

A BIG HAND FOR THE LITTLE DUMMY

by
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(Based on a story by Gene Hamilton and David Thrasher)

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INT. THEATRE STAGE - NIGHT

A distinguished, genteel ventriloquist, ARTHUR and his vent figure WOODY perform to the sounds of an adoring audience.

WOODY (V.O.)

If there was anything to say about Arthur and me, it was that we were a good team. We clicked. Well, I clicked, but just when my bottom jaw moved.

BALCONY BOX SEAT

A rival ventriloquist, ERIC THE GREAT, enviously eyes the pair over the railing.

WOODY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

But like all good things, it was to come to an end, because someone wanted to break-up our little act.

Eric spies the object of his envy-

Arthur's figure, Woody.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The still figure of Woody sits in the dark against Arthur's dressing room mirror.

WOODY (V.O.)

Arthur never knew what hit him.

Light from an opening door illuminates Woody as shadowy hands reach in and snatch him.

WOODY (CONT'D)

He's always been so trusting.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Posters for Eric the Great plaster the walls of this dressing room. Eric the Great is examining his new ill-gotten acquisition, Woody.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC THE GREAT

Yes. Yes. You'll do fine. You're just what my act has been needing except - your face! No. No, it won't do at all. It will require a few changes. Your old partner will never know you!

While Eric rummages through some boxes and drawers for something change Woody's face, Woody almost imperceptibly shakes.

WOODY (V.O.)

I hated the idea of working for this guy; he really scared me.

Eric's fingers apply putty to Woody's nose and cheeks.

Eric smiles at his handiwork.

Eric holds Woody up to see him face-to-face. Woody now has an exaggerated nose, cheeks, and chin and a somewhat crude paint job.

INT. THEATRE STAGE - EVENING

As Eric feeds him lines, Woody stares out at the audience. Eric roughly grabs him by the top of the head to turn it toward him.

WOODY (V.O.)

Those months on the road were hell. I don't know what was worse, that cheap cologne he wore or...

INT. DRESSING ROOM - LATER

Woody's head and limp arms drag against the floor as he is pulled by an unseen child or possibly a dog.

WOODY (V.O.)

..or how he'd let little kids and even dogs drag me around the place while he talked dirty to the chorus girls.

INT. THEATRE STAGE - AFTERNOON

Woody reacts slowly to Eric's prompts.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC THE GREAT

So, Junior, you want to know how
to meet girls?

WOODY (V.O.)

It was the same night after night.
The same stale lines. The same
large, rough greasy hand sliding
into my back. That same stench of
cheap cologne that clung to my
clothing.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Woody is thrown by Eric and lands against some travel
cases.

WOODY (V.O.)

And the end of every night's
performance, tossed aside like an
old candy wrapper - a piece of
litter.

Woody slumps forward.

WOODY (CONT'D)

I couldn't take it anymore. I was
thinking about ending it all when
a slight ray of hope arrived.

In the light cast from an open doorway, the shadow of a
man talking on the phone spreads over the wall.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S.)

You don't say! I haven't seen him
since...well, when some bastard
stole his dummy. Poor guy.

The figure leans back.

STAGE MANAGER (CONT'D)

He's going to be here tonight?
Well, of course I'll let him come
back stage.

Woody sits up with a start and tilts his head in the
direction of the doorway.

WOODY

(to himself)
Could he be talking about Arthur?

INT. THEATRE STAGE - EVENING

Eric and Woody are performing. Woody is especially inattentive. His face wanders as if searching for something or someone.

ERIC THE GREAT

So, Junior, you want to meet girls? Get a little squeeze now and then? Ha ha hah...

Woody is scanning the seats. Eric abruptly grabs Woody's head and twists it toward him.

ERIC THE GREAT (CONT'D)

As I said, so, Junior, you want to meet girls, do ya? Ha ha ha ha....

WOODY

(in character, half attentively)

Yes sir. Just like you!

ERIC THE GREAT

Just like me? Ho, ho, ho! You've got a lot to learn, my boy. I bet you have your eye on that Mary Lou again!! Do you give her splinters? Ha ha ha...

Woody is again searching the seats and glances at the wings of the stage too.

BACKSTAGE

Arthur stands, sad-eyed, near the curtain.

ERIC THE GREAT (CONT'D) (O.S.)

I said, I bet you have your eye on that Mary Lou again. Are you listening, boy?

ON STAGE

Woody does a double-take upon seeing his old partner. Eric forces his head back around.

WOODY (V.O.)

There he was! But he didn't recognize me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC THE GREAT

I SAID, I bet you have your eye on that Mary Lou again. Shall I shake some sense into you? Ha ha ha...

WOODY

Uh, yes sir.

ERIC THE GREAT

So you're having girl trouble, eh?

Woody keeps looking offstage and Eric keeps turning his head back. There's LAUGHTER from the audience who think it is part of the act.

WOODY

(irritated)

Not as much girl trouble as you're having.

ERIC THE GREAT

Wha... What do you mean by that?

WOODY

They don't call you "Tiny" for nuthin'.

Eric glares.

ERIC THE GREAT

Why you...!

Eric punches him in the face, partially breaking off the shell of the disguise covering Woody's face. The audience starts BOOING. Eric tries to pick up where they left off.

ERIC THE GREAT (CONT'D)

So you are having girl trouble?

Woody refuses to answer.

ERIC THE GREAT (CONT'D)

I SAID, So you are having girl trouble??

The boo's nearly drown him out. He forces Woody's head around to try again. As he does this, a shower of produce (tomatoes, cabbages, etc.) hails down upon the stage. Eric furiously manhandles Woody and stomps off the stage.

BACKSTAGE

Eric flings Woody into a garbage can and storms out.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Woody half hangs over the rim of the garbage can. A moment later, a man's hands gently lift Woody out of the trash toward his face. The man is Arthur. He looks closely at Woody's face.

Arthur's hands pull off pieces of the hardened shell of the disguise to reveal more of Woody's face.

Tears fall down Arthur's face.

Inexplicably, a tear runs down Woody's battered little face.

INT. THEATRE STAGE - EVENING

Arthur and Woody are performing. Woody is very attentive and happy.

WOODY (V.O.)

If Arthur and I clicked before, we really clicked after we got back together. Our career sky-rocketed. We played the Palace! In fact we played several palaces - in front of the great heads of Europe and to leaders all around the world.

INT. THEATRE STAGE - DAY

Woody is behind a forest of microphones.

WOODY

Eric the "Great" thought the success of our act was all because of me. But it wasn't. It was because of the great talent of my partner - and my pal, Arthur. He's the one who made the act and it is because of him that we stand before you tonight. Let's hear it for Arthur!

Arthur steps into view, his face beaming like a proud parent.

THE END