

Losing Sight

By
Kevin D. Ferguson

LOSING SIGHT

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LOSING SIGHT

DEDICATION

Losing Sight is dedicated to Thom and Mindi Penn at Atlantic Stage, who gave me an artistic home for ten years and friendships for life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Todd Ristau, founder of the Playwrights Lab at Hollins University, as well as Lisa Abbott of the Georgia Theatre Conference, Jeffrey Green of Georgia Southwestern University, Gregg Henry of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, John Patrick Bray, and Gene Kato of Next Stage Press, who all helped keep this little play going.

LOSING SIGHT

Losing Sight premiered in Americus, Georgia on January 24, 2014 at Georgia Southwestern University with the cast who read the play at the Georgia Theatre Conference in 2012 and at KCACTF Region IV in 2013.

JASON RYAN WALLACE as BARRY
SARA SELLERS as AMY
WILLIAM SEARCY as NOLAN

Directed by Jeffrey Green
Assistant Directed by Christopher Gilstrop

SCENIC DESIGNER.....RAYMOND MANNILA
LIGHTING DESIGNER.....JESSE WADE
SOUND DESIGNER..... JESSE WADE
COSTUME DESIGNER..... RAYMOND MANNILA
STAGE MANAGER.....CHRISTOPHER GILSTROP

Losing Sight received a staged reading in Washington, DC at the Kennedy Center during the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival on April 17, 2013.

JASON HUDSON ODOM as BARRY
JJANA VALENTINER as AMY
STEPHEN PATRICK MARTIN as NOLAN

Directed by MICHAEL DOVE

Losing Sight was selected for *Best American Short Plays 2014-1015*.

Losing Sight was a finalist for the John Cauble Award at KCACTF in 2013 and won outstanding short play at KCACTF Region IV in 2013.

Losing Sight won best one-act play at the Georgia Theatre Conference in 2012.

LOSING SIGHT

CAST OF CHARACTERS (2 adult males, 1 adult female)

BARRY, a young artist

NOLAN, his dead grandfather

AMY, proprietor of an art supply store

The characters can be any ethnicity.

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A one-room beach cottage transformed into a simple artist's studio. Messy. Beer bottles and pizza boxes. Canvas on an easel, tables littered with tubes of paint, brushes in jars and out of jars. Several different strengths of reading glasses sprawled about, and a large magnifying glass. The sounds of waves and windows with an ocean view. Lots of Light. BARRY, a man in his late twenties to early thirties, stands at the easel, brush in hand, trying different glasses and squinting at the canvas. Barry throws his paint brush across the room.

BARRY. Shit! *(He picks up the paint brush, cleans it, returns to the easel. He paints, continuing his ritual of squinting, painting, and alternating glasses.)*

NOLAN. *(NOLAN, a man in his late fifties to early sixties, enters.)*
Painting not going well?

BARRY. No, damn it.

NOLAN. Sorry to hear it.

BARRY. Why are you here, Nolan?

NOLAN. Can't a man drop in on his grandson?

BARRY. Not if that man is dead.

NOLAN. Well, there is that. *(Barry continues to paint in silence.)*

Monet went blind doing "Water Lilies."

BARRY. His last major work. Never painted again. Died right after.

NOLAN. Well, that's depressing.

BARRY. *(Barry shows Nolan a tube of paint.)* What color is this?

NOLAN. Magenta.

BARRY. *(Barry rummages around for a different tube.)* Shit.

NOLAN. How come you haven't opened up the main house yet? Been a month.

BARRY. You see any phthalo blue?

NOLAN. Why didn't you visit?

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BARRY. I need phthalo blue.

NOLAN. You were busy. Making a name for yourself. But you couldn't visit?

BARRY. Maybe cerulean?

NOLAN. You know the cliché a blind man hears better than a sighted man? Not true. Blind man just listens more, that's all. You need to listen more, Barry.

BARRY. I'm listening, Grandpa. It's just you're not really saying anything. You're dead.

NOLAN. You still need to listen.

