

The Decade Of Blind Dates

Richard Alther

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A gay dad plunges into the world of blind dates hoping to find that one perfect person who will change his life. But the perfect man proves harder to find than Peter Bauman and his supportive family expect and his search uncovers a multitude of sketchy bizarre and hilarious characters.

Richard Alther draws upon his personal experience as a gay dad who met his partner online years after coming out. Because of the novel's first-person perspective it reads like a memoir and allows readers a glimpse into Alther's own personal experiences giving the prose a power and wisdom it would otherwise be lacking. Rather than merely studying the human condition and the always eventful search for love and happiness Alther puts his own personal twist on the tales which are occasionally over the top and clichéd. Readers are drawn into the story the same way Peter (and Alther once upon a time) let his guard down and ventured into an unknown world.

The characters that pop up in personal ads and on Peter's blind dates are always colorful and never fail to produce a chuckle or an awkward moment. Peter is the quintessential nice guy cast as a fish out of water for the majority of the tale which allows readers to identify with him along this winding road to love. Because Peter is a gay man and a dad at that the story is all the more interesting as it tackles subjects that many writers would be hesitant to take on. The topic of AIDS comes up as it often does in works dealing with homosexuality but simple topics such as how children deal with a parent's new lifestyle choices or how the loss of intimacy with a former partner of the opposite sex can unfold dominate the story.

Alther is a talented author with a knack for creating beautiful sentences that reflect the protagonist's emotional state. His words flow easily one into the next like a journey in their own right. Take for example the following passage "Mud season turned into May. The forsythia was in bloom; the crocuses had come and gone. Big bulbs shoved up and out of the ground. Steady sap from the sugar maples had produced a bumper crop. Everywhere juices were flowing; I was horny as hell." Alther's comparisons are at once hilarious and brutally honest seeming almost childish upon first glance but carrying a much deeper meaning. Alther is telling his readers that this need not be a taboo subject and that nothing in nature could be more natural than homosexuality.

Ultimately the story is a heart-warming tale sure to entertain and most importantly inform its audience. Rarely are such novels written from a gay man's perspective let alone a gay dad's perspective. Richard Alther has certainly broken through stereotypes to produce a work as charming and funny as it is in a way revolutionary. The bottom line here is that one needn't be gay to enjoy this book just as one needn't be straight to enjoy a novel told from the perspective of a man searching for his lady love.

LIAM BRENNAN (November 3, 2008)

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