

THE LITTLE ONE

NARRATOR. [Casual.] This is a funny story ... Well, no, it isn't really ...
It's a peculiar story ... that's what I mean. Yeah, it's peculiar, this story
of the "Little One ..."

MUSIC. [Up and down.]

NARRATOR. In a way it isn't his story, but if I tell you about it right from
the beginning you'll never forget him. At least I haven't. It's really about
Helen Wilder. Helen's an ordinary sort of a girl; the kind you see in your
circulating library, or in the smoking car on the Long Island Railroad, or in
the bar at Childs. Just an ordinary girl. Helen was an actress. I was
directing a little theatre group in Woodside, that's just about three miles
outside New York on the Island, and one day this girl walked in to audition
for the show I was doing. She did a scene from Anna Christie; Yes, My Darling Daughter and Our Town. She was pretty good too; so I
asked her to join my company, and she did. We used to rehearse on Wednesday
night until ten o'clock. When we finished, we'd go to a quiet little bar down
by the station and then we'd sit around and talk about the things actors talk
about when they sit around quiet little bars. Well, it wasn't really a quiet
little bar. It was little, but it had a juke box.

MUSIC. [Juke box music in and hold under.]

NARRATOR. Yeah ... it had a juke box all right. Complete with Glenn Miller,
Bing Crosby and sad songs about the cowboy's pasture close to heaven where
they sell dreams to fools in love or something like that. You know juke box
songs. Anyway, we'd sit around this place and talk. And how we used to talk!

MUSIC. [Juke box music up ... hold then fade to B.G. and keep there.]

PHIL. O.K. So he's an actor with a nice voice ... so what? Did you see his
Hamlet? Full of tricks.

HELEN. What's wrong with that?

PHIL. You kidding, Helen? That's not acting, that's technique. The stage is
no place for a singing lesson. What does he do? He warbles and poses

and they
call him the Hamlet of the age. Huh!

HELEN. I repeat, what's wrong with it? If an actor has a good voice
why
shouldn't he use it? It's as much a part of his performance as anything
else.
Phil, you make me sick the way you always pick on little things like
that and
blow them up.

PHIL. Little things!

HELEN. Yes, little things.

PHIL. Little things my foot. I just hate to see him get away with it.

HELEN. Sometimes you make me so mad I could ...

PHIL. Spit?

HELEN. Worse than that.

[Simultaneously.]

NARRATOR. That's the way it usually went. Phil and Helen at each other's throats from the word go. They didn't mean all the things they said ... but you know how it is. They'd get no use all heated up and start calling each other names. I guess there are people like that in all isn't. groups. The rest of us would you just sit around and watch them go at each other. You know if this was a movie, ideas. they'd wind up in each other's arms. But this isn't a movie; so they just went along like that, fighting with each other.

PHIL. [Off mike.] For heaven's sake, Helen, either say something and stick at it or shut up.

HELEN. [Off mike.] If that's the way you feel about it there's discussing anything, is there?

PHIL. You're darn right there Start talking about something and make it personal right away.

HELEN. You've got so many cock-eyed

PHIL. Thanks.

HELEN. Shut up and have a drink.

Things would quiet down after a while when Phil left and we'd sit around and have a couple of drinks. Somebody would put a nickel in the juke box and get an old tune. Maybe Honey or ... Melancholy Baby, and we'd sit and sort of harmonize it....

MUSIC. [Melancholy Baby in ... three or four voices harmonizing ...]

NARRATOR. Beau, he was our tenor, he'd just sing. I never saw a guy

that
liked to sing the way he did. It was fun, as I said ... and we were a
pretty
good trio. All of a sudden Helen would jump ...

HELEN. What time is it? ... I missed it again.

BEAU. There's always the drunk train.

HELEN. That's the trouble.

BEAU. A couple of more drinks and you won't even notice it.

HELEN. I'll still be able to see him.

BEAU. Who's him?

HELEN. Just a guy on the drunk train.

BEAU. Hear that, Al? That's why she hangs around here, just so she can
meet
some guy on the drunk train.

HELEN. You wouldn't say that if you could see him.

BEAU. Why? What's the matter with him? Has he got two heads?

HELEN. [Seriously.] No ... but ... he's ... little.

BEAU. Little?

HELEN. Yeah. He's like nothing I've ever seen before. He's about three
feet
tall.

BEAU. A dwarf?

HELEN. No, there's nothing wrong with him. He's not misformed or
anything.
He's all in proportion. It's just that he's ... little ...

BEAU. So? Why should that bother you?