BARRY. I can't face the house yet, okay? Happy? I can't face the house. I know I ordered phthalo blue.

NOLAN. So you're hiding out in the studio?

BARRY. Not hiding out.

NOLAN. Hid out in the studio after your parents died, too. You were ten, remember? Scared to death of me, angry as hell. Sarah brought you down here and you just pounded and pounded the clay. She told me my own studio was off limits. Until you were ready to quit hiding.

BARRY. Not hiding. Working. Working, damn it!

NOLAN. I can see that.

BARRY. Very funny.

NOLAN. See a lot of things clearly now that I'm dead. (*Barry resumes painting in silence.*) Folks take sight for granted.

BARRY. I didn't. Don't.

NOLAN. Didn't you? Don't you?

BARRY. No. Saw everything while I had the chance. Van Gogh. Munch. Chagal. Picasso. Mattise. Dali. Gaugin. Studied them. Memorized them.

NOLAN Visited all your expressionist friends, did you?

BARRY. Yep. Had a face-to-face with them all.

NOLAN. Might have made time to visit a living artist. While he was still living.

BARRY. You don't understand.

NOLAN. I understand better than anyone.

BARRY. My career is ruined. My career is my life.

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NOLAN. The best thing that ever happened to me was losing my sight.

BARRY. Right.

NOLAN. It's true. When I lost my sight I had to find a new medium. And it wasn't easy. Sculpture hadn't been my focus before. Your grandmother was one of my first models. Of course, being blind, I had to touch her. It was 1956, and I can tell you, touching Sarah was worth going blind.

BARRY. I don't want to hear this.

NOLAN. Touching Sarah brought back my passion, and passion brought life back to my work. Took me past going blind, took me to a way of seeing things I never had before.

BARRY. Quit talking about touching Grandma!

NOLAN. She wasn't always your Grandma. How do you think your Dad got here? By stork? We weren't always old. We used to make love right here-

BARRY. (*Barry sticks his fingers in his ears.*) I can't hear you! LA LA LA LA-

NOLAN. Sarah was my muse. My sexy, passionate muse. And she was curvy in all the right ways.

BARRY, For the love of God!

NOLAN. The legs your Grandma had-

BARRY. Nolan, I'm begging you. Stop. Just stop.

NOLAN. You need to find some passion in your life, boy. Like I did.

BARRY. You're too old to be talking like this. Not to mention being dead.

NOLAN. And you're too young not to be talking like this. Not to mention being alive. You need to loosen up. You should call Amy.

BARRY. I'm not calling Amy. I broke up with her ten years ago. I'm not calling her. I'm not you, Nolan.

NOLAN. You've got my blood. You've got my talent. You've got my-

BARRY. Eyes.

NOLAN. We gonna talk about it? How you blame me?

BARRY. No. Yes. No. I couldn't look at you. Once I realized I... I couldn't look at you. I'm sorry.

NOLAN. I understand.

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BARRY. You say that! Wish I believed it was true, and not just what I want to hear. Don't you blame me for not coming home?

NOLAN. Maybe I was hurt. Maybe I was angry. Maybe I thought you were a selfish little shit who only thought about himself.

BARRY. Thought you said you understood.

NOLAN. Being dead gives you some perspective. Now I know you were just a scared little shit.

BARRY. Thanks, Nolan.

NOLAN. Either way, you're still a shit.

BARRY. Where is the damn phthalo blue! Should have been here by now.

NOLAN, You're lucky the art supply store delivers at all. Delivery was set up just for me. Special. Because I know the owner.

BARRY. The kid who took my order mentioned.

NOLAN. You really ought to call Amy. Sweet girl. Pretty.

BARRY. I'm not calling her. She probably doesn't live in town anymore, anyway. Probably married and fat with a ton of kids. Probably forgotten all about me.

NOLAN. Probably. Even though she was quite the fan of a certain young art student.

BARRY. Not really.

NOLAN. Liar. You ate it up. Her admiration. Your first fan. Your first love, really.

BARRY. Doesn't matter. Didn't want her admiration then. Don't want her pity now.

