

**Everything and Nothing**

He walks with me from the white-walled, carpeted classroom to the turf littered with tables, chairs, and people. His curly hair bobs up and down and his hands move in animated gestures as he finishes his story. I laugh and look up at the sky. I hardly notice that he has left my side until I see him throwing around a small, red hacky sack with some other boys.

I try to call out to him, but my voice catches in my throat, and I just follow him silently to where he and the others are. I drop my backpack, hearing it thump on the ground, and set my phone face-down on the table. Sitting on the dirty, white table, my feet swinging out in front of me, I watch as someone grabs his phone and runs across the grass. Shouts and laughs surround me, but I don't join in.

His feet tread steadily over the polypropylene grass, each step bringing him closer to the boy who holds his phone. When he reaches the boy, the two figures crash onto the ground, the two interlocked in a tackle of sorts. The other boy jumps up and takes off running again, running towards laughter and friendship and hacky sacks. I slowly walk over to the figure still lying on grass flattened by hundreds of teenage feet crossing over it each day. His worn-out blue shoes stick up a little as his chest goes up, down, up, down.

"Are you okay?" My voice comes out small and distant. For a moment, it seems that the voice is just in my head, that he doesn't hear me, but then he nods his head a little.

After a few seconds, the corners of his lips turn upwards in a smile and his eyes open suddenly. I extend a hand to him, and he grabs it, getting off the grass. If he's about to say something to me, he never gets to as his attention is diverted by the hacky sack flying past his head. I duck. He takes off running again. I sigh.

I go back to the table, and I'm left drowning in my own silence. A roaring, deafening silence weighing down on me until I can barely breathe. I look up at the blue sky. There's a cloud, maybe two, and some tree branches. Nothing else. No birds, no planes, no princesses on dragons coming to take me away. Just a boring, blue sky.

I imagine myself soaring off this dirty table and into the blue abyss. Beautiful, black feathers grow in place of my arms, and I glide through the cool, autumn air. From here, the clouds seem so endlessly far above that they are no longer a part of the sky. The tree branches that once seemed to obstruct the Carolina blue and the laughter that once faded into that horribly smothering silence are a world away, replaced by an endless sky and a gentle breeze. If I listen hard enough, I can hear the songs of other birds, birds about whom songs and poems are written. My beak parts and a trilling song of my own is released; it rings through the sky and is lost in the feather-ruffling breeze.

I watch as a feather floats down, down, down from my place in the sky to the ground below. I cannot see where the feather lands, but maybe it will find its place in front of a pair of worn-out blue shoes. He'll look up and see me, and for a split second, none of it will matter; laughter and friendship and hacky sacks will mean nothing, and the only thing in the world will be a small, unimportant being flying through the sky. For a split second, the only thing in his mind will be a bird and a song that he'll forget when the sun next rises. He'll never bother to learn that what sounds like a single musical note to his ears is made up of dozens of notes, dozens of breaths. But he'll smile, and that will be enough. A single bird and a single song will be enough to make a smile.

Right now, right here, I am just me — a mass of tissues of feathers and organs, an organism making my way through life, a dance unseen, a song unheard. As I fly through the endless blue, the whole world surrounding me, I am both everything and nothing.

A soft voice brings me back to the table as he comes over and sits next to me, out of breath. “Look at the sky,” he says. I look up. There flies a black bird, calling out in a loud voice. Maybe it’s calling for something, and maybe it’s calling for nothing. I smile.