

Love, Loneliness and Life

by Phillip W. Weiss

Once upon a time there was a man named Ernie (or Ernest if you are a stickler for formality, or Sergeant Ernie when he was serving in the Army, or Professor Ernie when he taught political science at a very prestigious college, or Brother Ernie when he was a member of the Freemasons, or Chairman Ernie when he chaired the local community board). He lived in New York City. He was essentially a good man. He worked, paid his taxes, associated with friends, went to baseball games and lived responsibly. Yet, despite his impressive resume with its long list of accomplishments, he felt lonely. He never married, in fact never wanted to tie the knot. Nevertheless, he wanted to share his life with someone special, a special lady, someone who he could love and would love him, someone who would fill that gaping vacuum of loneliness that threatened to turn his life into hell. To find this special lady, he went to bars, social gatherings, meetings, and political events. Every place he went he carefully observed all the ladies, looking for the one who would fulfill his dreams. He had known ladies in the past, beautiful ladies with whom he formed intense but brief relationships. He remembered the feelings of excitement and anticipation that accompanied every first meeting. For him that was the closest he came to experiencing true love. Yet, no relationship would last. Something unexpected would come up to break asunder what seemed true bliss. Yet, his life went on, he always met someone

new and all was well. Then one day he discovered something about himself. This discovery hit him like a boulder. While shaving he looked at the reflection of his face in the mirror and for the first time noticed that he was old. Of course, he knew his age and was aware of the passing of time, but this was the first time he was struck by the fact that he was no longer young and that women may no longer want him. That threw him into a panic. He became depressed and began drinking heavily. He called old girlfriends, many of whom he had not seen in decades, and found that their telephone numbers were disconnected. He searched their names online and to his chagrin found that many had died. He was flabbergasted and at the point of despair. The ladies who once had meant so much to him were now just memories. The times they spent together, the lovemaking, the arguing and the breaking ups were all lost to time, all just a waste of energy with nothing to show for it. He felt trapped. One evening, after having consumed a pint of vodka mixed with orange juice, he went out. He was desperate for the company of a woman, any woman provided she wasn't too repulsive. So he went to a nearby bar. It was crowded with patrons all of whom seemed like children to him. He tried to strike up a conversation with a young lady but she just laughed and walked away, leaving him feeling rejected and alone. He meandered back to his apartment, made himself another drink, turned on the television, laid down on his bed and passed out. In the morning he awoke with a start. It was already morning and the television was still on, showing a movie from the nineteen eighties which he saw when it first came out forty years

ago. He got up, drank a glass of water, took a shower, looked at himself in the mirror and then looked out the window. The sun was shining, people were talking, traffic was moving, and the sounds of the city came together to produce a strange yet exhilarating cacophony of music that was a thousand times more profound than that produced by the greatest symphony orchestra. Now mesmerized, he took in the scene, absorbed the music, filled his lungs with air and with a mighty roar, yelled to the world: "I may be lonely but it's good to be alive." From the street, a young lady nicely attired, stopped, looked up and replied, "That's good to know. You are not alone. I care. What's your name?"