

FINITUDE

A Sketch by

Tom Attea

LIGHTS come up on a  
large black bag at center.  
Ken, an adult, is inside.

KEN

Hello. Is anybody else here? Maybe I'm all alone. But how can that be? There must be someone else out there somewhere. It's such a big universe. Maybe there's a whole community out there. Maybe there are thousands of communities out there. Millions. Billions. Trillions. I wish I knew, but here I am, stuck in this small space. Sometimes I feel so isolated. Maybe this is like Europe before the discovery of America -- only it's the earth before the discovery of what? Other life? What kind? But what's that got to do with me? Maybe I should be content with what I can know. No! I want to make contact. Let me give it another try.

(an antenna slips out of the top of the bag)

Hello, out there? This is Ken. If you can hear me, send back a message. Any message. I'm not particular. Nothing yet. Let me scan a little.

(moves antenna around)

Hello, again. Come in, if you can hear me. I'll accept any signal I can get.

(gives up momentarily)

Silence. No sign of other life anywhere -- I mean, that at least can send a message. Am I really all alone? Well, then, how about God?

(wiggles antenna)

Hello. Are you there? Can you see in here? If you're so good, why am I all alone? You don't expect me to be content with this, do you? Well, don't act so high and mighty. If I wasn't here to perceive you, where would you be? But that's an old story. If HE or She or Them or It wasn't there, would I be here? But why do I have so many questions and so little knowledge?

(wiggles antenna furiously)

Come in, God. Come in, please. This is Ken. I want to know, why am I here? Just to die? That seems like a contradiction. Imagine, being born just to die. No, the universe is smarter than that. Then what was I born to do -- live? And do what? Suffer? Well, let me think about that.

(pulls in antenna and examines himself)

I've got two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth, two arms, etc. I seem well-balanced -- I mean, at least on the outside. Food tastes good. Sex is fun. In fact, when I just stroke my own arm lightly, it feels good. Thinking gives me pleasure. And weather can be nice. Do you suppose I was designed to enjoy life? I mean, not selfishly, but thoughtfully. I wonder if life could be a gift to enjoy? It doesn't seem as bad as it used to -- now that we've got things like antibiotics and air conditioning. Maybe it's perfectable; at least, it's improvable. Well, if it's a gift to enjoy, at least that would mean God could be a nice guy -- or girl, or both, or whatever. I like that. But what do I know?

KEN (CONT'D)

And what about when I die? I wonder what happens. Is it just like closing my eyes? Or is there something afterward? I wish I knew. Hey, I've got a really big question here. Can I please get an answer? Come on. It's just not nice to be alive without knowing what happens next. Let me out of here!

(starts to punch bag)

Let me out! Let me see beyond where I am. Let me see all the way to infinity! More silence. Always silence. Well, I refuse to accept it. But what can I do?

(settles down)

Hey, maybe I just need a bigger antenna. But how big would it have to be? I don't know. What am I doing here, anyway? I only know I'm here. Well, at least, that's something. I know I'm alive. Can't argue with that. It's my new *cogito*. If I wasn't alive, I wouldn't be upset. I wonder if knowing I've got life is enough -- I mean, since that's all I know, maybe that's supposed to be enough, if the universe makes any sense at all, and I think it does.

Hey, maybe I'm just supposed to take life and do the best I can with it. I wonder if the answer is that simple? But what about all my other questions? Hmm. Well, let's see. Do I really need a direct connection with the infinite to be happy? I'd sure like one. But maybe that's kind of presumptuous for a little guy like me. Well, let me think about that.

If, instead of all my striving and torment, I just settled in and did the best I could with life, I'd probably have the best life I could. And maybe whatever made it would like me -- if it likes anyone. Hey, that sounds almost like a win-win situation. But am I being small minded?

I mean, what about another life? What if there is one and all I'm thinking about is this life? Would that change whether or not there really is one -- I mean, for me? Haven't got a clue. But hold on a second. Maybe taking good care of this life is a good way to show I deserve another one -- I mean, if there is one. Could that be true? Well, at least, it sounds logical. But will I still believe it tomorrow? Will I believe it at the point of death? I guess time will tell. So I'm almost out of questions.

Except for the really big one.

(hits bag)

I mean, why is there anything at all, instead of nothing? But then, if there wasn't anything at all, there wouldn't be the question. No something, no nothing.

(hits bag again)

I can't stand it. Could my poor finite mind just be telling me to relax? No, no, I have too much curiosity for that. I want answers. I want the dignity that comes from the eternal quest for knowledge. And I've got the courage to stay with it. After all, I'm a human being. I've got brains. How do I know what my limits are? Well, birth and death. Those are pretty solid limits. Got to admit that.

KEN (CONT'D)

Hey, what if I have as many concerns after I'm dead as I had before I was born? Did I have any way back when? Can't remember any. What if the only experience is life? That does it! I think I'm just going to settle in and enjoy my life -- I mean, intelligently and with consideration for others. At least, until I pick up some kind of new broadcast with this antenna. Let me launch it out there and see.

(tosses walkie-talkie with antenna out onto stage)

Come in, anybody. Come in, God. Still nothing. Well, then, I wonder if I could be proud of myself for just doing the best with my life and no more? I wonder if I could even be glad I got to live? Hey, maybe that's it! Maybe I should try to live in a way that will make me glad I was born. But then what? I'll lie down in the earth like a perfect little tangent to the great globe, till I crumble back into it and disappear. Or maybe I'll avoid that and emulate the universe. I could give myself the same fate as a solar system near the end, when its star explodes and incinerates the planets it warmed for so long. At least, my molecules would get back into circulation sooner. One thing you can say. Nature sure knows how to die. Look how pretty the leaves are in autumn, almost like they're dying with a salute to life. I wonder if this is even the first evolution of modern life on earth? What if a meteor hit the earth and knocked it out of its atmosphere and water for even a few minutes. Everything would die, and in time the continents would be ground up and replaced with new ones. Can somebody please tell me why I have these concerns? I wonder if anybody else does? Oh, boy. I sure wish I wasn't alone with so many questions.

(hand comes out of bag with wave)

Hello, again. It's me, Ken. Are you sure there's nobody out there? Last chance. If there's anybody out there, let me know -- or I'm just going to settle in here, establish a nice balance between being and becoming, instead of stressing myself out, and enjoy myself until I die. OK, then, that's it. I'm settling in.

(pulls hand back in)

I'm content. I'd rather live with majestic questions than with uncertain answers. I mean, what do those answers do anyway but take the questions away from me? Yes, that's it. I'd rather live with true questions and wait to see if I finally get some answers.

So that's me, then. That's Ken -- truly alive, with true questions, but thinking I know enough to lead a pretty good life, and happy I'm here. Well, if that's the case, I guess it's time to look around in here more carefully and see what all is here. Let me, as the old saying goes, count my blessings. Count them for probably the first time in my life. After all, think how hard it is to get into life. Once, I was just one sperm among millions, racing toward an egg that happened to be there. Think how many millions and billions didn't make it over the years. But I did. With those odds, it's harder to get into life than it is to get into heaven. Lucky me. I made it, and so I have questions. But at least I got to live and maybe I can be content, especially if I can get some control over my needs. Maybe, I can be content. Just maybe. But I still wish I knew if there was anybody or anything else out there! I wish I knew!

(punches bag one last hard time)

BLACKOUT

