

THE WINDOW

a play in one act

by Leonard Goodisman

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By Leonard David Goodisman

CHARACTERS:

Howie and Sheila –late twenties, two years or so into their marriage
Geri/ Jerry – Sheila’s cousin, of ambiguous gender, carrying a small, modest bag
(Howie reads on the couch: newspapers, magazines, an open laptop. .

SHEILA

(Enters.) You look so intense, so comfortable. It’s beautiful.

HOWIE

What?

SHEILA

I like you in your world.

HOWIE

(Head in his magazine.) Interesting review, a play we should definitely see.

SHEILA

Great. (She stops, studies an imaginary painting facing away from the audience into the room; the audience looking through it.) I’ve looked at this painting forever. I want more of the world; let’s do our remodel.

HOWIE

It’s about the reality each of us wants.

SHEILA

What?

HOWIE

The play.

SHEILA

I want to broaden our reality and go ahead with the remodel.

HOWIE

Go ahead. Get tickets.

SHEILA

Don't do that! You know how I hate it.

HOWIE

Okay, we discussed a remodel and finished discussing it.

SHEILA

Did we? We promised to be honest. No lies.

HOWIE

Okay, we almost finished our discussion, but why bring it up now?

SHEILA

The painting's crooked.

HOWIE

You probably crookeded it. I'll fix it. Remodel now because the painting's crooked?

SHEILA

You know it's not a **now** thing. We've talked about it forever. A window would open everything up and the painting seems so lifeless.

HOWIE

People on a beach, waves, birds, how's that lifeless?

SHEILA

Rock-hard blobs of paint. The birds can't fly and the people can't smile.

HOWIE

They're in the air flying! Here comes one now; watch out. (Grazes her head.)

SHEILA

Stop that.

HOWIE

If that bird couldn't fly, it would fall? Help, I'm falling. (He falls, grabbing her.)

SHEILA

Don't try to distract me. A bird diving into that brick-hard water, even in perfect pike position, would break its back.

HOWIE

Okay, you're upset. But have we ever done it in pike position?

SHEILA

Shut up. Let's change the subject. Remember the Gathers invited us over for tomorrow.

Great. We're not going.

HOWIE

And my cousin is coming today.

SHEILA

Today?

HOWIE

I told you about it.

SHEILA

Your cousin from Nowheresville.

HOWIE

Don't put cousin down.*

SHEILA

HOWIE

We live an urbane life here, read magazines, google the web; go to the theater, we even take each other's pulse after workouts. How's this hick from somewhere out west gonna help with your painting problem?

SHEILA

My painting problem?

HOWIE

Okay, our problem. Is cousin a he or a she?

SHEILA

Don't know.

HOWIE

Everybody knows whether their cousin is a he or a she?

SHEILA

Mother phoned about cousin coming. I told you I never knew we had family out west.

HOWIE

Then we can tell from cousin's name, right?

SHEILA

(Laughs) Jerry, a guy with a J, or maybe a lady with a G. Sounds the same.

HOWIE

Is this the cousin who lent us money for our down payment? Your family's weird, a no strings-attached loan from an unknown lender.

SHEILA

You were happy enough to get the money.

HOWIE

Maybe Geri's coming to repossess us? We don't have the money for a window let alone to pay off our loan.

SHEILA

We both work, eat out, go to the theater. We have money; let's do it.

HOWIE

(He ogles her) Let's do it. (She rebuffs him.) We're going to need painting counseling?

SHEILA

Maybe window counseling.

HOWIE

Sorry. I hate it when things come between us. I love you.

SHEILA

So you say when you're getting 'serious'. You getting serious?

HOWIE

Very. Come with me.

SHEILA

When it's over, I'll still want a window there.

HOWIE

It'll never be over. (He laughs.) Or maybe you'll be tired and forget. (The doorbell rings.) Let it ring. (The doorbell rings again.)

GERI

Hellooooo. Anybody home. Any cows in this pasture?

SHEILA

It's my cousin, for sure. (Straightens her blouse, exits, and returns with her cousin.)

