

PUPPET ON A STRING

HAL AMES



Roger and Marta had known each other since the second grade when Marta's family moved into the house across the street from Roger. They became the best of friends and spent most of their time together.

All during their school years, they continued to be friends and after graduating from college, they were married.

They had always wanted to have a family, but after fifteen years of marriage, they realized they would never have children of their own, so they decided to adopt.

It was not easy finding the right child. They went to many orphanages where they met many children. On one visit to a home for children, they fell in love with a young girl and decided to bring her home. They named her Janet.

At first, Janet was a wonderful child. She was a happy little girl and smiled most of the time, but as Janet grew up, she became more and more difficult to deal with. The problem was she never wanted to listen to anyone. She always wanted to do what she wanted.

She was selfish and rude to people. No matter what her parents tried, Janet continued to disobey them. Over time, it only got worse.

As the years went by, Janet became more and more of a problem. It was difficult to take her anywhere. She would say mean things to people and then laugh about it. She thought it was funny to tease people who looked different, and she would throw things at them while in a restaurant. Everywhere they went, Janet would cause a problem.

Her parents became frustrated and didn't know what to do. They began to search

for answers to the problems with Janet.

When she was seven years old, they took her to a doctor. While she talked to the doctor, Janet acted like a princess. The doctor thought that her parents were making up the stories. She said there was nothing wrong with Janet.

As soon as they left the office, she returned to her old ways.

Janet said, "You're not going to get a doctor to give me medicine. I'm fine. It's you who are the problem."

This happened every time they went to see another doctor or therapist.

As a last resort, her parents hired a nanny.

They went to a famous agency and looked at the files of many candidates. They read the file of a nanny who had very good recommendations. They hired her and arranged for her to live in their house.

When Janet was introduced to her, she immediately began to scream.

"Who are you? Why are you here?" Janet questioned her.

"I'm Stacey. I'm going to be your new nanny, and we are going to have a wonderful time," the nanny greeted Janet.

Janet looked at her parents in surprise.

"Why do I need a nanny? Everything is fine. You can just let her go. I don't need her," Janet said.

"We want you to become friends with Stacey. She'll help us take care of you," Roger answered.

"You must be crazy. I can take care of myself," Janet answered.

"Please don't be like this. We're going to give it a try. Please try to be nice to her," Marta asked.

"I don't want a nanny and I'm not going to be kind to her. Tell her to go away," Janet said, and then she turned and ran into her room.

Roger and Marta looked at each other. They were surprised at the response Janet had to the news.

“I’ll do my best to make her my friend, just give me a chance,” Stacey responded.

The nanny tried to work with Janet to help her to become better behaved, but Janet just shouted at her to leave her alone.

Then, Janet told the nanny that she would kill her if she didn’t do what Janet told her to do. After only a few days, the nanny ran away because Janet was so terrible.

Her parents hired another nanny who was eager to help, but then the same thing happened. The nanny ran away afraid for her life.

Roger and Marta didn’t know what to do. They were afraid that Janet might do something terrible and then the police would blame them. No one believed them that Janet was such a terror. She was completely out of control.

They thought about taking Janet to the forest and leaving her in the woods. They thought about putting Janet on a boat and sending her to a remote island in the middle of the ocean. They even thought about calling the police, making up a story of something she did to hurt them, and then having her arrested and put into jail. They didn’t know what to do.

One day, while Roger was reading the newspaper, a small piece of green paper fell onto the floor. Roger picked it up and read it.

It was an advertisement for a nanny who claimed she was able to train any child. The article said that she could take the most misbehaving child and turn them into the perfect son or daughter, one who would not talk back or cause any problems.

Roger showed the advertisement to Marta. They agreed to give the nanny a try. Roger picked up the phone and called the number on the paper.

Two days later the nanny arrived at the house. Her name was Marnie.

She was very short and small, and her voice was very soft and sweet. Her appearance was very different. She had a very pretty face with freckles on her cheeks, her bright red hair reached almost to the ground.

