

The Talented Trickster Tour 2003

DEPARTING THE FLOATING WORLD

By Alan Bennett I l a g a n



I AM AT A PARTY. The voices of the guests have merged into one monotonous roar. Not one stands out above the rest and Andy is nowhere to be seen. Someone pours me another drink. I smile and laugh. I think I laugh. And suddenly everything turns dark and slow. It feels like I am falling ~ or maybe floating, because it seems so hard to stand up and yet I do not crash down. I finish the drink. I taste nothing ~ no sharpness of alcohol, no sting of proof ~ just liquid pouring down my numb throat.

The question surfaces in the faces of my friends, in the flirtation of other men. Is he the one? How can I be sure? A part of me thinks there will always be a doubt, that we can never fully know and be completely certain. And so I drink more. Someone invites me outside for a smoke. I take one deep drag and hold it inside my lungs before missing Andy and stumbling back inside.

I fall into forgetfulness. I drown myself and float ~ floating and sinking at the same time. I can barely walk. I see laughing faces, grotesquely distorted. Demons of seductive depravity... is this fun or danger? I cannot tell and I continue onward in my search.

Do not drop the glass...

There are arms grabbing my arms. Hands and fingers crossed before my face. I fight to find something, someone. Will I always wonder? Half of my drink spills onto someone's shirt. I quickly swallow the rest and then the world shuts down. Everything is darkness ~ all is oblivion. I don't know who I am. I literally cannot remember who I am.

There is no past or future, only this present moment and I feel scared. I pretend I am all right. Focusing on how to walk, I let someone lead me into another room. How to explain that I don't know who I am or where I came from? How to even begin? I know nothing but fear.

A terrifying thought, followed quickly by a strange resignation. What if this is what my life will be like? What if I never find who I am, who I was, who I was meant to be? Then I realize that no one else seems to know something is wrong, no one notices that I am lost. For one harrowing moment everything shuts down. I am aware of neither light nor space nor time ~ hovering in suspension ~ asleep and afloat in a void. Then into this nether region a hand ~ tender and caring and strong ~ pulls me slowly out of nothingness.

I am coming to... coming to the surface. Through my tears and sobs, through my drunken haze, through my moment of doubt and worry, I see him. I am fighting my way back from oblivion, tearing through years of masks, layers of drink and drug... There is my past pulling me back, but I am fighting even harder because I have to make my way back to him. And there it is. The answer for which I had been forever searching. The one thing that makes living in such a world worthwhile. **LOVE**. It seems so simple, so easy and cliched, but how hard it is to realize it, and how we fight against it ~ mistrusting such goodness in our cynical coolness. It has always been for Love. And Love to me meant only one person ~ Andy.

I am reaching out for him, pulling myself out of the floating world, kicking free from my mind-altering shackles, and seeing things clearly for perhaps the first time. I am awake now. The Floating World has dissolved into dim memory, dissipating into thin air.

We are outside. I don't remember leaving the party, but there we are on the sidewalk. Tears stain my face, cool in the night air.

"Andy... is it... is it really you?" I stammer between sobs. I never thought I would find him.

On-lookers pause and pass us. I feel his arms around me and I see his confused smile. Such happy recognition I have never known until now.

I AM SAFE. I AM LOVED. I AM FREE.