The Imperfection We call Human

‘Yes, it could make every letter or story so perfect that it leaves us speechless. After all, it’s so perfect,” Lindani said, staring at the glowing screen.

But dear, “have you noticed it lacks something? Something only we humans have?” Amanda asked.

“I don’t understand,”Pabatso replied. “I don’t see any flaws in it ,it’s good and it makes work so faster and so perfect.”

Lindani learned back in his chair. “That is exactly what worries me.”

Pabatso laughed. “You are worried because something is perfect?”

Amanda smiled. “let him explain.”

Lindani turned the laptop towards them. On the screen was a letter generated by artificial intelligence. Every sentence was beautiful constructed, there was no spelling mistake.

No awkward phrases, no unnecessary words. It just sounded warm, intelligent and emotional. Almost too emotional.

“Read the last paragraph.” Lindani said. Pabatso read it aloud, when she finished, she nodded. “Beautiful.”

“Do you feel anything?” Lindani asked.

“Of course.”

“What?”

Pabatso paused. “I don’t know, I just… like it.”

“Exactly.”

Pabatso frowned. “What exactly.”

“It sounds emotional,” Lindani said, but there is no emotion behind it.”

Amanda looked at him carefully, “Explain.”

Lindani closed the laptop. Imagine receiving a letter from someone you love. They tell you they miss you, maybe the sentences are messy, maybe they repeat themselves.

Maybe they accidentally spell a word incorrectly. But when you read it, you know that person sat somewhere thinking about you. He placed his hand on his chest. “You feel them.”

Pabatso shrugged. “But AI can write the same thing .”

“it can write it ,”Lindani agreed. “But it can not live it.” The room became quiet. Outside the wind pushed against the window and somewhere in the distance, a dog barked. Pabatso finally spoke.

“So you are saying AI can’t write emotions?”

“No, I’m saying it can describe emotions. There is a difference.”

Amanda nodded slowly. “it can write about a mother losing a child.” She said, “But it doesn’t know what it feels like to lose a child.”

“It can write about falling in love,” Lindani continued. “ But it has never had a heart race because someone smiled at it.”

“And it can write about childhood memories,” Amanda added, “Without ever having a childhood.”

Pabatso looked at laptop again, for the first time, the perfect sentences seemed strangely empty.

“But isn’t that the point of technology?” she asked. “To make things easier?”

“Yes, and I’m not against that,”Lindani said.

“you aren’t.” Pabatso raised an eye brow.

“No, Ai can help us. It can correct grammar, it can help us find information, it can give us ideas when we are stuck, it can even teach us things.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

Lindani looked at his friends. “The problem begins when we stop using it as a tool and start using it as our voice.”

Amanda was silent, Pabatso didn’t answer. The following week their school announced a writing competition and the theme was simple: **what does it mean to be human in the age of artificial intelligence?**

The three friends immediately thought of their conversation.

“I already know what I am writing, Pabatso announced excitedly.

Lindani smiled, “ let me guess, AI is amazing and humans should stop worrying.”

“Exactly.”

Amanda laughed, “and you? She asked Lindani.

“I don’t know yet.”

That surprised both of them.

“you have been arguing about this for a week,” Pabatso said. “How can you not know what you are writing?”

 “Because talking about something and understanding it is different.”

Amanda smiled, “that sounds very human.” They laughed. That evening Lindani sat alone at his desk. He opened his laptop and the blank page stared back at him.

He typed: what does it mean to be human? Then he stopped, he opened an AI writing assistant. His fingers hovered over the

keyboard. For a moment he considered asking it to write the entire essay.

He could submit something polished and very impressive. No body would know, he began typing: *write me a powerful story about human creativity in the age of AI.*

The response appeared almost instantly, Lindani read it and it was good infact it was very good. The story had beautiful metaphors, perfect dialogue and a dramatic ending.

He read it again…then again. He should have been impressed, instead he felt uncomfortable. There was something familiar about it, to him it just sounded like everyone.

It sounded like nobody, he deleted it .For some time he stared at the empty screen. Then he opened the notebook. He wrote about his grandmother, the way she used to call him by a nick name nobody else used.

He wrote about the day ,she had laughed so hard that she couldn't finish her sentence. He wrote about the smell of bread in her kitchen. His handwriting was messy; some sentences were terrible.

He crossed out words and rewrote them. He made mistakes but kept on going. For the first time that night Lindani wasn't trying to sound perfect. He was trying to sound like himself.