HOWIE

(Unsure who/what he's talking to) Glad to meet you? You come with a name? You're J-Jerry I hear? Or G- Geri? (Gets no response.) You come with a J or a G?

GERI

Nah. All I have is this small bag. (Holds up his suitcase.)

HOWIE

That's all you're traveling with.

GERI

I'm not traveling with it. It's traveling with me. Just joking.

HOWIE

Yeah.

GERI

No point feeding the fire if the flames are already out. (Hugs Howie) Got a good hug from cousin at the door. Neat to meet you both in your "digs". (Strolls around the room, looking at things, pressing on the walls here and there.)

HOWIE

(Points to Geri, says to Sheila.) Your cousin knows cool words.

GERI

(Picks up an object with a feather from a table and puts it down again, continues walking around, ending up in front of the painting.)

HOWIE

How do I spell your name, Geri?

GERI

Like the color of chameleons, depends who you're talking to, who you're talking about.

HOWIE

Unbelievable.

SHEILA

Cousin, how are we related? I'm embarrassed to say, but I'm not sure.

HOWIE

Never mind how you're related. (Winks at Sheila) I'm sure cousin Geri knows all about art. Probably a regular docent.

SHEILA

Don't start.

HOWIE

(To Geri, pointing to the painting.) You like this painting?

GERI

(Studies it.) Nah. I'm not like that painting. (He compares the painting and Howie.)
You're more like that painting than I am.

HOWIE

I mean do you like the painting?

SHEILA

Maybe this isn't such a good time to visit. We're sort of having a spat.

GERI

Oh lucky for me. More of a spitting spat or a sputtering spat.

SHEILA

I don't know. For example, the Gathers next door asked us over and Howard won't go.

HOWIE

Example of what? You're dragging the neighbors in?

GERI

Am I invited too? I'm sure I'd love them.

HOWIE

(He rolls his eyes.) I don't think so. Fred Gather is too fat, and his wife's so skinny.

SHEILA

Amy has a name.

HOWIE

If he ever mounted his frail wife; he'd kill her.

SHEILA

You mount paintings, not your wife. Maybe she mounts him.

HOWIE

Back to paintings, huh?

SHEILA

I want to put a window in where this painting is and Howard's in a state.

HOWIE

Not in a state! We took months to find this painting, for that spot, the perfect painting in the perfect place. It's us! Now, suddenly, she wants to throw it away.

SHEILA

Firstly, all I'm saying is let's hang it somewhere else. Secondly, it's not sudden. Thirdly, I want a window there.

HOWIE

Why throw a perfect painting away?

SHEILA

I never said throw it away, but I will if you're not man enough. Firstly, secondly, and thirdly rolled into one, it was never "**perfect**". We shouldn't have **impressionism** there

HOWIE

(Rolls his eyes.) An "impressionist" painting? Great. " We shouldn't have **impressionism** there and we don't. Are we good or what?

SHEILA

So, it's post-impressionist.

HOWIE

You should have taken another art class.

SHEILA

Then I might have met another you. We met in art class, remember. It's crooked again.

HOWIE

It gets crooked when we talk about it. Paintings can be sensitive

SHEILA

Not this one. The faces are just smears and smudges.

HOWIE

You're an artist too.

SHEILA

Each bird is a single palette knife smadge.

HOWIE

A what?

SHEILA:

Faceless people and lifeless birds. The people can't smile and the birds can't fly; just streaks of hardened color smadges.

HOWIE

So, cousin, are these impressionist smadges or what?

GERI

This is no more impressionist than the sun is the moon. You knew that, just tickling my toes there, huh?

SHEILA

How do you know, cousin?

GERI

I can tell when fish nibble my toes? No light on the water the way impressionists like. This painting's more like you.

SHEILA

You mean Howie doesn't see the light either? (Laughs.)

HOWIE

Is it post-impressionist?

GERI

No more than a few years old. You disappointed, cousin? (Hugs Howie.) You pay too much, get stuck with a hen that don't lay? Oh, turn this way. (Takes Howie's head, sensually strokes his jaw, moves it one way and another.)