HELEN. It does. He just sits there and looks at me ... and smiles...
That's
what bothers me ... the way he sits there and smiles ...

BEAU. He doesn't talk to you?

HELEN. No ... He just smiles ...

NARRATOR. Well ... that was the first we heard about the Little One. We
finished our drink that night, paid our bill and went up on Woodside
Station
to wait for the train with Helen. She'd aroused our curiosity about
this
little guy that just sat and looked at her.

BIZ. [Train pulling into station.]

NARRATOR. The train came in... . The Port Washington train... . Helen took it out to Flushing ... The drunk train ... I don't know whether you know what a drunk train is, but it's the last train of the night and if you live out on the Island you have to catch it or you're out of luck. It's a funny kind of train. It's the Long Island Railroad in slacks. People are pretty friendly on the drunk train and you're apt to be asked to join an impromptu quartet one night or just sit and listen to your neighbor snore the next. Anyway, Helen got in, took a seat about halfway down in the smoking car as she always did. We followed her. And then we saw him ... Sitting across the aisle from her. You know it's funny now that I think of it. Here she was talking about how she hated to see this little guy, but there were other seats in the train and she sat in the seat right across the aisle from him. She's never been able to explain that ... Anyway, we saw him. He sat there, perfectly erect, with his back straight up and down like a school kid when the teacher's trying to correct his posture. He was about three feet tall and his feet just dangled ... didn't come anywhere near the floor. He looked funny all right.

NARRATOR. We started to laugh....

[Laughter, in B.G... three or four people.]

NARRATOR. We'd had a couple of drinks and we were just a little too drunk to be polite, so we just laughed at him.

LITTLE ONE. [Odd, unusual, strangely quiet and sinister voice.] Your friends are laughing at me. I suppose I am amusing....

HELEN. [Startled.] No. They've just had a couple of drinks. You know how it is... ..

LITTLE ONE. They're laughing at me. I don't mind.

BIZ. [Train out ... hold dead air.]

NARRATOR. That's the way it started. He spoke to her. Just like that. After

that Helen caught the drunk train every night. She wouldn't let us come up on the station with her anymore. I guess she was afraid we'd laugh at him, like we did that first time. She shouldn't have worried on that score. We didn't feel like laughing. We'd go into that quiet little bar ...

MUSIC. [Juke box music in.]

...with the juke box and sit around and have a couple of drinks. But it wasn't the same. I guess Beau and I knew the score, but Phil couldn't figure it out. Somehow, he'd lost a sparring partner. It sort of took the zest out of his evening and he'd try to bait her; try to get a rise out of her.

PHIL. Did you see what Atkinson said about that show last night? Honest, someday somebody's going to put on a show that the critics like and we'll all drop dead ... people say the theatre's dying ... well, who's killing it? Mr. Nathan, Mr. Atkinson, Mr. Anderson and the rest of the critics.

NARRATOR. Not a word out of Helen. She'd just sit there with her head in her hands ... her hair falling all over the place ... without saying a word. Phil couldn't figure it out. Beau sort of figured it out I guess ... but he was in love with Helen and that clouded him up a bit. It's funny, he wouldn't sing anymore, him that loved singing so much. He took to drinking a lot too. All in all we weren't what you'd call a jolly gathering.

PHIL. What's the matter with all of you? Why doesn't somebody say something?

HELEN. [In dead voice.] What's there to say?

PHIL. [Sarcastically.] Nothing. Not a thing. Let's just sit and think about what a terrible world it is and how everybody's against us... I might as well go home I guess.

BEAU. Don't go yet, Phil. I'm going into the city soon. I'll ride in with you.

PHIL. I might as well.

HELEN. Go or stay, but stop talking about it.

PHIL. Thanks for making up my mind for me.

BEAU. Take it easy, Phil!

PHIL. Take it easy! I don't like to be obvious, but it looks to me from where I'm sitting that I'm not wanted around here.

HELEN. Nobody said that, Phil.

PHIL. Oh, didn't they? It's funny, I could have sworn I heard somebody say it.

HELEN. Oh, shut up, will you?

PHIL. What's the matter? Have you got the mood concession around here? Can't I get moody and sad? Or should we just sit and watch you?

HELEN. [Rising.] Shut up!

PHIL. [Back at her.] What's the matter with you?

BEAU. She's in love with a midget.

NARRATOR. There it was. It was said. Beau realized it after he'd said it and he turned sort of pale. Phil just sat there with a dumb expression on his face. Helen looked up ... looked at the three of us and then said ...

