

In his ratty gray hoodie, leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed, most would mistake York as being angry. But no fever can cause Andreas not to recognize the worried scratching at his scalp.

The thermometer beeps. His mother hums. “Down to 100.7,” she says, as if checking off a grocery list. His stomach churns at the comparison. She quirks a brow at him. “Are you going to be able to get through the night without throwing up?”

He nods hopefully. If he does throw up, he won’t tell her. He can make it to the bathroom. Just flush, and it’s gone.

She stands up. “Call me if you need me. Go to sleep.” As she passes York hovering in the doorway, she barks, “You too. And feed the cat.”

She turns towards her bedroom, but York calls after her, “Are you *sure* we can’t hold off on giving out candy this year?”

The buzzing drone from the new doorbell emanates through the house, sending a shudder through both brothers.

“Just because you’re too old for trick-or-treating and your brother isn’t going doesn’t mean that Halloween isn’t happening this year. Other kids have the right to a normal holiday. The candy isn’t going away until the trick-or-treaters have taken them all.” Her tone hardens. “The world doesn’t stop just because you’re sick.” With that, she leaves.

York stands motionless in the doorway, burying his fingers in his hair. As Andreas coughs, Atlas sighs in displeasure. Andreas copies him: No one dislikes this more than him! Those luminous green eyes blink at him. The cat stretches, then hops off his bed. He trots up to York and meows.

York looks between Atlas and Andreas. Andreas’ fingers itch for his tablet, but its light exacerbates his headache. Still, he hopes his mother’s sentiments echo through his brother’s brain: The cat doesn’t stop eating just because he’s sick!

Atlas meows again. “Be right back, Skippy!” York assures him, and Andreas sinks back into his pillows, satisfied. He knows his brother does not lie.

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He must have dozed off a bit because his eyes fly open at the dip in his bed: too deep to be Atlas, so it can only be...

“Sorry!” York squeaks. “I didn’t mean to wake you up!”

A cough pushes its way past his defenses. It was already going to wake him up, but York denied it the pleasure. He wiggles in his bed, pressing his throbbing head against York's chest, trying to copy its gentle rise and fall, like placid evening waves.

"May I touch your hair?" York whispers, so he will hear past the pounding between his ears. Andreas hums an affirmative, and York begins carding his fingers through his younger brother's short blonde hair.

Andreas vaguely thinks to try to warn him that there may still be food-stuff in there.

"...Ew," York says.

Andreas whimpers a warning.

"One sec," York assures him. And before the question can be asked, he answers, "I'm not leaving."

He scampers off, in the direction of their shared bathroom. Andreas watches the lights blaze listlessly and licks his lips at the sound of the running faucet. When York returns, it's with a plastic cup—it seems the toothbrushes have been evicted—and a damp washcloth.

York sits on his bed and asks again. "May I clean your hair?"

To be honest, Andreas doesn't care about his hair. His mother puts so much time into keeping it short and straight. "*At least one of my boys won't have a rat's nest on his head.*" York always screams whenever anyone but himself brushes his hair. Yet, Andreas muses as his brother delicately dabs the washcloth around the soiled strands near his face, he is spending much longer on his hair than his own.

It's soft. Unlike a cat's tongue. He looks at Atlas, who is curled up by his feet. Normally, Atlas sleeps closer to his face, but Andreas does not blame him for wanting to stay away from the splash zone.

Was anyone ever this gentle to Atlas when he lived outside?

He hears indistinct chatter outside, then the doorbell sets the space behind his eyes aflame. He groans and burrows into his brother's hoodie, hoping the gray wave will clog his ears.

York says what the boy cannot say out loud. "It hurts. I know it does." And, then, quietly, he confesses, "I wish I could do something."

With a grunt, Andreas pushes back, watching his brother turn towards the window. He imagines that he sees a team of trick-or-treaters: gaggles of ghosts, warts of witches, packs of princesses, blotches of Batman.

