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### CANNON BEACH LEATHER

239 N Hemlock  
503-436-0208  
SANDRA L. WARD



Dear Uncle Mike,

Is there anything you could find out that would make you wish to stop living? Is there anything or anyone you cannot live without?

I am so sad. I feel bereft, spiritually. I feel like I am not real enough, like life is always such a compromise. I know you'd have to be an idiot in this day and age to not feel that, but I feel like I am meant to feel something strong and good. I feel like I will someday. I used to, actually. It was a feeling that I thought I'd be able, someday, to actualize and insulate, to make strong. It was my goal for adulthood.

I assumed there'd be someone else, an S.O. (that's PC speak for significant other) who'd fit into the picture. But it's not just a relationship, it's a whole thing. And it's not instant and constant and easy, simple, reassuring like it used to be. It comes and goes. Sometimes I even want it to go away. I call it (anidely) Erikaland, after my name.

Um, it has to do with my place in the world. Why do I feel so ineffectual? Why do I care? I just do. Am I an egomaniac? Headed for disaster? Disappointment? Yawn, I'm getting sleepy. I've also lost my ability to dream, and even (this is embarrassing) my ability to fantasize sexually. This has never been an issue with me. I think I feel unlovable. Ew. Pretty pitiful, huh? You know how, in magazines, columnists try to assuage lover's guilt over fantasizing someone other than their S.O.? Well, I sometimes fantasize that I'm someone else. That's a new one for me.

I know someone whom I'm madly drawn to, like a kamikaze, as if they were someone I'd known forever and trust implicitly (although, in fact, I have good reason to be wary) who would say I'm being self indulgent and that everyone feels that way. I don't know.

But thinking about stuff like this makes me lonely. Why?

Love, Erika in Portland

Dear Erika,

My, we are in a metaphysical funk, aren't we? It's fortunate you wrote to Uncle Mike promptly since any delay might have cured your angst before Uncle Mike had a chance to put in his two cents worth.

Is there anything that would make Uncle Mike want to stop living? Absolutely. Death, for one. Intractable physical pain for another. Or the belief he was of no use to anyone. Or forgetting the words to Bobby McGee.

Is there anything or anyone Uncle Mike cannot live without? Aside from food, water, oxygen, cigarettes and coffee, he can't think of a thing. Other humans? Although he has a great capacity for love and at least his fair allotment of friends, Uncle Mike has, like Bob Dylan, seen pretty people disappear like smoke. Again and again and again. After a few such episodes, even a chimpanzee would get the picture.

Why do you feel ineffectual? Since all actions have an effect, Uncle Mike can only assume that a) you are in a profound state of inertia, or b) you're trapped inside your head. He suggests you do something.

Why do you care? Probably because you are a caring person. Are you an egomaniac? Uncle Mike must, with all due respect, laugh. Egomaniacs assume their difficulties are the result of others' refusal to worship them. Your difficulties seem the result of your reluctance to appreciate yourself. In Uncle Mike's experience, the best humans are those who are constantly baffled that anyone finds them even remotely interesting.

Are you headed for disaster? Who knows? If Uncle Mike were a betting man, and he is, he'd bet not. Intelligence and empathy are strong talismans against making the sort of bonehead mistakes that feed one's life into the cosmic shredder. You seem possessed of both.

Are you headed for disappointment? Of course, dear. Who among us is not? As far as Uncle Mike can see, the trick is to have the fewest possible expectations. Dreams, yes. Hopes, absolutely. Expectations, nope. Expectations depend on one's ability to predict the future. Something that, given the nondeterministic nature of all events, none of us should try at home. Working without lust for results is the prayer most often answered.

That you've lost your ability to dream seems, in Uncle Mike's experience, a short term disability. A symptom rather than a disease. You're dreaming whether you remember your dreams or not. That you aren't remembering them can mean a number of things, none more serious than a cognitive hangnail. Uncle Mike, for instance, has had dream cycles he'd give a year of his life to get back. He suspects that's the reason they're gone.

That you've lost your ability to fantasize is only a slightly bigger deal. It sounds to Uncle Mike like your libido is backing up. Or that you're not in an especially sexual mode just now. Uncle Mike would wager his old mother's pension that the fantasies, and the realities, will return.

Uncle Mike is sad that you are sad. Even sadder that you are spiritually bereft. He senses the real problem is that you're feeling lonely and isolated and wounded by love. Welcome to the human comedy. No, unlike the person to whom you're madly drawn, Uncle Mike does not think you're being self indulgent. Uncle Mike thinks you're being an introspective human, one of Uncle Mike's favorite kinds.

Most of all, Uncle Mike thinks you're hanging out with people who, for one reason or another, aren't your people. People who are your people exhibit certain behaviors. They appreciate you for who you are. They care about your well-being and act in ways that support your sense of self. They accept the gift of your friendship with gratitude and respect. And, most importantly, they give more than they take.

You are not unlovable, Erika. You are probably not even unloved. Uncle Mike suggests you find a rose and smell it. Or run off with him for a week in the Bahamas.

He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I ever met.

Abraham Lincoln

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