

The Observer

by Susan Krichbaum

Act III

(Two years have passed. As the scrim lights come up, we see two frozen figures backlit. They are silhouetted at a booth in a restaurant seated across from one another. Actors come to life as the footlights come up. They are just finishing a meal as is indicated by empty plates, wadded up napkins, and half empty glasses on the table. Observer, seated stage left, sits with elbows on the table. Luke, seated stage right at the other side of the booth, is facing the audience with left leg propped on the seat of the booth in front of him.)

Observer- Aw, you're so hard on people, Luke. Maybe next time...

Luke-(interrupting) There won't be a next time! (Smiles) Next time he gets sick from drinking tequila with beer chasers, he'll have to find someone else's floor to throw up on.

Observer-(chuckling) Something tells me he has already learned his lesson.(Leans back in booth) So, Luke, how's your love life?

(Luke winces)

Luke- Unfair to ask a question that you already know the answer to...I have my music. It keeps me too busy for a girlfriend. Besides...

(Waitress approaches the booth)

Waitress - Can I get you more tea?

Observer - That would be great, thanks.

Luke - Can I get some more coffee? Mine has gone cold.

Waitress- Sure, hon.

(The waitress walks away. Moments of awkward silence pass as both watch her go.)

Observer- Besides?

Luke- Well, you know.

Observer- Actually, no. I've known you both a long time, but that doesn't mean I can entirely read your minds. I don't know anything, Luke. I only have a lot of suspicions

based on what I've seen. When you two are around each other, everything else seems to go away...but I only know what I feel, that there's still a thread that connects the two of you...but maybe that's just me.

(Luke squirms momentarily in his seat as if trying to avoid the conversation. He finally moves to face Observer.)

Luke- It's true. It's all true. Every thought you had. Everything you suspected.

(Silence)

Observer-How, Luke? Why?

(Both increasingly upset at revelation)

Luke- The reasons don't matter any more. None of it matters.

Observer- It matters to her. (Hesitates) It matters to me. (Pauses again) You two were happy together one minute and then, nothing. For almost a year, Luke, nothing. You wouldn't talk to her. You wouldn't even look at her...

Luke-(wildly) Don't you get it? I couldn't look at her. (Pauses as if to regain composure but fails.) Every time I'd look at her, she would sense it; she would look back at me and when our eyes would meet, there would be this conversation. (Tears begin to well up.) One three-second conversation with Sarah would take me three hours to say the same thing with any other girl... (turns to face audience again but with eyes downcast.) and I knew it was all over my face and anybody could see it. I couldn't do that to her. I couldn't do that to me. (Puts elbows on table and head between his hands.)(Softly) I couldn't.

(A long uncomfortable silence follows as Observer looks around, sighs heavily, and finally speaks)

Observer-I still don't understand why you pushed her away in the first place...

Luke- There was just a lot of stuff...(Sounding beat) I know I made a lot of mistakes, but we were seventeen. Seventeen year olds should not be that wrapped up in each other, should they? Isn't it common knowledge that love doesn't count until you're in your twenties?

Observer- (Squinting as if in thought, then relaxes) I'm sorry, kid. I got nothin' for you. No answers; only more questions.

(Waitress brings a pitcher of tea in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. She sets the coffee down on the table, pours the glass of tea, and steps back.)

Waitress- Do ya'll want any dessert or anything?

Observer- No thanks, just a check.

(Waitress walks away)

Observer- You know, Sarah will be here in a little while to pick me up.

Luke- (Stares down at table) I'll make sure I'm gone before she gets here.

Observer- It doesn't have to be that way, you know.(Both shift in their seats. Luke gets up.)

Luke- I'll be right back, I have to go to the bathroom.

(Luke exits stage left. While he is gone, the waitress comes by and leaves the check on the table. The observer's cell phone rings.)

