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## Who's There?

Leah Bechtold  
*Butler University*

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## Who's There?

*Leah Bechtold*

*"There is no such thing as a real void, one that is completely empty" (from Seven Brief Lessons on Physics by Carlo Rovelli).*

I don't know how to best describe my current state other than feeling completely and utterly alone. My parents left me their orphaned daughter when I was very young; I have no siblings. My grandparents are long gone. It's just me, Phleb. It's been just me for quite some time. In the quiet and cold that felt like night, my mother used to tell me to remember that I am never truly alone. I think she was smart, but she was wrong. I have nothing in this void to comfort me. Sometimes I scream and cry and my only consolation lies in my own breath returning to me in an echo. In the daytime, I sing for eternities. After being alone for so long, my mind plays tricks on me. Sometimes I swear I can hear a voice singing back in harmony. A shadow following my dance. A chuckle when I laugh. But I'm alone. A flicker of light shines in the distance illuminating a figure that almost resembles me, but I'm hopeful.

I like to imagine what life would be like if I had a companion. Someone to really sing back to me. A partner in my one-sided tango. A face to see break into laughter at my antics. A voice to say my name. Yesterday I could have sworn I saw a figure in the distance. Tall, lanky, clumsy, and curious. For a moment I let myself believe that he existed. I fantasized the life we would have together. I imagined the love and laughter and life I'd yet to live. But in an instant, he faded away, yet I could hear a faint whistle. A tune familiar to me. The harmony to the melody I sang. The mind plays cruel tricks but perhaps my mother wasn't so wrong. Perhaps the world hasn't been so cruel to leave me totally alone.

I wish I wasn't curious. I wish I could convince myself that I'm going crazy and no one sings to me. But it's not my nature. I'm not satisfied with just the possibility of a companion. I'm desperate for the truth. I did not sing my usual ritual today, nay, I sang a message. A cry of desperation. A plea for

humanity to find me. With the same melody I cried out, “My name is Phleb. I thought I saw a face to comfort me. Show yourself and I’ll be glad. I’ll be glad indeed.” And then I waited. I waited until I could feel every fiber of my being at attention. My ears listening for any disturbance in the all too familiar atmosphere. A cough or shuffle or breath. An existence to match my own.

I waited what felt like years. Maybe even eons. And then I heard a raspy squeak. “Here.” My breath hitched in my throat. “Who’s there? Please! Show yourself!” From what I thought was the emptiness of space emerged a figure. Tall, lanky, clumsy, and curious. His gaze darted around before meeting mine. In an instant, a surge of emotion rushed through me. He looked scared. He looked as if life had battered him as it had done to me. He looked like he knew what I felt. He looked safe. He was the harmony in my song. I stepped toward him, tentatively, and extended my hand. He peered around inquisitively and took my hand in his own. My heart suddenly beat in tune. I felt a rhythm connect that wasn’t just my own. I was part of a symphony. Yes, this was my companion. This was my meant to be. I looked up at him as if to ask where he was for all my existence. He knew exactly what I meant. Without opening his mouth, he echoed my song in perfect harmony. He mirrored my tango. He matched my being.

I squeezed his hand. We needed each other. Neither of us could exist without the presence of each other. Perhaps my mother was right. In the infinite void of space with all its darkness and unknown, my soulmate has been watching over me. There’s never been emptiness, just isolation. Hand in hand, we walked toward our new life. Our new being. Our unity. No, the void was never truly empty.