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Ad Astra Per Aspera

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AD ASTRA PER ASPERA

It's two thirty in the morning. The lateness of the hour makes my eyes sting and my body ache in odd places. I've been awake for twenty hours and will have to be up again at six am, but I don't care. I breathe in and the Adirondack air is all around me and inside me, cold and clean. The coolness of the night settles at the edge of my wrists where my sweatshirt doesn't quite reach, and on the backs of my exposed legs, and at the tip of my nose.

Jack lays beside me, the glittering darkness above and the lake lapping at our feet. We don't look at each other, we're watching the sky. As he talks, I trace the patterns of the stars and mentally check off the constellations I know: Ursa Major, Cassiopeia, Orion...

I know there's more that I can't make out, but at home the sky is so charged with ambient light that I've never seen such a clear picture of the heavens before. Jack's voice drones on and I find myself at home in it. The cadence and rhythm of his speech has become familiar and comforting in a way I hadn't thought another man's voice could be.

"You'll be gone in fourteen hours," he says, and then doesn't say anything else.

I don't respond, because the pain in my chest is overwhelming and all I know is that suddenly I can't remember what it was like not to know him.

OLIVIA VOEGTLE