

## A Comprehensive Guide on the Art of Feeling Human, Counting Backwards from Infinity, and Perpetual Permanences.

Introduction:

Reader, I would like you to imagine this. (In order to learn how to feel human, we must figure out first what it means to *not* be human.) Close your eyes, take in three deep, slow breaths. Close your eyes, and imagine yourself surrounded by nothing. What does nothing look like to you? Is it pink? Or perhaps periwinkle blue? Is it shiny? Hot? Cold? Most importantly, *did you imagine anyone else with you?*

Reader, here is what I think it means to be human.

It means to not be forgotten.

*What I really mean to say is,*

*you must not be alone.*

### *Act I: Permanence*

1) In math, an asymptote is a line that continually approaches a given curve, but does not meet it at any finite distance. In other words, it goes on forever. In the light of this infinity, my thought process goes somewhat like this. First, that a lot of my friends talk about what they're going to do when they get older, and move out of their house, and away from everything they've ever known. That for one, is not what concerns me. (*It is quite hard for me to define whether I am afraid of something, or it just excites me to the point where I feel nothing but adrenaline.*) What concerns me is that I am a horrible, terrible person because one day a friend of mine suggests getting a tattoo, and that alone makes my stomach twist in knots. I hate the idea of a black mark getting stuck on my vulnerable, stainable flesh so much that I try to avoid looking at the little scars on my body in the morning. *I suppose it is true that mirrors hide truth in them, after all.* Little permanences, I think, is what is truly terrifying. At night, I lay in bed and think about

tattoos and perennials and things that last, like Hollywood love stories and asymptotes and fairy tales with happy endings. *Then, I wonder if the difference between them really matters at all.*

*Act II: What I think about when someone says, "future".*

2) My highschool algebra teacher marks a problem on the whiteboard in red ink. She draws a curve, a cross, two arrow heads. The lights of the classroom are dim, and I sit at the back of the class. I have forgotten my glasses. She asks for us to identify the leading coefficient, and the degree of the function. I can do nothing but watch the world move around me, forever sucking up the slow, honey-golden drops of time. I suppose in this function, the degree is unknown. The leading coefficient is unknown. As the curve goes on, it's future is unknown. I am thirteen when I begin to think (and admittedly worry) about the future. I know it won't be like I imagined. Perhaps I have a significant other with messy hair and loving hands that takes me to places like botanical gardens and planetariums and as we sit stargazing confessing our love in the dark, they tell me I'm lovelier than all the stars in the sky. Maybe I am sitting in law school studying with a huge book that I checked out from the college library like it's not \$150; and I see that someone has scribbled their initials in the margins in sparkly blue pen. *In this future, I will smile and add my own, hoping that I won't be forgotten either.* Perhaps someone climbs through my window at 3 AM and before I can say anything, they grip my shoulders and tell me that I'm probably going to break their heart, and they would gladly let me. *Maybe it is dusk and I sit on top of a building watching the sunset, and thinking how the streets below would look if set on fire, and it is very, very still.* I hope that I do not become lost at the bottom of myself. I think it is safe for me to judge the meticulous things that lie within the boundary of my own character, and it is plausible this will never happen. However, it is in this future I become a tragedy, because I am only mortal and a catastrophe of human nature, and I will be the dead god that history has always wanted to tell stories about. *In this paradise-lost, I am content with finding pieces of myself, and losing them all at once.*

*Act III: Leminescate and fatal flaws*

3) My little permanences: I had heart surgery at 13. I play sports. I write poetry. *I tell the stars about myself so when I am gone, I will not be forgotten.* I wish that I bled silver and gold so I could be anything other than human. I don't like the dry texture of fake fur, but I like cats. I am five foot two and wish that I would grow so people could stop looking down on me and start looking up. I am Chinese and wish I could speak it as well as I used to, and I get straight A's, even though people say it's just because I'm asian. My favorite book is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, and art really is quite useless, once you think about it. I have a mole above my right eye and hair that hangs to my waist, and I don't wear makeup because I think it's suffocating. I cry during sad movies and I watch old chinese dramas with my dad without subtitles so I can prove to myself that I'm not slipping away from my heritage, I've played piano for nine years and my favorite composer is Chopin, because his music is so heartbreakingly lovely and it sounds like the song the ocean sings at night. I am waiting for the moon to talk to me, and I like the smell of rain. The dictionary of obscure words says it's called a "pluviophile". *I think it's just being human.* I watch Ted Talks on string theory in my spare time and entertain the idea of opposite dimensions at night, and ever since I traveled to Tokyo it stole my heart and never looked back. I write love letters to beautiful things on scraps of old newspapers, and tear them up right after. *I don't want to be forgotten. I don't want to be forgotten. I don't want to be forgotten.*

*Act IV: Polynomials and the Function of the Universe*

4) It is 10 PM on a Wednesday night in which I begin to ponder two values; zero, and infinity. I have chosen the word "values" because to me, these concepts appear ever increasingly hard to think about. *Zero is the absence of everything. Infinity is the absence of nothing.* Likewise, the zero power rule states anything raised to the zero power is one. *I see that it is not just in our world that empty things are given a*

*place to belong.* In my math class on Monday, my teacher hands out a paper that asks, *what is zero raised to the power of zero?* I answer in simple terms: *Zero to the power of zero is undefined.* It is then when I am sitting at my desk that I think everything is utterly, utterly useless when it comes to understanding numbers. *And by numbers, I mean the nature of infinity, the nature of humanity, and the nature of the end of the world.* Of course, I am not a mathematician. I am a tired high school student slouched over a worksheet and trying to wrap my mind around infinity, and zero. Now what has begun as a simple experiment to finish my math homework, I am here wondering if zero or infinity or impossible things really exist at all.

#### *Act V: Fear*

5) Considerably, the concept of death does not frighten me as much as it should. Like I have said before, the only thing more terrifying than the absence of nothing is the absence of everything. Being human, in retrospect, is just as constricting. It is difficult for me to imagine what the definition of humanity is. Of course, I suppose one could define it as standing in the rain on a late summer evening without an umbrella, or maybe walking along the beach barefoot, so you can read the sea's heart and her yours, or driving down a lone highway as the sky turns from pale peach-pragne to a torrent of black clouds and all the things what we lost, or finally, (and I think this is the most believable definition) being human means being skilled in the art of losing things. For that matter, being human is like the value zero. Humanity cannot exist without loss. Zero cannot exist without another number with a tangible value. In the light of this realization, while I sit at my desk on a late Wednesday night I then ask this question: *if you cannot exist without something else, do you really even exist at all?*

- *Nothing responds, and I am left to my own perpetual silence.*

