

The white fabric of Edgar's nightgown clung to his body, uncomfortable and damp against his clammy skin. His face burnt, but his fingertips were freezing cold. Dragging his weakened muscles up to cover his face left him with no comfort, only the feeling of his own skin. He had yet to open his eyes, but through the thin skin a cover of red flooded his vision, disappearing seconds after. His door opened and closed quietly, and whoever had come in was making an effort to walk softly, too. He opened his mouth, but realized he didn't have the strength to speak, and closed it. He shifted his hands to dig his palms into his closed eyes, letting out a pained, discordant hum.

Andrew tiptoed to the too-small covered stool he had placed next to Edgar's bed, sinking into it. The floor creaked from the change in weight, and he cringed at the sound. He leaned down, placing the bowl of cold water on the floor between his feet and Edgar's bed, careful not to spill it or make too much noise. He removed his gloves, and rolled his sleeves up, leaving his hands and forearms free. He frowned at the pale scars that dotted his arms and hands, before flexing his fingers and dunking the rag he'd in the water, wringing out the excess.

It had been almost silent in Edgar's room until now, filled only with the sound of his labored breathing, the night-time hum of wildlife outside his window. Now, the sound of someone moving filled the space, too. In that time, Edgar had realized he did not know who was in his room with him. His head lolled to the side, feeling full of stone, and he attempted to glare at the man in his room. Even bleary-eyed from sleep and without his glasses, there was only one person it could have been: pale skin, white hair, red eyes that darted around nervously—and realizing it was only Andrew was oddly comforting to him. *It would be difficult*, he thought, *even for me to forget his face*. He tried again to speak, but only a harsh rasp left his mouth, leaving him unsure of what he even meant to say.

Andrew flipped his bangs from his face, uncomfortable now to be watched at all, but especially while helping someone. He shifted the rag in his hands, freeing one to wipe it dry on his upper thigh. Reaching out with his cool hand, the backs of his

long fingers and broad palm barely grazed Edgar's forehead. Andrew withdrew his hand quickly as he had placed it to begin with, and oddly Edgar wanted to chase the cool feeling of his hand. He shut his eyes again, he realized, when Andrew had put his hand on him.

"You have... you have a fever. But that's a...all." Andrew's voice was somehow even quieter than his usual soft timbre, his stutter and strange accent comfortingly familiar in the empty feeling room. "I have... I want..." he shook his head in frustration and raised his hands up, gently clutching the rag, "It's c...cold. It will, it'll, it will help." Again, his cold hand brushed Edgar's skin, this time moving sticky stray hairs from his forehead, before carefully smoothing the cold rag out. "If you can sit up later, I'll," he drug the syllable out, struggling to catch up to where he needed to end the sentence, "I will br...braid your hair back, and it won't be as... as ann..n..noy-bad." His voice was farther away now, and the sound of shifting wood filled Edgar's ears as he left his sore eyes closed. Andrew padded over to the small, single-pane window facing Edgar's bed and forced it up, cracking the seal and leaving an inch open for air to cycle through. He tied back one half of the curtain, but left the other drawn so the morning's sunlight wouldn't be as visible.

While he stood in Edgar's room, the two of them alone in the stuffy darkness, Andrew began to feel antsy. *Is it weird to do this?* He began to shift his leg, left to right, his worn leather boot scratching on the hardwood. *It's not like either of us are very sociable...* He worried his lower lip between his crooked teeth and resisted the urge to straighten out the tubes of paint and jars of God only knows what. He snapped his gaze back to Edgar in his bed, red-faced, with sweat beaded on his hairline, and clicked his tongue in discontent. He approached him again, carefully, as always, touching the cloth on his forehead. It had already become warm in that time alone.

He peeled it gently from Edgar's forehead, dunking it softly back into the cool water with his off hand, before Edgar's elegant fingers caught his left wrist, pulling his hand back to his forehead. He hummed in contentment as Andrew's fingers reflexively splayed across the hot skin of his face, his

palm pressed to Edgar's red cheek, fingers falling across this nose and forehead. Andrew tensed. He was not used to touching people, or being touched. Edgar's blue eyes opened wider this time, staring at Andrew's pale face, seeming even whiter under the glow of the moonlight. His grip on Andrew's wrist tightened, not uncomfortably. Finally opening his mouth again, Edgar forced the words out, slurred and sleepy, "Don't leave my room." He pulled softly on his wrist, "Your hands are cold, and I like it." Just as quickly as he said it, his eyes began fluttering shut again, his grip unwavering. Andrew stared down at the sick man, now both embarrassed and obligated to stay by his side. *I really hope he doesn't remember this when he wakes up.* Andrew buried his face in his free hand, and began to wait for him to let go in his sleep.