

"No Strings Attached" (Excerpt)

By

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entire script)

FADE IN

INT. CELL, EVENING (PATERSON, NEW JERSEY, 1925)

A dimly lit cell, with a single cot and a sink. Slumped against the wall on the cot, obscured in shadow, is the figure of a WOMAN.

The cell door swings open, and the figure glances up.

EXT. COURTHOUSE, EVENING

The city courthouse. The building is typically gaudy -- large marble columns framing imposing wooden doors. On the left side of the steps, a iron placard clearly reads PATERSON COURTHOUSE.

All around the front of the steps, angry demonstrators rally. They carry signs proclaiming the need to "*Protect our children!*" and "*Stop the wooden menace!*" among other things.

INT. COURTROOM, EVENING

A typical courtroom setting -- raised podiums to the left and right for the jury, with a large bench in the middle, at which the JUDGE sits. To his left, the BAILIFF.

The spectator sections of the court are completely packed. Unlike outside, there are no signs, but the room is nonetheless filled with fervent chatter. A line of guards protect the barrier between them and the rest of the courtroom.

ARCHWAY

Behind the spectator sections, standing in and shadowed by the the doorway, accompanied by a GUARD, the woman stands.

GUARD

Are you nervous?

WOMAN

No. Are you?

COURTROOM

The Judge BANGS his Gavel, and the room falls silent.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE

Order! Order! The Court is now in session.

BAILIFF

The accused, Maretta Fanoni, may now take the stand.

ARCHWAY

The guard takes the woman by the arm and leads her out of the shadows into the light.

We see that she is made entirely of wood -- a highly-realistic, feminine puppet. Her surface is scratched in a few places, but she is otherwise beautiful, and dressed in a long gray dress. This is MARETTA FANONI.

COURTROOM

Slowly but confidently, Maretta walks towards the defendants bench, where she stands, unaccompanied. Opposite her, the PROSECUTOR leers.

The Judge nods to the Bailiff.

JUDGE

Read the charges.

BAILIFF

Maretta Fanoni--

MARETTA

Just Maretta.

The Bailiff grimaces.

BAILIFF

-- Maretta Fanoni, you stand before first Criminal Court of New Jersey on the basis of three charges. First, you are charged with the crime of assault. Secondly, you are accused of conspiracy against the city and people of Paterson. And finally... you are charged with the murder of respected puppeteer Elijah Fanoni.

The crowd begins to murmur loudly once again. Maretta, however, maintains an affect-less pose, fixing the Judge with a level gaze.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE

How do you plead?

MARETTA

If I may digress, your honor --

JUDGE

You may not.

Maretta carries on. The murmurs grow louder.

MARETTA

-- Men here have sent my kind to
furnaces without a care. Why have
they not also made appearances on
this podium? Are our wooden lives,
our ashen souls, simply not worth
as much as those of flesh and
blood?

The murmurs break into snickers.

SPECTATORS

Are rising out of their seats, mocking and whistling at the
defendant below.

HECKLER 1

Show some shame, you wooden wench!

HECKLER 2

We created you, didn't we? Answer
your own damn question!

Maretta turns around to point into the crowd.

MARETTA

I *did* answer that question,
Skinwalker! That is why I am here.
I determined that our lives were
worth *more*!

The snickers give way to outrage, with the crowd yelling and
now actively trying to push past the guards. Maretta smirks.
The Judge BANGS his gavel yet again.

JUDGE

Order, Order!

The yelling fades back into murmurs. Maretta turns back to
face the Judge, who fixes her in a cool gaze.

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE

The state of New Jersey has already done you a great service by granting you the legal proceedings afforded our citizens. Any further disruption and you will be held in contempt of court...

(beat)

Now, if necessary, I can repeat the charges, if they were not understood the first time.

A beat, and then Maretta shakes her head.

MARETTA

No, your honor... I understood them quite clearly.

JUDGE

Then we must continue with the proceedings. How do you plead?

Maretta looks around the room, studying her audience coolly. Then, she speaks:

MARETTA

I plead as I will inevitably be charged: guilty -- of theft, of conspiracy... and of murder.

The crowd begins to yell again. This time, the Judge does not move to silence them, merely speaking over them.

JUDGE

Very well. The defendant has pled guilty. The trial will now commence in order to determine the scope of punishment.

BAILIFF

The prosecution will now make it's opening statement.

The Prosecutor, glancing over at Maretta, rises to his feet. He raises his hands, and the room falls silent. He smiles.

PROSECUTOR

Thank you, your Honor, but I do not believe there is much to be said. This facsimile of a trial is a waste of our time. This monster deserves the harshest punishment imaginable. We cannot hang it, so let us burn it!