HOWIE

Don't mess with my head.

GERI

The outline of that cloud looks just like you.

SHEILA

It really does. I never noticed it before.

HOWIE

It does not!

GERI

As much like you as a morning glory looks like the morning.

SHEILA

(Sees Howie mad.) You go to the art museum at home often?

GERI

Whenever I can. (Laughs.) No museum for two hundred miles.

HOWIE

But **you** know art. Where would you put this painting?

GERI:

(Studying the painting.) It must mean a lot to you, since it looks like you. So keep it where **you** can appreciate it. I'd put it in another room.

SHEILA

(Enjoying Howie's comeuppance) Not in the bedroom. Please!

HOWIE

Why can't it stay **here**, Cousin Art Consultant?

GERI

A hilltop pine doesn't grow in the valley. Does it? (Wanders toward the back, out of earshot, looking at herself in a mirror and at their objects, in particular the feathered one,)

HOWIE

He's weird.

SHEILA

'He'?

HOWIE

Cousin Geri hears exactly what he/ she wants.

SHEILA

I kinda like cousin.

GERI

(Rejoins them.)

HOWIE

(To Sheila) She looks different.

SHEILA

She?

GERI

Feels good to tidy up a bit. (Smiles at Howie flirtatiously) You've got an awful lot of stuff here. Don't take offense.

HOWIE

Why not? You've poked everywhere, picking at everything, including my wife.

GERI

It's what I said about the painting, isn't it?

HOWIE

What do I care what you said about the painting? Who are you anyway?

SHEILA

He's my cousin. Please.

HOWIE

After ten minutes here, you're comparing my head to a cloud in my painting.

GERI

How long do I have to be here before finding your head in a painting?

HOWIE

Touching everything. This is our house. Are you here about the money for the house?

GERI

You mean the \$80,000 you borrowed for the down payment. Never heard of it.

SHEILA

Oh my god. Howard!

HOWIE

That's why you're checking the walls. Look, we can't repay it right now.

GERI

No, no-no-no. You don't plant beets to get a potato.

HOWIE

What? I didn't mean to sound unfriendly.

SHEILA

Howard's rude sometimes. We're sorry. Mother didn't say where the money came from or when we'd have to pay it back.

GERI

(Putting his arms around them.) You're having a lover's quarrel. It's no time to worry about money.

HOWIE

Did you lend us the money? I have to know.

GERI

Absolutely not. You think I'm dumb. Just kidding.

HOWIE

Then why did you mention the money?

GERI

No use putting a hat on the turkey after the horse is out of the barn. **You** mentioned it.

SHEILA

Howard's upset, but help us, isn't a window here a wonderful idea?

HOWIE

At least ask fairly. This painting was important for us. Don't deny that, at least not in front of him or her.

GERI

What's wrong with me? I'm family.

SHEILA

You're daring me? Okay. I deny it!

HOWIE

No! (To Geri.) See what you've done.

GERI

Isn't it wonderful? Bringing everything out in the fresh air, like the flowers in spring.

SHEILA

He browbeat me into hanging this painting because the painter's his ex or something.

HOWIE

You lo-o-oved it. And what do you mean "or something"?

GERI

Ooh, goodie, this is turning into a real good spitting spat.

SHEILA

"Or something" because who knows what you **did** with that woman?

HOWIE

What did I did with her? Whatever someone does with his girlfriend. You jealous?

GERI

It doesn't make **me** jealous. I love it. What did you did?

HOWIE

Nothing.

GERI

Cousin Howie, you should never admit that, bad for your reputation and worse for hers.

HOWIE

I didn't mean it that way.

SHEILA

The painting lets her control you and us. You never got over her and bought it to prove how cool you've become since she dumped you.

HOWIE

She never dumped me.

GERI

You guys are so cute.

SHEILA

You were strutting to prove you were so cool now that you could buy **her**.

HOWIE

You're better than she could ever be and I wasn't buying her!