HELEN. Let's have another drink...

NARRATOR. But it was out. It was said. You know, I don't think Helen even realized it until Beau said it. It was the way she looked up at us when he said it. Like she'd been trying to work out a problem in algebra and somebody had just said ... X equals 24. That kind of a look; the kind of look that says ... "Yeah, that's right ... Why didn't I realize it before?" She caught her drunk train that night and I didn't see her for a week. She just didn't show up at rehearsals; so I had to replace her in the cast. If it was anyone else I woulda called them up and given them the devil ... but it wasn't anybody else... It was Helen. The night she came back she called me aside after the rehearsal.

HELEN. Al, I want you to know this before any of the rest of them. ... I'm going to marry him.

NARRATOR. That's the way she said it. Matter-of-factly, like that. "I'm going to marry him." It might have been Clark Gable or the feller that had

the
fruit concession at Grand Central... but it wasn't. We both knew whom
she
meant. I didn't say much. I think she was grateful for that. I just
looked
at her.

HELEN. I wanted to tell you first, Al, because I think you'll
understand it a
little better than the rest of them. I didn't want it to happen. It
all
started about a week after he spoke to me that first time. He asked me
to go
out fishing with him in a rowboat the next Sunday. Can you imagine me
fishing
in a rowboat? It was funny, but all of a sudden I was saying yes ...
[Slowly.] I don't know why, but I was saying yes....

NARRATOR. Of course, people had to be told. That was the tough thing
for her.
If she could just take him, this Little One, and go off somewhere with
nobody
ever knowing... with nobody ever seeing them, it would be all right ...
But
that's not the way things are. People had to be told. She told her
mother
next ...

MOTHER. Helen, are you mad? Are you stark, raving mad?

HELEN. I'm quite sane, Mother. I'm going to marry him.

MOTHER. [Starts to cry bitterly.]

HELEN. Don't, Mother. Please ... don't.

BIZ. [Continue sobbing until indicated cut.]

NARRATOR. That's the way her mother took it. She didn't say anything
after
that. She never mentioned it again ... [Cut sobs.] Helen had to tell
Beau
and I knew that was a tough job for her. She and Beau had been close.
You
know how people click. They sit and talk and borrow books from each
other ...
see a movie together now and then, and without putting it into words or
talking about it they've got something pretty important between them.
That's
the way it was with those two. Beau loved her, we all knew that ... and
in
that special way I was talking about, she loved him too. That's why it
was so
tough for her. But she had to tell him, I guess.

HELEN. I wish you'd say something, Beau. ...

BEAU. Sure ... tell me what you want me to say, Helen. I'll say it.

HELEN. Do you understand that I can't help it.

BEAU. Yeah, I understand it... . [Quietly throughout.] Helen ... there's something I've never said to you because I didn't think I had to say it, but... .

HELEN. [Fast.] It won't do any good to say it, Beau!

BEAU. Won't it?

HELEN. No good at all. Don't say it, because I don't want to hear it.

BEAU. O.K... . I hope you'll be very happy, Helen.

HELEN. [Sharply.] Don't laugh at me, Beau.

BEAU. [Puzzled.] I'm not laughing. I mean it. I hope you'll be very happy.

HELEN. With him? I don't expect happiness from it.

BEAU. [Puzzled.] Then... why are you marrying him? Don't you love him?

HELEN. You've seen him. ...

BEAU. [Quietly.] Yeah, I've seen him. Helen, I'm going nuts ... What's the score?

HELEN. [Almost as though drugged.] I don't know. All I know is I'm going to marry him. It's like a dream I've had over and over again. I'm lying on my back in complete darkness, on a sort of conveyor belt that's pulling me forward towards something I can't see ... but it's something horrible ... I can't get off ... I can't even scream.... It's like that, Beau ... with him.

BEAU. You've got to get off.

HELEN. I can't, Beau.

BEAU. Helen ... I love you.

HELEN. I know. [Pause.] But I can't get off.

NARRATOR. So she married him ... the Little One, I mean. She suddenly dropped away from all of us. That was part of her way of working it out, I guess. Anyway, I didn't see Helen for almost a year. You know how New York is.

People are always drifting in and out of your life. That's one of the things you have to adjust yourself to: losing people like that. But somehow I just couldn't seem to lose Helen completely. She was more than just a girl I used to know who married a midget. I used to wonder about how it was working out, wondering whether she was able to make it work. She had guts, that girl ... if there was any chance of it working ... she'd be the gal to do it.

