

Between the Wire and the Wood

Written by

Melissa A. Bartell

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First Draft

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A dark club, where you'd normally expect to hear jazz, but instead, the performer onstage (a raised platform downstage left) is a cellist, BELOVED.

In the audience, at the front table, upstage center, angled so that she is watching BELOVED as well as addressing the audience, is LOVER.

The first scene is LOVER's monologue during BELOVED's performance.

BELOVED is playing the Prelude from Bach's Unaccompanied Suite for Cello (No.1)

LOVER

Below the melody, I can hear the pressure of his fingers, blunt force pushing the string down to meet the fingerboard. Pale flesh meeting ebony wood with wire sandwiched between.

LOVER is silent for several seconds as BELOVED plays. HE is mic'd in such a way that you can hear his fingers press and release the strings of his cello.

LOVER

The actual piece doesn't matter. It's something by Bach, of course, baroque and brooding, an elegy at times, a discourse at others. I know that it's Bach in the same way most people know the difference between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, but the name of the specific piece eludes me.

BELOVED continues to play the piece. While he plays, a WAITER brings LOVER a glass of wine (taking away an empty glass from her table) and a plate with a chocolate dessert, which she begins to eat.)

LOVER

Between the notes, I hear him draw a breath. If I were watching him, I'd probably see him reposition his bow in that same moment. As it is, I hear the air being released from his lungs, from his lips, just before the bow attacks the strings.

While BELOVED continues to play we see LOVER looking anywhere but at him. There is no microphone on her so everything she does - toying with her dessert, playing with her phone, is with without sound, but we can hear BELOVED breathing in time with his playing.

LOVER

I can't watch him.

I look at my phone, observe the deep claret color of the wine in my glass, devote close study to the remains of the dark chocolate mousse cake on my plate.

Anything to avoid his eyes.

Behind the music I catch the rasp of his sleeve where it brushes against the bridge on an up-bow. I lift my eyes - just for a second, I tell myself - and drink in the crisp white of his shirt, the jet black of his tie.

Finally, I am caught, trapped in the warm brown of his eyes.

From this moment on, BELOVED plays with his eyes locked on LOVER, and her gaze fixed on him. What was a performance is now an open seduction. He knows she is there, watching. She knows he is aware of her presence and is playing for her.

LOVER

He notices me staring at him, but his playing never falters, though there's a slight quirk of his brow that just matches the note he flourishes.

Beneath the chords, I hear the faint buzz, not quite a wolf-tone, from the titanium strings, and discern - barely - the soft contact of his thumb resettling itself in the saddle of his cello.

As he lifts his bow from the strings, the faint tang of sweat and rosin assaults my senses. I lick my lips,

anticipating the moment when he leaves the stage and joins me at my table.

With LOVER's attention fixed on him, BELOVED finishes the piece. There is applause from the onstage audience (all shadow people). He sets his cello on its ribs, lays the bow on top, and joins LOVER at her table.

BELOVED
I'm sorry you had to sit alone.

LOVER
(half in jest)
People always warned me about dating a musician. (beat) I was never alone; only... unaccompanied.

BELOVED reaches for LOVER's wine glass and sips from it, then leans over and kisses her as the lights...

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE TWO

The loft that BELOVED and LOVER share. It is early morning and the large arched windows (think pre-war NYC) are letting in the light of a rainy day.

On a bed pushed against the upstage wall, LOVER lies tangled in sheets. BELOVED enters from off-stage right with a tray holding coffee and bagels. He is bare-chested and wearing loose pajama pants.

BELOVED
(softly, seductively)
Morning... time to get up...

LOVER
 (rolling over and
 sitting up, but
 keeping the sheets
 wrapped around her)

Do I smell coffee?

BELOVED

You do... Slide over...

LOVER

Ohhh... I *do* love you.

BELOVED

You say that to all the men who bring you coffee in bed.

LOVER

No... only to the ones who remember I like cream.

BELOVED

Ah, well, then I'm in luck.

Balancing the tray, BELOVED joins
 LOVER in the bed. He sets the tray
 between them and LOVER reaches for
 one of the mugs, sipping for it and
 smiling.

LOVER

Perfect.

BELOVED

Thank you, you're not so bad yourself.

LOVER

I meant the coffee.

BELOVED

Ah...

LOVER

But since you made it...

BELOVED

... and the bagels...

LOVER

And the bagels, I guess I'll keep you. For a while anyway.

BELOVED

Only a while.

