

Ad Astra

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Ad Astra

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[GRIAN]

It's almost like looking right up at the night sky.

Or... *down*...

Notes

This statement references several past ones, but I would especially recommend reading [Concerns from the Academic Record of Mr. Tango Tek](#), [Stargazer](#), and [Supplemental: Moonsick](#) before reading this one! Though frankly you should read them all I mean tbh

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Statement:

[Click]

(Footsteps)

(Door opening)

[IMPULSE]

Oh, hey, Grian. Heading out early?

[GRIAN]

Yeah, I've just got some errands to run. You know how it is.

[IMPULSE]

For sure, for sure. Stretch your legs! Feels like I haven't seen you leave the office in weeks.

[GRIAN]

Hey, I've been busy! There's been a lot of work to do! *(Door creaks)*

[IMPULSE]

Oh! Don't forget your glasses. You left them on your desk- here you go.

[GRIAN]

...Right! Right. I... do need those. Thanks.

[Click]

[Click]

(Faint background noise; inaudible, distant murmuring voices and the sound of pages turning)

[GRIAN]

(Hushed) Well, here we are. Astra Library. I've already gotten frowned at once for talking in here, so I'm trying to keep my voice down.

I've been getting really, *really* frustrated lately about how many mysteries there are around me that I can't *do* anything about. I don't know where Etho is now or really even what *happened* to him still, I *know* there's something Xisuma's not telling me, I don't have any other *useful* leads on Joe Hills, I haven't been able to find anything else on Joel... or what's happening with Pearl...

So I'm here instead.

Maybe I won't find anything. Maybe it's just a library. But I just want to understand *something*. Anything! Is that really so much to ask? I feel like if I keep on only finding more questions and no answers I'm going to crawl out of my *skin*.

This building is only a few years old, though it honestly already looks much older, mostly due to the classical style. It was finished in 2017 to expand the campus library of Greenwich University, and it really is gorgeous. It feels like it could have been here forever.

The exterior is made of stone that's... not black, exactly, I think, but so dark it almost looks like it. Or a very, very deep blue. Which, for those of you who didn't finish most of an architectural degree, is fairly unusual for classical styles. White is far more common. There's something about it... I almost felt unsteady walking up the front steps. I couldn't say why, but it almost felt like I was going to fall right through the surface of the stone. Like... walking on a frozen lake, and knowing if you step wrong you could put your foot right through and just... sink, down into deep, cold, endlessly dark water.

It's quite dark inside, which does add a certain atmosphere. There's reading lamps placed around by study areas and tables, of course, it *is* a library, but there's almost no proper overhead lighting- if there is, I can't tell where it's coming from. It makes it hard to gauge how big the space is in any dimension. The shelves built into the walls are very tall, and stuffed with books.

I wonder... if I read all of them, every single one, would I find the answers I'm looking for?

The ceilings are very high, especially here in the rotunda, but so shrouded in shadow it's hard to tell quite *how* high. And they... sparkle? I think that's the only way I can describe it. The walls behind the shelves, arching up into the ceilings... they're pitch black, and overhead they're dotted with these intermittent dots of light, faint enough that you could almost miss them if you weren't looking. I can't tell if they *are* lights or some other effect of the building materials. If I could just get a better *look*...

(Pause)

It's almost like looking right up at the night sky.

Or... *down*...

(The clatter of a dropped tape recorder, muffled against carpet)

(Ambient noise continues, undisturbed)

[Click]

[Click]

(Loud, uneven breathing; ambient sound of traffic)

[GRIAN]

My... arms hurt. Why do my arms...

...Oh. Right.

(The faint rustling of fingers combing through feathers)

(Breathing steadies slightly)

I'm... sitting on the front steps of the library. I don't... know how I got here. I don't remember...

No, I... remember falling. I remember looking up at the sky- the ceiling. I remember looking up at the ceiling until my eyes started to hurt from not blinking. I didn't want to look away from it. It was like... a puzzle. I knew there had to be *something* about it that would make it make sense, if I just looked at it long enough, looked at it from the right angle, that would bring the optical illusion

back into stone and paint and light and shadow.

(Breathing evens out entirely)

I was looking up. And then I was looking... down. There wasn't a transition. It just felt like I realized, all of a sudden, that I was hanging over something that wouldn't catch me if I fell. And then...

And then I was falling.