“Maybe I *can* do something.” His brother dashes out of the room, his hood billowing, a superhero’s cape.

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He first registers that something is amiss when he realizes that the blur that zoomed past his bedroom door is not gray.

He knows it is not his mother: She has gone into her room to change into her pyjamas, and she tries to not to leave her room once she is in her pyjamas. It is not quite a rule, but it could be.

It is one of the few things that she does that Andreas thinks is a good rule.

His suspicion is confirmed when York passes by his room with a sheet wrapped around him like a kingly cloak. Andreas coughs at him to get his attention. The thumbs-up the teen flashes the boy is given with the confidence of a royal decree. Intrigued, Andreas, despite his aches’ protests, stumbles to the window, groping at the blinds. He pries them open with his fingers and through the slits, he registers a familiar cowboy costume: the last trick-or-treating costume York ever wore. York had been thirteen years old: eighth grade. He had insisted that it was not a costume, but a uniform, for when he would have a big red truck, like all his favorite country singers.

York is sixteen now. He does not have a big red truck. He drives the same white sedan their mother does. And he does not like country anymore. Thank goodness.

Andreas is not sure if he can be relieved yet, though. York, in the cowboy costume, goes up to the candy bowl, grabs something from it, tips his hat, and begins to walk off... only to charge around the back of the house.

*Is he entering through the back door?*

The boy puts a hand against his forehead, searching for a logical explanation for what he is seeing, as he sees York at the front of the house again, this time in the dog costume *he* was supposed to wear this year.

Except he is nine years old, and York is sixteen, so the body is too small, so he only wears the bulbous, disfigured head.

Andreas sees a cluster of people hastily cross to the other side of the street. York, either because scaring away other people is a part of his plan or because of sheer commitment to “doing something” this way, zooms around the house for a second time—*a second time that I have seen*—unbidden.

This third time, Andreas groans at the costume choice. Dad wouldn't call it a costume, but York looks ridiculous in the Navy uniform, saluting at the candy bowl and marching in a cartoonishly stiff way.

He must be tiring of running because he marches the same way past his room. It is enough time for Andreas to get his attention by stomping his foot.

"Skippy!"

Oh no, this isn't going to work. The boy points angrily at the wrapper clenched in his fist. York looks down at it. "You don't like Reese's Peanut Butter Cups."

Yes, peanut butter smells bad, but this plan is also bad. He raises his index finger questioningly: *One?*

"The bowl only says to take one. That's the rule."

Well, if that's the rule, he is going to need many more costumes. Andreas collapses into his bed as the doorbell rings, moaning.

"Well..." York demurs, considering the situation. "Not all trick-or-treaters follow the rules..."

Atlas bats at his hair, as if to say, *watch*. And Andreas watches as York dons his gray hoodie again, stuffing his hands in his pockets, and stalking down the stairs with a swagger that even the other TV show characters would scoff at.

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"Ha!" York the Bad Boy sneers into the air. "The rules don't apply to me!" Andreas watches as a man with a little boy starts to steer the preschooler away.

York the Actual Person steps out of the act with all the grace of Clark Kent reporting on Superman's latest escapade. "Here, which one do you want..?"

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Atlas welcomes York back into the room, sniffing at the plastic pumpkin container he has. "The candy is all gone," York explains. "Trick-or-treaters took them all. No more doorbell." He grins. "I made a sign."

Atlas rubs at the container with his chin, and a wrapper slips off the top. York has a lot of candy. How will he hide it all?

York seems to think of the question at the same he does. "Oh no! I have to eliminate the evidence..!" He darts away.

Andreas looks at Atlas worriedly. The cat, for his part, yawns and becomes a heavy lump on his feet.

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"Why don't you ever listen!?" their mother booms after the sound of vomiting subsides. She reiterates that she told him to stay out of his sick brother's room.

Andreas knows that York listened to her terms keenly. The candy disappeared when the trick-or-treaters took it. The candy reappeared when the trick-or-treaters ate it.