NOLAN. Don't worry. That girl's not going to pity you.

AMY. (*AMY enters as if she's used to coming in and out, catches herself, and "knocks" while inside. She neither sees nor hears Nolan. She is of an age with Barry, and dressed the way a woman dresses when she wants to make an old boyfriend regret losing her. She carries a bag with fresh paint and brushes.*) Knock, knock.

BARRY. Took you long enough. Did you bring the phthalo blue?

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AMY. (*Amy, taken aback, sweeps the trash off a table with one hand and dumps the bag onto the table with the other. She speaks with a dangerous sweetness.*) Phthalo blue? You didn't order it. You ordered cerulean, phthalo red rose, and cadmium yellow light. That's what I brought. And the brushes.

BARRY. Amy?

AMY. Barry.

NOLAN. Surprise!

BARRY. Didn't know you worked at the art supply store-

AMY. I don't. I own it.

NOLAN. Told you I had a special arrangement with the owner.

BARRY. (*Barry replies to Nolan.*) Why is the owner making deliveries?

AMY. Better question would be: Why is the owner selling to you at all?

NOLAN. Told you the girl wouldn't pity you.

BARRY. Uh. Okay. Why?

AMY. Because it wouldn't look good for the local art supply store to refuse to sell to the leading local artist.

NOLAN. Ouch.

BARRY. That what I am now? The leading local artist?

AMY. Apparently.

NOLAN. (*Nolan speaks to Amy, who can't hear him.*) I'm barely dead and gone and already you've replaced me as the 'leading local artist'?

BARRY. You're still mad that we broke up-

AMY. Are you kidding me?

BARRY. What?

AMY. Do you honestly think I would care about a high school break-up at this point in my life? Who carries that kind of baggage around?

NOLAN. (*Nolan points at Barry*) He does.

AMY. And we didn't break up.

BARRY. We didn't?

AMY. No, we didn't. Saying that we broke up implies that we actually had a conversation in which we officially broke up. We didn't. You just went to college and ghosted me.

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NOLAN. (*Nolan loses his temper with Barry.*) You didn't have the guts to break it off face-to-face? Of course not. What am I saying? You were always a coward.

BARRY. Nolan!

AMY. What's your grandpa got to do with this?

NOLAN. You didn't have the guts to come see me, so it's no big surprise you didn't have the guts to talk to Amy-

BARRY. (*Barry replies to Nolan.*) I can't believe that's what makes you angry.

NOLAN. You don't treat a lady that way, Barry. I taught you better than that.

AMY. Of course that makes me angry. I'm mad as hell about what you put your grandparents through,

BARRY. Excuse me?

AMY. Do you think for a minute that I dropped your grandparents because you dropped me?

BARRY. I never really thought about-

AMY. Because I didn't. We were close.

NOLAN. Yep. Thick as thieves.

BARRY. I didn't know-

AMY. No, you didn't know, did you? You broke your grandmother's heart, Barry. Broke Sarah's heart.

BARRY. I thought she-

AMY. It was inexcusable.

BARRY. I'm not making excuses.

NOLAN. Well, why the hell not?

AMY. Have you even been in the main house at all?

BARRY. Not yet. Too busy trying to finish this.

AMY. (*Despite herself, Amy is drawn to the easel.*) May I see it?

BARRY. (*Barry quickly covers the easel.*) No! Don't like to show my work until it's done.

AMY. Nolan liked to show his work in progress/ I was glad to know him. And Sarah. Have them as friends, as well as customers. Nolan left me a sculpture, you know.

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BARRY. (*Barry responds to Amy, but aims his answer at Nolan.*) He did?

NOLAN. Yep. Should have read the will more closely, Barry. “Laughing Girl.” She was the model.

BARRY. Really.

NOLAN. Yeah. Amy was like-

AMY. Yes, really. Why is that so hard to believe? I was like a-

BARRY. (*Barry responds to both of them.*) Like a grandchild.

NOLAN. Yes. Like the granddaughter I never had.

AMY. Like a granddaughter, maybe.

