just cowards*, Pei-ya thought as he skidded across the counter; just then... another big “splat” hit the table landing just a millimeter away from him.

“Ahhh!,” Pey-ya wailed, “ Don’t they care about me spreading out and multiplying in their bodies? Humans only care about their species. How selfish! Ugh! Time to let them join our virus culture! It’s the *only* one they’ll have left! ” Pei-ya and his pals traveled around the city like excited children in an amusement park continuing to infect thousands of people for the next three months. The germs were exuberantly out of control, and there was seemingly no way to stop them.

Meanwhile, there was no way to stop Alessia either. Still reeling from her father’s death, Alessia decided that enough was enough. Through research and listening to medical professionals, Alessia was able to devise a plan to combat Pei-ya and his germ friends. She started a local drive to gather masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes to launch her own

battalion. She gathered vitamin C and D and Zinc to combat the invisible creatures. *Haha! Humans are smarter than germs think*, Aleesia thought to herself with determination.

On the other side of the “war,” Pei-ya and his “germania” were riding in the nose of their new victim when out of the corner of his eye, Pei-ya saw a sign on a tree saying. “GATHERING FOR VIRUS!” He saw a few other black “splotches” on the paper, but ignored them and led his group inside to meet a possible superspreader.

Once inside, they saw a huge group of kids in masks and hazmat suits march in armed with disinfectants. The door slammed shut, and Pei-ya and his friends quickly discovered they were trapped inside without access to new victims.. Pei--ya quickly ran through his memory to the sign on the tree. Suddenly, he realized that it actually said, “GATHERING FOR WIPING THE VIRUS OUT.”

Suddenly, a disinfecting wipe came down upon his virus entourage like a bomb falling from the sky, and just like that.... the lives of Pei-ya and his group of germs was over. Aleesia stood victoriously as if she were proclaiming to the entire world, “This is how it is done!

“However” she thought to herself, in order for us to be victorious over this war, it will take more than just hand sanitizer; every weapon in our arsenal will be needed. Our greatest weapon is to unite against our enemies. When we unite, we win! When we don’t, we perish.” *As Helen Keller once said, “Alone we can do so little. Together, we can do so much.”* and with that thought, Aleesia found hope from within the darkness of death that the future might be difficult, but it certainly was not lost.