Beau was still with me, playing juveniles, carrying a terrific torch that he tried to put out with liquor ... liquor and ingenues ... it was kinda pathetic watching him. A new girl would come in to audition and I'd turn her over to Beau.

GIRL. [Fading on before last sentence of NARRATOR.] "... and that's the way I want Life. I want it to walk up to me on the street with a smile on its face and a cigarette in its mouth. I want it to take my arm and walk along the avenue with me and stop and look in the shop windows and point out all the beautiful things on sale. But what do I get? A cheap ..."

BEAU. [Breaking in.] That's enough, thank you.

GIRL. I haven't finished. I would like to do Camille, and Annie Christie and Sadie Thompson.

BEAU. And spoil that beautiful voice of yours? No, I think I've heard enough. Would you give me some vital statistics on yourself? Name, address, phone number, experience?

GIRL. Experience?

BEAU. Acting experience, of course.

GIRL. Oh.

BEAU. Though not necessarily.

NARRATOR. He'd take her off into a corner and ask her all about herself; name, address, the rest of it, and then a few nights later he'd call her up, tell her he had a part he thought she might be able to do and could he come up and talk it over with

BEAU. Name?

GIRL. Peggy Dalton.

BEAU. Address?

GIRL. 37 -- East 64th St.

BEAU. Phone?

GIRL. Regent 4-2387.

BEAU. Experience?

GIRL. Well, I had two years in

stock.
her that night. You know the I was out at Roslyn for a season
and
routine. You do if you've ever I worked with Billy
Kirkland...
been an actress or a casting
director. You know, some people say you can't forget one woman by
knocking
around with ten or fifteen others. Maybe not, maybe you can't, but I
was too
fond of Beau not to take the chance. That's why I put him in charge of
auditions. But it didn't work. We had a sort of unspoken agreement
not to
talk about Helen. And we didn't. That is, we didn't until one night.
It was
after a rehearsal too. He grabbed my arm as I was leaving.

BEAU. Al ... I ... How would you like to go to see Helen with me?

NARRATOR. Helen?

BEAU. Yeah.

NARRATOR. I didn't know you knew where she lived.

BEAU. I got her address from her mother two months ago. She's living
out in
Douglaston.

NARRATOR. I don't know whether we should or not, Beau. It isn't quite
fair to
her, is it? If she wanted us she would have invited us. Let her work
things
out, will you?

BEAU. You're right, but I've gotta see her. She doesn't even have to
know
we're there. It's early, maybe she'll be sitting on the porch ... maybe
I'll
just get a look at her somehow. I gotta see her, I tell you. I've gotta
see
her, Al.

NARRATOR. Yeah, I guess you do. O.K., Beau.

BEAU. Thanks, Al.

NARRATOR. We didn't have much trouble finding the house when we got to
Douglaston. It was a nice house, with a porch that ran all the way
around it,
a couple of bay windows, and the largest hedges you'd ever seen. She
always
liked hedges. Well, we sneaked in the yard. I guess Beau felt as
foolish as I
did, but by now I was just as anxious as he was to see Helen. We
looked in
the window.

BIZ. [Creaking of rocking chair and mournful cry.]

NARRATOR. I don't like to remember that. Even now it makes the sweat run up and down my spine. I don't know why; it wasn't anything scary really, yet I've never been so scared in my life. Well ... this is what we saw ... Helen was sitting in a rocking chair, rocking back and forth, and on her lap was ... the Little One ... like a doll, all stretched out and she was rocking him back and forward, back and forward. But ... he was ... crying like ... moaning and crying like nothing I've ever heard. We just stood there looking through the window at them. Her rocking him and this sound, the moan coming to us through the glass, making us wonder about our sanity.

We didn't say much on the train we took back to town. It was just a couple of weeks later when we heard about his death. It was in all the papers. You know, it's funny. None of us, Beau or me or even Helen stopped to think about what he did for a living. But there it was in the paper. He was a freak. He was on exhibition in one of those side-street penny arcades. Anyway, he was dead now. They found him in the attic with his neck all twisted. He'd fallen off something. Beau and I didn't know whether we should go out to the wake or not. We wondered if we had the right to intrude. Well ... we decided we'd take the chance. So we took the train out to Douglaston. A colored boy let us in.

BIZ. [Door closes.]

NARRATOR. We followed him through the hall and into the parlor where the body was. That's when we got another shock. The first thing we saw when we came through the door was a giant ... and I mean he was a giant; at least eight feet tall. Next to him was a man without arms, and a huge, fat woman. It's like one of those mad nightmares you have. But it was natural. These were his friends. We stood there a little uncertain about just what we should do. The giant must have known how we felt because he came over to where we were standing.