Observer- Hello? Hey baby girl. (Pause) Well, we can make the eight thirty showing. (Pause) No, Luke and I are finished eating, but if you want I can place a to-go order for you. (Pause) Alright then, I'll see you when you get here. Love ya, bye.

(Observer picks up check and looks at it. Luke returns and sits at table.)

Before I forget, I need your help with something.

Luke- Sure, what do you need?

Observer- Well, there is this major project in my summer class. I've written a song lyric and it needs a tune. Do you think you could help me?

Luke-(brightening visibly) It would be my pleasure. When do you need to have it scored?

Observer- Well, my revision group meets on Monday, so the weekend would be great.

Luke- O.K., if you can give me the lyrics on Wednesday, I can think about it, and we can get together on Thursday and knock some things around. I can have an audio CD for you by Friday.

Observer- That will work. Sarah is going over to her friend's house Wednesday afternoon. I'll have her drop them off on her way then.

(Luke visibly tenses)

Hey, you're going to have to deal with it sometime. Don't expect things to change if you never take a chance...

Luke- I hurt her too badly. There's too much pain there...Besides, it's been two years.

Observer- I'm not so sure, Luke. You know, she saw you at the jazz concert last weekend.

Luke- Yeah, I know; I saw her, too. What was she doing there? (Hesitates)
She...didn't...come to see me...

Observer- No, she was there for extra credit, but she saw you play.

Luke- Really?

Observer- Actually, she heard you before she saw you. (Luke frowns in confusion) It seems she was walking around when she heard "Summertime" in a trumpet solo. She said she immediately knew it was you and followed the sound to the stage.

Luke- But that's not where I saw her...

Observer- Well, she didn't see you either. Just about the time she got to the stage, the solo ended. She looked for you but didn't see you. She thought maybe her mind had been playing tricks on her. She thought that maybe she had just wanted to see you and had let herself believe that she had heard you. "Summertime" and know it was you, so she started to leave.

(Luke begins to shake his head slowly in disbelief.)

She got about 50 feet away. Then she heard it again and knew it was you, so she followed the sound back to the stage. This time she realized that the song was coming from behind the column, so she moved so she could see, and there you were.

Luke- You're kidding.

Observer- Ask her if you don't believe me.

Luke-(Sweeps through a range of feelings, but ultimately restrains his emotions) It has been two years. I don't love her any more, and I'm sure she has gotten over me. I don't really believe you, but it's a great story. Thanks for that.

(Stage lights dim to 50%. Character of Luke freezes. Observer rises to stand on apron of stage, facing audience.)

Observer- (Shakes head) If only it was a story. (Slowly directly to audience) I do not envy God. The burden of knowing every crack in the universe, every black hole where a star once was, is a weight beyond my comprehension. But He is God...and I am just an observer...and this is my burden. (Turns back toward the booth, pauses pensively, and turns to half-face the audience. A sad smile crosses her lips.) And now it's your burden, too.

(Lights return to 100% as observer retakes place at booth, Luke reanimates and looks at watch.)

Luke- Wow, look at the time. I guess I had better be going.

Observer- Yeah, she'll be here any minute; I had better get going too.

Luke- We should do this again sometime soon.

Observer- OK, call me up. (Luke comes around to help Observer put on coat.) Be careful going home.

Luke- Don't worry, there's a full moon out tonight. I always drive better under a full moon. (Both smile) You two have a good time at the movies tonight.

(Observer stops and unexpectedly, leans across the booth, pulls something from Luke's lapel, balls it up between his fingers, and tosses it onto the table.)

Observer-(Mutters) Loose thread.(Again they smile at one another. Observer winks mischievously at audience.)Bye, Sweetie.

Luke- Bye.

(Luke gets up and puts on his coat as Observer picks up check and rifles through her purse. Luke begins to exit stage left but is halted in his tracks. He nearly bumps into a girl heading toward the table. They both stop and their eyes meet.)

(Softly) Hi, Sarah.

(Actors freeze, stage lights dim, curtain falls.)