SHEILA

But you acted as if buying her made you a big shot. It was hurtful, disgusting.

HOWIE

And what makes you think she was for sale?

SHEILA

Under a street lamp, her mini skirt pulled up over whatever a street walker pulls her skirt up over, her bra, through her flimsy blouse, stuffed with one dollar the bills.

HOWIE

She was wearing a black turtleneck.

GERI

Turns me on, all those bills, if you could stuff in one more big bill.

SHEILA

They were all ones.

HOWIE

You checked them out?

GERI

Small bills don't turn a person on quite as much. Still, the more fish in the pond, even small ones, the better the water must be.

SHEILA

Sorry, cousin. I got excited; we shouldn't talk like that in front of you..

GERI

We're all cousins. Sometimes, when it rains you don't notice the sky.

HOWIE

Some family.

SHEILA

Some painting. Buying it was painful.

HOWIE

We bought it together. Whenever we looked at it, we saw something new in it and in each other. Painful? It's everything you like: beach, water, birds, people. It's us.

SHEILA

It's just smidges and smudges.

HOWIE

(To Geri) She said the birds couldn't fly or poop. Seriously constipated birds there.

SHEILA

They're not birds.

HOWIE

That's dumb. Perfect birds. Perfectly fine people enjoying the beach. It's idyllic.

GERI

Lotta people like the beach, but the salt is very hard on your hair.

SHEILA

What beach has people and no children? Where are the children playing in the sand?

HOWIE

Oh my god. Oh – my – god.

SHEILA

What?

HOWIE

That's it! Isn't it?

GERI

Careful, Cousin Howie; you could fall in a big hole here.

HOWIE

It isn't about the painting, or a window. It's the children. Right?

SHEILA

That is so dumb.

GERI

(Excitedly) Oh, cousin, (with a hand on Sheila's abdomen.) You don't look like you're about to throw pop-tarts.

SHEILA

I'm not.

HOWIE

You want children. You never mentioned it before but now you're ready. Women are so biological. We can have children, maybe not right away.

SHEILA

If I want children, I'll talk about children, not this painting that I hate!

GERI

(To Howie) You get my cousin any more excited, she's going to pop twins out right here.
(To Sheila) Why do you stay with him?

SHEILA

I don't stay with him. He stays with me.

HOWIE

I stay with you because I love her. I didn't make us buy this painting and I wasn't buying the painter.

SHEILA

Buying her admiration anyway. You sashayed around her, while she sat with her legs much more crossed than they needed to be. I've never seen legs as crossed. And her eyes were crossed also. And what was she thinking?

HOWIE

What?

SHEILA

What what?

HOWIE

In all my time with her, I never knew what she was thinking. You saw her for a few minutes and knew what she's thinking.

SHEILA

I didn't know what she was thinking. But I never saw someone actually sashay before. Disgusting, walking with your whatever sticking out?

HOWIE

If I was showing anything off, I was showing off you.

SHEILA

How sweet. What are you hiding from? Windows open buildings to the world.

HOWIE

Really? You're an architect now. Glass is just an expensive way to keep the world out, so birds don't come in and poop on your couch.

GERI

Don't you love this kind of intellectual spat? Like tumbleweed in the wind.

SHEILA

You afraid to spend a little money?

HOWIE

You just said I spent too much money showing off for my girl friend.

SHEILA

Your girlfriend?

HOWIE

My ex girlfriend.

GERI

Girlfriend? Before, you weren't sure you really ever harvested the wheat with her.

HOWIE

Please stay out of this.

GERI

Can't tell the peas from the popcorn sometimes. We back to the money now?

SHEILA

We have the money. I looked at our bank statement.

HOWIE

Without me?

GERI

Oh-oh. We have more sows in the sty now than we have boars in the barn.

HOWIE

He's right.

SHEILA

He? Right? He's calling me a pig?

GERI

Never, dear cousin.

SHEILA

(To Geri) I know you didn't mean that.

GERI

Never been fonder of a cousin. Been fond of some pigs, but not in the same way.