GIANT. [Whispering.] He looks peaceful, doesn't he?

BEAU. Yeah... . Yeah he does, doesn't he?

GIANT. Did you know him well?

BEAU. No. No, we didn't know him very well.

GIANT. Great little guy. We been workin' together for three years.
Great
little guy, wasn't he, Gus?

NARRATOR. Gus was this feller without any arms. He looked at the big
feller
when he spoke to him.

GUS. [Harsh whisper.] He's better off.

GIANT. What're you talking about, Gus?

GUS. He's better off. We're all better off that way, aren't we? Poor
little
guy ... poor little guy.

NARRATOR. When he said that ... "poor little guy" ... he wasn't just
talking
about the Little One... . He was talking about the two arms he was
missing,
he was thinking about the fat lady and the giant. Beau and I kind of
nodded,
excusing ourselves and walked over to the casket. There was somebody
kneeling
in front of it, praying.

NARRATOR. We knelt beside her
and said a few words. Not a
prayer, you understand...
earth
somehow we couldn't pray there
this day
... When we finished we glanced
to the right at this woman
praying beside us.... She had
into
a full beard! She stood looking
at the miniature casket with
the Little One in it.

LADY. Our Father which art in
Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy
kingdom come, Thy will be done on
as it is in heaven. Give us
our daily bread, and forgive us our
trespasses as we forgive those who
trespass against us. Lead us not
temptation, but deliver us from ...

BIZ. [Rocking chair in B.G. -- hold.]

NARRATOR. Then we heard it. Nothing scary really, but the sweat was
running
down my back again. It was just the noise of a rocking chair; rocking
back
and forth. Just that. Nothing else.... But she had a look on her face
I
can't forget. She was looking at that casket and her arms were folded

in her
lap as though she were holding something as she rocked back and forth.
[Cut
rocking.] We got out of there fast. I don't think Helen even knew we
were
there. That's about all there is to this story about the Little One ...
except for one thing ... something Helen told Beau.... Well, about two
months
after his death, Helen walked into a rehearsal one night. Just like
that, out
of a clear blue sky.

HELEN. Hello, Beau: Al. You got a part for a struggling actress?

NARRATOR. That's the way Helen did things. She came back to us and
things
were just like they always were. No one spoke about her marriage or
the
Little One. It was as though it had never happened. One night we went
into
the city to see a movie, Helen, Beau and myself. It was a picture
starring
Phil. Phil, the one who used to fight so much with Helen. He'd gone
out to
Hollywood and was really getting to be a well-known actor. After the
movie,
we went in and had some coffee.

BEAU. It's funny seeing Phil in a movie.

HELEN. Remember the way he used to talk about them? "That graveyard of
talent?" It's poetic justice. How long has he been out there?

BEAU. He left just after you ... [Catching himself.] About six months
ago.

HELEN. Just after I what?

BEAU. What do you mean just after you what?

HELEN. Just after I got married. That's what you were going to say,
Beau,
wasn't it?

BEAU. Yes.

HELEN. I wish you wouldn't worry so about saving my feelings. Since I
came
back I can feel it ... things you can't talk about ... things you can't
say.

BEAU. I'm sorry, Helen, I ...

HELEN. It's all right, Beau. We can talk about it. As a matter of fact,
I
wish we would. You know as much about it as I do except one thing.

BEAU. What's that?

HELEN. The way he died.

BEAU. He fell, didn't he?

HELEN. That's right. That was what the death certificate said. Did you ever stop to think, Beau, or you, Al, what he fell off of?

BEAU AND AL. No.

HELEN. I found him in the attic. He'd been going up there every night for a week. He stayed up there until late. I could hear hammering and a lot of other noises, but he'd never tell me what he was doing. One morning he wasn't at breakfast. That's when I went up and found him.

HELEN. What'd he fall off of?

HELEN. We had a funny kind of marriage. I'd never been able to tell what I felt for him ... why I married him. He was more like a little boy to me. But he was a man, with all the hopes and feelings of a man in a little boy's body. Can't you guess what he fell off of, Beau? Can't you guess what he was making in the attic? [Pause.] He fell off of a pair of stilts.

NARRATOR. That's all there is to this story of the Little One. Personally, I'm not laughing ... maybe you are. It's a funny situation ... a midget falling off a pair of stilts and breaking his neck. But, as I said ... I don't think its funny.

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