Into that night sky, *through* it, those little points of light whipping by around me. They were the only thing I could see, against the endless black and blue. I couldn't tell how close or far they were- it was impossible when I was falling so *fast*. There was... wind, or something like it. I could feel it in my feathers. It made my skin hurt, like- like more of them were *growing*. I don't- I don't think they *did*, it wasn't real, but...

It almost felt less like falling and more like flying. Almost.

And it was like falling into the sky, but it was also like... falling into the ocean. Like being swallowed by something huge, and so blue it was almost black, with those distant lights retreating above me. I wanted to- I wanted to catch myself, I wanted to swim, I wanted to- drag myself up with wings I didn't have and make it back to where things were real and made *sense*.

I couldn't, though. I would try, I would try and reach out to something, and I would feel like I could almost catch something in my hand, under my feathers, some water or... *ink*, that I could swim up through and eventually reach the surface, but it would always slip out through my fingers again before I could.

I just kept falling, or... drifting, or flying, or sinking. It felt like I would be falling forever, alone in the dark.

And... I thought of Pearl.

I thought about her dreams. I wondered if they'd been like this. The way she described them was... different, nicer, but...

Back when we were still in school, there was this parking structure just off campus where you could get a pretty good view of the sky- or, as good as you can ever get in the center of London, but it was the tallest building around, and nobody ever parked at the very top. One night, she packed some blankets and told me to bring snacks and meet her up there. It was clearer than usual, not a cloud in the sky, and the moon was bright.

She had me lie down next to her and pointed out the constellations one by one- Cygnus, Gemini, Ursa Major. A lot of them weren't very clear, not all the stars were visible, but she traced the outlines like she knew the shapes by heart even without needing to see them. We sat there for hours, talking, until she dozed off, staring up at the sky.

I *know* that's how it went. That's how I should remember it. But I don't.

I was sitting on a blanket next to Pearl, and she turned and looked at me, and her eyes were dark and full of stars.

She said, '*Grian*, what're you doing here?' She didn't sound angry, or upset, it was just- the same sort of tone she'd use if she was teasing me for making a dumb mistake.

I said she'd invited me, but she shook her head. 'You're not supposed to be here. It's dangerous for you,' she said.

I said, 'What about you?'

She laughed, and said, 'Oh, I'm fine. I'm safe here. But you can't stay. There's nothing to see but sky.'

'I don't know how to leave,' I said.

She laughed again, and shoved her shoulder into mine. 'You never change,' she said. 'Getting into things with no clue how to get out again... follow me.'

She grabbed my hand and pulled me to my feet. Her hand was... it seemed like the first solid thing I'd felt in the darkness. It was warm. I held onto it as tight as I could.

She walked me across the roof of the parking garage and to the stairs, and told me to take them down and not let go of the railing until I reached the ground. She gave me a hug, just before I started down the steps. A little ways down I tried looking back, to see if I could see her, but all I could see at the top of the stairs was the night sky, and those faint, distant dots of light.

And then... I was standing on the front steps of the library.

And now I'm here. Just... sitting down until I get my bearings again. It's dark out. It wasn't when I went in. I think I might call Mumbo to come pick me up. I also texted Pearl, just to... ask if we could talk, but she hasn't replied yet. She might already be asleep.

(Pause)

...Did I bring two recorders? I thought I dropped the one I was using inside...

Huh.

[Click]

Supplemental:

[Click]

[GRIAN]

(Loudly whispering)

Addendum-

Sorry for the audio quality, by the way, I'm in a car-

In case it wasn't clear, I did not find Tango Tek in the library. I didn't even find any *sign* of Tango Tek in the library, not a *thing*, and it's making me want to push Mumbo out of the driver's seat-

[MUMBO]

Do not! I am driving!

[GRIAN]

(Still whispering) I'm not going to! I just want to. Not even very much.

[MUMBO]

(Scoffs.)

[GRIAN]

I don't even really want to *hurt* you, I just want to have his *statement-*

Uh, to listen to, to be clear. Not for dinner.

[MUMBO]

You know, Grian, that second option didn't even occur to me. Are you hungry? *Did* you eat dinner?

[GRIAN]

That's irrelev-

[Click]

End Notes

oh boy we're really in it now!! we're really in it now!!

i didn't mean to post this one so soon after the last one but i was just extremely excited to write it so i finished it much faster than i thought i would, and i'm really very proud of it. if you guys enjoyed, please leave a comment!

ad astra is latin for 'to the stars.' and you should go watch tango's videos where he built the astral library right now if you haven't. yeah you. you like timelapses?? [go!! rn!!!](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!