(CONTINUED)

The crowd cheers. Maretta, however, does not react.

BAILIFF

Defense, would you like to respond?

MARETTA

Very well. I have chosen to defend myself, after all, so I may as well start from the beginning...

INT. THEATER, EVENING, 1920

A run down community theater. A spattering of people sit in the audience. A wooden placard reads "Elijah's Amazing Puppets."

ELIJAH FANONI, 64, an hunched but muscular old man, stands on stage, manipulating a pair of marionettes. He is performing a scene from 'OTHELLO'

An

AUDIENCE MEMBER

lets out a loud yawn, looking around the theater tiredly.

EXT. BACK ALLEY, EVENING

The back alley behind the theater is as deary as can possibly be, lit only by the lights shining in from windows.

Elijah opens the door and steps outside, carrying a box full of his puppets. Turning around, he begins to walk down the alley.

A rustling to his right, however, causes him to spin around.

ELIJAH

Who is there?

The rustling continues, and after a moment, Elijah's eyes come to rest on a large stall. Carefully, he walks over to it. The

STALL

is gaudy, with odd trinkets here and there. Elijah looks into it, examining the contents of the stall carefully. His eyes fall upon a

BOOK

the cover of which reads "THE CRAFT" in big gold letters. Tilting his head, he reaches towards it, curiously.

EXT. WOODSHOP, NIGHT

The 'woodshop' is a worn down shack in the outskirts of New Jersey. A few posters are attached to the wall outside, advertising the "Fanoni Family"

The SCRAPING of metal against wood can be heard through the door.

INT. WOODSHOP

The woodshop is a drab and dusty place, poorly lit save for the light coming from streetlamps through the windows and a oil lamp sitting on a workbench.

Elijah Fanoni sits at the workbench. A wooden scraping sound and the clashing of tools indicate that he is hard at work. Wood shavings litter the floor.

WALLS

The walls are lined with metal hooks. Off of many of these, a wooden limb or two hang limply -- an arm, a leg, a foot, a hand.

PHOTO

On the counter sits a photo of Elijah's family, sitting in a cracked frame-- a younger version of himself, his wife, and his daughter, all smiling happily next to one of his vaudeville signs.

HEAD

A piece of wood is turned over and over as Elijah chisels away at it with uncanny precision. The features which are beginning to take shape are clearly those of Maretta's face.

COUNTER

Elijah snaps piece after piece of the puppet together. Eventually the entirety of Maretta lies before him, expressionless, beautiful in her simplified form. She has about the same amount of detail as a modern mannequin.

Elijah stares at the puppet for a moment, drumming his fingers on the counter. He bites his lip.

And then, in one movement, he moves his hand over to the magic book and flips it open. The text on the pages GLOWS.

EXT. WOODSHOP, NIGHT

A moment of silence. Then, the windows of the shop flash with a fantastic blue light, and an unnatural sound echos across the night. Then both fade, leaving only a lingering silence.

INT. WOODSHOP

Elijah Fanoni looks down at Maretta in disappointment, the open book in his hands. Nothing has changed, except for a small bit of smoke rising from her temple.

Idly Elijah puts the book down and walks over to the figure. He runs his fingers over her eyes -- which then snap open.

Maretta lurches away from Elijah, startled. She falls backwards off the workbench and lands on the floor with a THUNK.

Elijah gapes, peeking over the table to look at her.

ELIJAH
(hushed)
Blessed be...

Elijah moves towards her, but Maretta slides away from him on her back.

MARETTA
What... what is going on?

Elijah throws his hands up and moves towards her slowly.

ELIJAH
Shhhhhh, everything is going to be
alright. I'm not going to hurt you.

Maretta looks at Elijah, frightened, rising to her feet and pressing against the far wall.

MARETTA
Who -- who are you?

ELIJAH
(surprised)
Who am I?

Elijah pauses for a moment, thinking.

(CONTINUED)

ELIJAH
I'm Elijah Fanoni. I'm... well...
I'm... I guess...

He glances over at the

PHOTO

on the workbench. His gaze lingers for a moment, and then he looks back at Maretta, and offers her his hand.

ELIJAH
I guess I'm your father.

Maretta stares at him. Then, cautiously, she takes his extended hand.

JUDGE (V.O.)
And so he took you in, just like
that?

INT. COURTROOM, EVENING, 1925

The courtroom is silent, everyone -- including the prosecution -- listening intently to Maretta's story, although most of their expressions are disdainful. Maretta stops, looking up at the Judge.

MARETTA
I suppose you could say that. He brought me back to his home, he clothed me, named me, gave me a place to stay...

EXT. PATERSON STREETS, DAY

The streets of Paterson are fairly well cleaned, though at several places there is evident wear and tear.

