

Strings Attached SAMPLE ACT ONE

By

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INT. VITUCCI'S BAR. EARLY AFTERNOON

MOPPET, an orange puppet with a wide head and a shock of blue hair sits at an almost empty dive bar with SOCK, a sock puppet with button eyes.

MOPPET

It's getting so I can barely look  
at this crap...

SOCK

(Pops some pills, chases them  
with a drink)  
Pays the bills.

On the bar TV set, the treacly opening credits to KIDSVILLE, a public television children's show, on which MOPPET and SOCK both appear.

MOPPET

Hey, Eddie! The TV! How many times  
do I gotta tell you?

EDDIE

Sorry, boss.

EDDIE, the bartender, a live actor, uses a remote to turn the channel. A craggy BARFLY, also a live actor, protests:

BARFLY

I was watchin' that!

MOPPET

Now you'll have to concentrate on  
drinking yourself to death.

BARFLY

You like having a hand up your ass,  
you freaking homo?

MOPPET

Oh, I've never heard that one  
before. Screw you.

BARFLY

How bout I rip you and athlete's  
foot a new one?

SOCK

(Bolt upright in his chair)  
You got something to say? Do ya?  
Feeling strong, Grandpa?

(CONTINUED)

BARFLY  
 (Stands up)  
 Bring it!

SOCK  
 Oh, I'm bringing it scumbag!

MOPPET  
 (Holding SOCK back)  
 Woah, hold it there, partner--

SOCK  
 Let go of me, Mop! Come on, you sonovabitch!

MOPPET  
 Remember Manny, Sock, come on, think of Manny...

SOCK  
 (Relents)  
 You're right, you're right. Ain't worth it.

EDDIE  
 Who's Manny?

MOPPET  
 His parole officer.

EDDIE  
 I don't want any trouble here.

SOCK  
 Trouble? For who? Fuck you.

MOPPET  
 Who are you, Mahatma Ghandi? Just get us another round, chippie. What happened to Wig?

SOCK  
 On the phone.

WIGWORM, a puppet earthworm with a long, green glam-metal hair, is on the bar's pay phone.

WIGWORM  
 What's the point spread?  
 (Beat) Just put it all on the Knicks. (Beat) You heard me.  
 (Beat) Don't give me any attitude, just do it.

(CONTINUED)

A tap on the store front glass. MOPPET and SOCK turn. Standing outside, a mother holds up her child to the window, who is waving to MOPPET and SOCK. MOPPET walks over to the window. The child's eyes light up. MOPPET lowers the blinds.

MOPPET

Let's face it, we've all but  
destroyed our careers already.

SOCK

If I lose Kidsville, I'm done for.

MOPPET

See, that's the difference between  
us, Sock. You think too small. You  
think like a puppet. You're a  
puppet, and I'm a...

WIGWORM comes back to the bar.

WIGWORM

And you're an actor, scootch over  
Sock. Moppet, you're like a  
broken--

MOPPET

I want to do movies, drama. I need  
to stretch my wings, ya know? I'm  
suffocating!

WIGWORM

We don't have such a bad gig.

MOPPET

I'm better than this. We're better  
than this.

SOCK

What can you do about it?

MOPPET

You know who's blame.

WIGWORM

Your agent?

SOCK

Your mother?

MOPPET

Isn't it obvious? (Beat) Are you  
kidding me?

(CONTINUED)

SOCK

Who?

WIGWORM

Enlighten us.

MOPPET

James. It's James! Obviously!

JAMES

Come on.

SOCK

No way.

WIGWORM

Mop, James made us who we are. He discovered us.

SOCK

Sure, the guy's a throwback hippy, but he built Kidsville from nothing.

MOPPET

He's kept us down our entire lives!

WIGWORM

He wouldn't harm a fly.

SOCK

On top of that, the guy's really ill.

MOPPET

He's not ill, he's just sweating the producers for a bigger salary.

WIGWORM

He's in the hospital, Mop, it's serious. Why do you think they lined up a guest director?

MOPPET

Perfect example, I mean, where did they get this clown?

SOCK

Bob Cross is a big deal. The guy's done movies, British theater...

(CONTINUED)

WIGWORM

Oooh, British theater.

MOPPET

You know James hand-picked this hack from the bottom of BBC barrel. This is exactly the the kind of crap I'm talking about. Well, I'm not going to sit on my ass another minute. I'm doing something.

WIGWORM

Like what?

SOCK

Quit?

MOPPET

I'm writing James a letter.

WIGWORM

A letter, ooh, that'll show em'.

MOPPET starts writing on a legal pad.

MOPPET

I'm going to tell that asshole what I really think of him.

SOCK

(Reads over MOPPET's shoulder)  
Oh, Mop, that's not nice.

SOCK pops more pills.

WIGWORM

He won't send it. He'll never send it.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. NEXT MORNING

JAMES MANDERFIELD, a bearded man in his early 50's is in his hospital bed. He looks weak and gaunt in his paper hospital gown. Despite being hooked up to machines, he plays an acoustic guitar.

JAMES

(Singing)

I know I'm most happy/ When most  
people complain/ All of you  
sunnyday people/ You can call me  
insane/ Say what you will/ But I

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (cont'd)  
 love I love, I love, love, love,  
 love, love...the rain...

JAMES starts to cough. JESS, his assistant comes in with the mail.

JESS  
 You should be resting, James.