The next morning, he showed Amanda what he had written. She read it quietly till she reached the end. As she had finished reading, she didn't speak.

"Is it that bad?"Lindani asked nervously. Amanda shook her head, "No."

"Then why aren't you saying anything?"

She looked up, "Because I'm trying not to cry."

Lindani smiled, " why?"

“Because I know your grandmother, I could see her.”

“That story isn’t perfect.”

“No,” Amanda said. “It isn’t.”

“And that’s why I believe it.”

Pabatso arrived a few minutes later. She was carrying her laptop. “I finished mine.” She announced proudly.

“Already?”

“AI helped me.”

Lindani looked at her. Pabatso opened the document, they read it. It was flawless, the introduction was powerful, the arguments were organized and even the conclusion was beautiful.

Amanda nodded, “this is really good.”

Pabatso grinned, “see I told you.”

“yes it is.” Lindani smiled. But he noticed something, Pabatso had written about human creativity without telling a single human story.

No memory, no fear, no joy, no experience, just perfect sentences. Pabatso noticed Lindani ‘ s expression. “What?”

“Nothing.”

“Tell me.”

Lindani hesitated. “It sounds like something everyone would write.”

Pabatso ‘s smile disappeared. “And yours doesn’t?

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because mine is about something that happened to me.”

Pabatso looked at his screen. “ So?”

“So nobody else would have written it exactly the way I did.”

Pabatso didn’t respond. That afternoon the three friends continued working on their entries. Pabatso became frustrated, she kept changing her introduction.

Then her conclusion and then the middle. Every time she asked AI to improve it, the writing became more polished. And somehow, she liked it less.

She closed the laptop, “I hate this.” Everything sounds so perfect but when I read it, I don’t feel like I’m reading something I wrote.

Lindani smiled, “now you understood.”

Pabatso was quiet. The she opened a blank page and started again. This time she didn’t ask AI to write for her.

She wrote about her father, about the first day her father taught her how to ride a bicycle. About falling, About crying even about her father ‘s laughter.

About the moment she finally managed it ride without her father ‘s help. The writing wasn’t perfect, but as she finished she smiled.

Amanda learned on her shoulder. “That,” she said. “sounds like you.”

Pabatso nodded, “I think I finally understand what you mean.”

Lindani looked at both of them. “AI can give us perfect words.”

Amanda continued, “But perfect words don’t automatically make a meaningful story.”

Pabatso added, “ Because meaning comes from somewhere.”

“where?” Lindani asked. Pabatso thought for a moment, “from us.”

Few days after the day of the competition finally arrived.

The students gathered in a hall, one by one they presented their work. Some students had written about robots, others wrote about the future and others feared AI. Others believed it would change the world for the better.

Then it was Lindani ‘s turn. He walked to the stage holding few sheets of paper. His hands trembled, he looked at the audience then he started.

He didn’t talk about machines taking over the world. He talked about his grandmother, he talked about memories. He talked about imperfect handwriting and words that came out wrong.

He talked about how humans cried, laughed ,loved, lost and remembered.

Then he said: “perhaps the greatest thing about human is not that we can create perfect things. Perhaps it’s the fact that we can create something imperfect and still give it meaning.”

The hall was silent. Lindani looked down at his paper, he took a breath. “AI may write far more perfect sentences than any of us. It may create stories in seconds.

It may know millions of words and understand patterns we can not see.”

He looked at the audience, “But there is one thing , it can not give a story.” He paused.

“A life.”

The hall remained silent for a moment. Then someone began clapping, another joined then another person joined.

Soon the entire hall was filled with applause. Lindani smiled, he walked back to his seat.

Pabatso leaned towards him, “you know what?”

“What?”

“Your story wasn’t perfect.”

Lindani laughed, “I know.”

“It had few awkward sentences.”

“I know.”

“And I think you made a spelling mistake.”

“I definitely know.”

They both laughed; Amanda looked at them. “would you change it?”

Lindani looked at his paper and then he thought of the perfect version AI could have produced. Then he shook his head. “No.”

“Why?”

“Because every mistake is mine.”

Perhaps that was the answer they had been searching for all along .Humans were not perfect because they could always create better than machines.

They were special because behind every creation there was a reason. A memory, a feeling, a dream, a wound and a hope.

AI could imitate the shape of those things, it could described them beautifully. It could make our sentences cleaner and our work faster.

But humans gave those words a heartbeat. And as long as humans continue to feel, remember, imagine and create. There

would always be someone in our imperfect words that perfection could not replace.

Something only humans could give, a meaning.