REVIEW OF *HOW TO NOT DIE ALONE*

Great relationships are *built*, not discovered.[1]

Ury thinks there are three common tendencies that lead people to sabotage their own love lives:

The Romanticizer has unrealistic expectations of *relationships*.
The Maximizer has unrealistic expectations of their *partner*.
The Hesitater has unrealistic expectations of *themselves*.[2]

I didn't immediately feel like any of these described me. But the book has one of those rate-your-agreement-with-each-statement-to-find-out-what-category-you-are quizzes, and this description of a Hesitater hit me pretty hard:

If I want to attract the best possible person, first I need to *become* the best possible person.[3]

Well, don't I???

OK, I guess what I actually believe is more like: if I haven't been able to attract a partner with all the qualities I want yet, it must mean I'm not a desirable enough person yet. But that mindset does have some of the problems the book lists about being a Hesitater, such as:

…let's say you do reach this so-called state of perfection you've envisioned for yourself—by earning that promotion or shedding ten pounds—and then enter into a relationship. Will you worry that their love is conditional? That they'll leave you if you lose your job, tailspin, develop a ravenous cheddar cheese addiction, and gain twenty-five pounds?[4]

---

[1] Logan Ury, *How to not die alone: the surprising science that will help you find love*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 1, emphasis in original.

[2] Ibid., 20, emphasis in original.

[3] Ibid., 19, emphasis in original.

[4] Ibid., 51.

But surely we can't expect an unconditional partnership. We don't pick our partners at random, and committing to stay with them through down periods and tragedies does not mean committing to stay with them no matter who they decide to become in the future. Maybe the point is just that we should look for partners who love us for our more stable, proven traits rather than for the traits we had to strain ourselves to our limits to achieve.

One of the traits that matters a lot to most of us, though—whether we want it to or not—is physical attractiveness. Ury emphasizes that we need to "look for a life partner, not a prom date"[5]. But her point seems to be that we shouldn't try to *maximize* our partner's attractiveness, not that we shouldn't care about it at all:

> Infatuation fades! Lust fades! All that matters is that you feel attracted to the person, not that you scored the hottest possible person.[6]

There seems to be an underlying assumption that most people have lots of potential partners who they could share mutual attraction with, and that if you're getting hung up on superficial things, it's just because you're obsessed with getting someone on the extreme far right of the hotness curve. This, I suspect, will generally only ring true to people who are conventionally attractive. When Ury uses case studies of—for example—a "tall, fit, and charming"[7] CEO whose only obstacle to finding a partner is that he needs to relax his requirement that that partner also be "an in-shape business executive who's at least six-four"[8], or when she encourages women not to worry about the difference between 5'10" guys and 5'9" guys, I cannot help but feel that the challenges faced by 5'5" men or very large women have not really been addressed.

Regardless, the book gives a lot of advice that seems good, including:

- Let friends pick your photos for dating apps—we aren't good at judging photos of ourselves.
- "Stop going on dates in well-lit coffee bars. … Choose something sexier, like a candlelit wine bar."[9] I've generally taken the coffee date approach, but this book convinced me that's probably creating too much of a job-interview vibe.

---

[5]Ibid., 75.
[6]Ibid., 84.
[7]Ibid., 108.
[8]Ibid.
[9]Ibid., 156.

- Don't focus your conversation during dates on sterile facts about each other. Try asking questions designed to "escalate[] in intensity and intimacy"[10]; or "diving straight into the type of conversation friends (or lovers!) might have"[11] by talking about what's going on in your life right then; or asking for advice about something.
- "…try sitting next to—rather than across from—your date. …it's easier to talk when we're not looking someone in the eyes. … Eye contact and processing language rely on the same neural circuitry."[12]
- "Be interested, not interesting."[13]
- Don't expect to feel a spark; default to going on second dates.
- Evaluate dating partners less based on their objectively measurable traits and more on how they make you feel and behave—"What side of me did they bring out?"[14]
- Have scheduled weekly check-ins with your partner.

There are also some more out-there but interesting ideas:

> A former coworker told me she was offering a big chunk of change to anyone who introduced her to the man she'd marry. When I heard how much she was willing to pay—several thousand dollars—I was impressed.[15]

That sounds highly rational and incredibly awkward; I love it.

I'll leave you with this mortifying tidbit:

> Swiss biological researcher Claus Wedekind … found women preferred the smell of the men whose genes were *more dissimilar* from theirs. (Coincidentally, the effect reverses for women on oral birth control. Things can get awkward when a couple marries, **the woman goes off birth control, and suddenly, she's attracted to different people**.)[16]

---

[10] Ibid., 162.

[11] Ibid., 163.

[12] Ibid., 156.

[13] Ibid., 164.

[14] Ibid., 169.

[15] Ibid., 141.

[16] Ibid., 86, italics in original, bold added.