JAMES  
 I've want to finish this song. I  
 wrote it especially for Mop...I  
 can't let the show down.

JESS  
 They'd want you to rest, don't  
 worry about them.

JAMES  
 I can't help it. They're my family.  
 What this?

JESS  
 Just some mail. The get-well cards  
 are coming in droves.

JAMES  
 Hey, this handwriting looks  
 familiar!

He reads. Slowly, a terrible expression on his face develops. He clutches his heart. The machines he is hooked up to start beep loudly. JAMES falls back into his bed.

JESS  
 Oh God!

INT. SET OF KIDS ROCK JUNCTION - CONTINUOUS

MOPPET and MURPHY, a green puppet with a tall head and a stern face share a scene with ANGIE, a puppet feminine and tough-- Gena Rowlands meets Jackie Brown. Dancing in the background is a large yellow NUMBER FIVE puppet.

ANGIE  
 Hey Moppet, hey Murphy...what's  
 your favorite number?

MOPPET  
 If I had to pick, if I had to  
 choose...

(CONTINUED)

MURPHY

A favorite number, win or lose...

MOPPET

Win or lose a favorite number...

MURPHY

That number would indubitably be...

MOPPET

Indubitably...wait, hold on.

BOB CROSS, the guest director, steps onto the set.

BOB CROSS

(Disgusted)

Alright, cut. Pull back, so that the rest of the cast and crew, who are now all moaning and groaning, are visible.

BOB CROSS

Okay, what's the problem now, Moppet?

MOPPET

"Indubitably." No one talks like this. It's the kind of word that you only hear on children's shows.

ANGIE

This is a children's show, moron.

MOPPET

Well, Angie, I like to think this is more than a children's show.

BOB CROSS

Well, Moppet, let's try to break this down, shall we? What do you think the scene is about?

MOPPET

Listen, fellah, that Stanislavsky crap doesn't fly with me.

BOB CROSS

(Exasperated)

Alright. What do the writers have to say about this? Where are the writers?

MAX, a balding puppet is chatting up a thin, leggy (Live) ACTRESS.

(CONTINUED)

MAX

See, I see us really delving deeper into your character...maybe it's something we can, you know, talk about over dinner?

ALEX, MAX's tall, thin, and nervous writing partner (also a puppet) tries to get MAX's attention:

ALEX

Max! Max! I told you they'd hate that scene. They're looking for the writers!

MAX

Jesus.

(To ACTRESS)

Don't go anywhere.

(Yelling to the STAGE)

I just turned down Law & Order this morning, so you guys can kiss my puppet ass. Everyone knows I shit golden eggs for for breakfast. You want a script change? You change it. Your loss.

ALEX

Oh no.

MOPPET

What do you think, Murphy?

MURPHY's cell phone rings.

MURPHY

(Holds up a finger)

Gotta take this. Lindsay! I thought you forgot about me. Did you hear from the cereal people?

MURPHY walks away, talking.

ANGIE

Where's he going?

BOB CROSS

Please, Murphy, don't stray too far.

ANGIE

(Under her breath)

God, I miss James.

(To MURPHY)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ANGIE (cont'd)

I need to be out of here at six!

SOCK

Are we going past six? I gotta be somewhere.

SOCK pops more pills

WIGWORM

Did anyone hear if the Knicks won?

MOPPET

They lost by fifteen.

WIGWORM

Oh god.

MOPPET

Bob, what I'm trying to get at here...

THE NUMBER FIVE

You know, if we're taking a break...I'd like you to consider...

BOB CROSS

We're not taking a break!

THE NUMBER FIVE

I just want to say, just consider this-- I have a much bigger range than this part.

MOPPET

Do you mind? I'm trying to talk to Bob...

THE NUMBER FIVE

If I stand upside down, I can do a really convincing letter "S".

MOPPET

Bob, I know you're not our regular Director--trust me, I know what you're up against.

BOB CROSS

Up against?

ANGIE

What the hell does that mean?

(CONTINUED)

MOPPET

It means you are a royal pain in mine and everyone's ass!

The entire cast explodes. It's bedlam.

BOB CROSS

People! Please, please!

JESS

Shut up! Would you all just shut up?

ANGIE

GUYS? GUYS! It's Jess!

The entire cast and crew are silenced.

ANGIE

I've got some really sad news here, guys...James just died.

There's a stunned silence, then a mass exhale of disbelief.

ANGIE starts crying loudly.

JESS

You all know he was really sick...well, this morning someone wrote him an anonymous hate letter, and...his heart just couldn't take it.

BOB CROSS

Who would do such an awful thing?

WIGWORM and SOCK look to MOPPET, who stares into space.

ANGIE

I know we're all shocked right now, and I don't want to seem rude at a moment like this, but I feel like it's just best to get all of the bad news out in the open...

ALEX

More bad news?

SOCK

(Popping yet more pills)  
Sweet Jesus.

JESS

The station has decided to cancel  
the show, effective immediately.

WIGWORM

Immediately?

A stunned silence, then:

BOB

(Gingerly)

Does that mean I can leave?

Another stunned silence. Then:

MAX

(On his cell)

Get me the Law & Order people,  
pronto!

The rest of the cast & crew scramble. More pandemonium.  
WIGWORM slams a bottle of Malox. ALEX runs like a chicken  
with his head cut off. ANGIE breaks down crying. SOCK spills  
his pills, the scrambles on the floor for them. MOPPET tries  
to blend in.

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