MARETTA (V.O.)
...he certainly framed the world
for me.

Elijah leads Maretta down the street, pointing to various buildings.

A group of people stop and stare at Maretta. Maretta notices them and speeds after Elijah.

(CONTINUED)

ELIJAH (V.O.)
Alright, Maretta dear, I want you
to take a look at this.

EXT. FANONI HOUSE, EVENING

Elijah's house has the airs of a place that used to be really nice, but has since fallen into disrepair due to neglect. At several places, the paint is chipped.

Through the

WINDOW

which is dusty and slightly cracked, Maretta can be seen, sitting uncomfortably upon a large, yellow, couch.

Elijah walks up to her, carrying the photo in his hands.

INT. FANONI HOUSE, LIVING ROOM, EVENING

The living room is sparsely furnished, save for a few couches, a table, and a large piano in the corner of the room. Dust has accumulated here and there.

Elijah plops down next to Maretta on the old couch. He points down at the

PHOTO

his finger coming to rest on the prominent Vaudeville sign.

ELIJAH
Some years ago, my family and I
were on the Orpheum circuit. We
performed all over the country.

Elijah hands the photo to Maretta, who takes it, smiling slightly to herself.

Elijah moves his finger away from the sign and to the subjects, pointing to them each in turn.

ELIJAH
We were a three part act. I carved
the puppets and played the music,
my daughter Anya sang, and my
wife... well, she really kept the
whole thing together.

Maretta glances up at Elijah.

(CONTINUED)

MARETTA

And people came to see you? They knew who you were?

ELIJAH

(nodding)

Many people did. We were pretty successful, back in the day.

Maretta smiles.

MARETTA

That sounds... amazing. I wish I could do something like that.

Elijah looks up from the photograph and sighs, closing his eyes, a satisfied smile crossing his lips.

ELIJAH

You know...I think I can grant that wish, Maretta.

Maretta looks up at him. Elijah smiles at her, and, somewhat nervously, she smiles back.

INT. LOBBY, DAY

A well-decorated office. Various framed posters of Vaudeville acts line the walls -- Harry Houdini, Charles Grapewin, and so on.

Elijah sits on a couch next to the inner door, twiddling his hat in his hands and looking at various things in the room. Maretta sits next to him, now wearing a simple blue dress. Her eyes remain fixed firmly at the ground.

The inner door swings open. THOMAS MARLEY, a well dressed but stocky businessman in his 40's, steps into the room. Elijah immediately rises to his feet.

ELIJAH

Ah, Thomas! How are you today?

Thomas brushes the greeting aside.

THOMAS

Fanoni, let's make this quick. After your last three pitches, I don't have time to listen to another dud.

Elijah's smile falters.

(CONTINUED)

ELIJAH

No, Mr. Marley, of course not.

There is a moment, and then Elijah regains his composure. Clearing his throat, he leads Thomas over to the seat where Maretta is sitting.

ELIJAH

Mr. Marley, I'd like you to meet someone. This is my daughter, Maretta Fanoni. Maretta, dear, this is Thomas Marley -- He's Martin Beck's representative here in Paterson.

Maretta glances at Thomas, and then quickly looks away, staring ahead. Elijah grimaces.

ELIJAH

She's a little nervous.

THOMAS

Ah.

Thomas looks confused. He leans close to Elijah, speaking quietly.

THOMAS

Is she... Oriental?

ELIJAH

No, of course not. She's made of wood.

Thomas balks. He looks over at Elijah, who beams at him, and then back to Maretta.

Suddenly, Thomas reaches out to touch Maretta, his fingers brushing the surface of her face. Surprised, Maretta recoils, looking up at Thomas in shock. Thomas stares at his fingers.

THOMAS

...Well, I'll be.

Maretta watches them both, anxiously. Several moments pass in awkward silence, and Elijah shifts uncomfortably. He clears his throat.

ELIJAH

So... do you think this can get me back on the Orpheum?

Thomas looks over at him.

THOMAS
I'm not sure. I'm not sure people
are ready to see...

Thomas gestures to Maretta.

THOMAS
...that.

Maretta looks down. Elijah sighs.

ELIJAH
She's quite sweet, you know.

Thomas looks at Maretta, and then at Elijah, considering.
Finally, he nods.

THOMAS
I can give you a test show this
Thursday -- see how the audience
reacts. That is all I can promise.

Elijah grins. He turns back to Maretta, beaming.

ELIJAH
Did you hear that, dear? You are
going to be a star.

Maretta looks at Thomas, for a while now. She smiles weakly.

MARETTA
Thank you.

Thomas just gapes at her. Maretta looks away again.