BARRY. Sorry I was such a disappointment.

AMY. Why haven’t you been in the main house yet?

BARRY. Been too busy.

AMY. If you’d gone inside, you’d know you weren’t a disappointment. How proud of you they were.

BARRY. How?

AMY. I created a private gallery. All your work. Special lights. Photographic enlargements.. Sarah’s idea. Nolan wanted to see as much of it as he could.

BARRY. Didn’t know.

AMY. They were so proud of you. Sarah kept every notice you ever got. Nolan called you the greatest work of art his line ever produced.

BARRY. God, Nolan-

NOLAN. Gonna get a sno-cone. On the beach. (*Nolan exits*).

AMY. Been documenting your career for them.

BARRY. Are you so close to all your customers?

AMY. You really are an ass, Barry. Nolan and Sarah were friends. Most of my customers are students. Hobbyists. People who think anyone can paint. Which is true, actually. Almost anyone can paint a “couch painting.”

BARRY. “Couch painting?”

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AMY. Painting that matches your couch. A lot of customers come in to my gallery looking for a painting to match the couch. Complement the drapes. The rug. Some of them my several paintings. Switch them out according to the season. It's not about art for them. Just decorating and color coordination.

BARRY. I think I'd rather give up art.

AMY. Yeah. Well, it's my living. Here, I've got to go. (*Amy holds out a tube of paint. Barry neither reaches for it nor reacts. She drops the tube on the table. He starts a bit. She realizes his condition.*)

AMY. It's at your three o'clock. (*Barry reaches for the tube.*) Retinitis pigmentosa?

BARRY. Yep.

AMY. Came on a little late, didn't it?

BARRY. Yep.

AMY. Hit Nolan when he was a lot younger.

BARRY. Yep.

AMY. When Nolan's sight got bad, he switched to sculpting.

BARRY. Sounds familiar.

AMY. Maybe you could change mediums.

BARRY. You and Nolan. I'm a painter. Not a sculptor. A painter!

AMY. So was Nolan.

BARRY. Yeah. Well.

AMY. He swore by Vitamin A. And fresh fruit. Oranges.

BARRY. Did he?

AMY. (*Amy takes a good look around.*) Artist cannot live on pizza alone.

BARRY. What do you want to do, document the end of my career too? The last painting.

AMY. God, you are an unbelievable ass. The last painting. Doesn't have to be the end of you career. I could bring some clay.

BARRY. Yeah. I'm not my grandfather.

AMY. No, you're not. Not even close.

BARRY. Glad we finally agree.

AMY. You were actually even better, Are actually better. Sorry.

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BARRY. (*Barry is stung to the core by her accidental use of the past tense.*) I don't need fucking clay. I don't need fucking fruit. I don't need fucking pity. I do need phthalo blue. Bring me the goddamned phthalo blue. (*Amy slaps Barry – hard – across the face.*) What the fu-

AMY. That's for feeling sorry for yourself. (*Barry regains his equilibrium. Amy slaps him again.*)

BARRY. The hell?

AMY. That's for not visiting Nolan and Sarah. Next time it'll be for ghosting me. Be right back. (*Amy exits.*)

BARRY. (*Barry again regains his composure, uncovers the easel, and studies his canvas.*) The last painting. Gonna be the "unfinished" last painting if I don't get some phthalo blue.

NOLAN. (*Nolan enters*) Got a sno-cone on the beach. Rainbow. Didn't remember how vibrant the colors were. Red, yellow, green, blue. Melting together. Wonderful!

BARRY. You didn't get a sno-cone on the beach, Grandpa. You're dead.

NOLAN. You're in a mood.

BARRY. Think?

NOLAN. Clear the air with Amy?

BARRY. Really don't know.

NOLAN. Screwed it up, didn't you, kiddo?

BARRY. Probably.

NOLAN. Didn't I teach you anything?

BARRY. You were always smoother with the ladies than I was, Grandpa.

NOLAN. That's true. I cut quite a figure in my day. The roguish artist. How do you manage to mess that up?

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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