LOVER

Well, musicians are fickle. You might get bored with me, move on to someone else... same way you might fall out of love with Bach and decide you want to obsess over... I don't know... Faure.

BELOVED

No one ever falls out love with Bach.

LOVER

Oh?

BELOVED

No. It's not possible. Bach is... you know the prelude I was playing last night? You can play it every day for a year, for two years, and you might think you've found every nuance in it, eked out every little flair in each note. Found every place where you can accent this or underplay that... and then you can set it aside for a decade and come back to it and it's like a whole new piece... you... you're the same.

LOVER

(mock-insulted)

I'm someone you want to put aside for a decade?

BELOVED

No. You're someone I want to learn every nuance of, someone I want to play -

LOVER

Play?

BELOVED

Worship. Delight. Entrance. Experience. Love. (beat, and then darkly) Play.

LOVER

Like Bach?

BELOVED

No. Like my cello. Only you're my lover and she's my mistress.

LOVER

You sure it's not the other way 'round?

BELOVED

(sheepish)

Well. Maybe. Sometimes. But you're the only human I share myself with. Me and you. Flesh and blood. Body and soul. Me and cello. Wire and wood.

LOVER
(teasing, flirting)

Wood, huh?

BELOVED

Hush. Eat your bagel.

LOVER

Bagels can wait. Rainy mornings should *not* be wasted.

BELOVED

Good point.

LOVER puts her mug back on the tray and BELOVED puts the tray on the floor next to his side of the bed. LOVER manages to rearrange the sheet so that it's over both of them without baring herself to the audience.

BELOVED

(whispering)

I love you too, you know.

LIGHTS FADE OUT

SCENE THREE

Some years later.

The same club as scene one, the same setup. BELOVED is playing again, but he's playing a different piece this time he's playing the solo cello version of Mark O'Connor's Appalachia Waltz. LOVER is at her regular table.

LOVER

Between the wire and the wood there is a moment, where time stops. It's less than the space between heartbeats, but similarly immeasurable... it's the kind of moment you only recognize after years of intimacy.

BELOVED's playing of this piece is less polished than it was of the Bach, even though time has passed. It's a piece that's meant to be haunting, like a walk through ancient woods.

LOVER (cont'd)

Learning how to hear those moments... learning how to live your life in between them... that's how you make a relationship work when one of you is tied to a single location and a mundane job, and the other is jetting off to play concerts.

BELOVED lets the final note fade out slowly, waits for the expected applause, sets down his cello, then leaves the stage and joins LOVER at her table. As before, he sips from her glass before kissing her.

BELOVED

I still feel bad that you're alone when you come to hear me play.

LOVER

But I'm not.

BELOVED

I know. You're just 'unaccompanied.'

LOVER

It's more than that now. I've heard you rehearsing... lived with you figuring out what to play in different spaces. And I hear more than just the music. I hear your breath and your pulse and the spaces between the notes.

BELOVED

(murmuring)

Between the wire and the wood.

LOVER

(smiling)

Yes. That. That exactly. (beat) Ready to go home?

BELOVED

Let me just pack up. Finish your wine.

LOVER

Sure.

LIGHTS FADE OUT

SCENE FOUR

The loft. It's a little more furnished, but not much changed. It feels much more like a couple lives there,

*though... BELOVED and LOVER
enter together.*

BELOVED
(setting his cello
near a dining table
downstage right)
It's good to be home.
(turning to embrace
LOVER)
Do you want dinner now, or...

LOVER
(kissing him)
I ate at the club. I'd much rather have dessert.

BELOVED
Dessert sounds nice.

The lights are already dim; they
move toward the bed shedding
clothing as they do, until LOVER is
wearing only her blouse and
underwear.

LOVER
The piece you played tonight... it's contemporary, isn't it?

BELOVED
Yes. American, even.

LOVER
It's different than Bach. Less moody, but... haunting,
somehow.

BELOVED
Oh?

LOVER
I was wondering if you'd play it for me.

BELOVED
Now?

LOVER
(flirtatious)
On me.

LOVER is facing upstage and she
drops her blouse so that the
audience can see that her back is
tattooed with cello f-holes.

BELOVED
(teasing, flirting)
Well, if you think you're in tune... ?

LOVER
With you? Always.

BELOVED
Mmm. Truer notes have never been played.

LOVER and BELOVED come together on
the bed as the lights fade out and
as the Appalachia Waltz starts
playing again, we have...

CURTAIN