Her clothing was unique. She wore a long black cape draped over her shoulders. Her jacket was yellow and had writing in strange letters across the front. She didn’t look

like anyone Roger or Marta had ever seen before. They wondered how such a small person could control their daughter, but they decided they had to give her a chance. They did not have any other choice. They wanted Janet to change into the daughter they had always dreamed about.

Marnie entered the home and looked around. Roger and Marta gave Marnie a tour of the house, and she inspected each room. She didn't say a thing as she looked around the house.

Roger and Marta followed behind her, very curious about what she was doing, and of how Janet was going to treat her when they met.

"Where's the girl?" Marnie asked.

"She's probably in the playroom. That's where she spends most of her time," Roger responded.

Marnie went up the stairs to the playroom. She slowly opened the door and looked in to see what Janet was doing.

Janet was playing with a doll. She was trying to pull its head off.

Suddenly, Janet saw Marnie. She jumped up and asked in a rude voice, "Who are you? Are you my new nanny?"

Marnie just smiled and nodded her head.

"You know, I've already chased two nannies away and I'll do the same to you. You can't make me do anything!" Janet yelled at Marnie. "If you try to make me do things I don't want to do, I'll kill you!"

Then she ran past Marnie to go to her room. She closed her door with a slam.

After meeting Janet, Marnie and Janet's parents went to the dining room to talk. Marnie told her parents that she must be alone with Janet for four weeks. They must not interfere with her plan, or it would fail.

Even though Marnie was strange looking, Roger and Marta decided to hire her. At this point, they had no other options. Her parents agreed that they would let Marnie take control of Janet for one month. At the end of that time, they expected Janet to be the

perfect child.

Janet's parents took Marnie to the room where she would sleep. Curiously, Marnie didn't have any luggage.

"Don't you have any luggage?" Marta asked.

"No, I have everything I need," Marnie answered.

Marta and Roger just looked at each other in curiosity.

"This room will do fine. I'll be very comfortable here," Marnie stated, as she sat and bounced lightly on the bed.

Instead of staying at home, and possibly getting in Marnie's way, Janet's parents decided to go on a holiday. It would be the first holiday they had taken since they had adopted Janet.

They said goodbye to Janet as the taxi pulled up in front of the house to take them to the airport.

Janet didn't look up or even say goodbye. She just sat in the corner of her bedroom playing with her doll, which was now missing its head and one arm.

Later, Marnie walked into the room to see what Janet was doing.

"Janet, it's time to go to bed. Please get ready," Marnie instructed Janet.

Janet just ignored her. She didn't listen to Marnie.

"Please get ready for bed," Marnie repeated.

Janet turned toward Marnie and replied, "You're not my parent. I don't listen to them, so why should I listen to you? I don't have to do anything you tell me to do."

"Well, we'll see. You'll learn to obey or something very bad is going to happen to you," Marnie told her.

"I don't believe you. No one has ever been able to tell me what to do, and you won't be the first! I'll scream if you try to hurt me," Janet yelled back at her.

"Don't worry, I won't hurt you. I've never hurt a child and I won't start now. However, there are consequences for your actions and soon you'll find out what that means," Marnie explained. "If you don't learn to be a good child, you'll turn into

something that will be quiet and peaceful. It's your choice."

"I don't believe you!" Janet screamed back at her, and then ran past Marnie to her playroom where she began to make a big mess. All her toys were now on the floor.

Janet responded to Marnie "You're going to clean up my toys. All my nannies have cleaned up after me. That's your job."

Marnie looked at the clutter, and then informed Janet, "Just to let you know, you are going to clean up this mess, not me."

"I don't think so," responded Janet

"Well, we'll see about that," Marnie answered, as she left Janet alone in the room.

The next day, Marnie called out, "Janet, come here. I have your breakfast ready for you."

Janet ignored her and continued to play.

While she was playing with her toys, suddenly Janet noticed that her left foot was changing. It was turning into wood. She wasn't able to move her toes.

Janet ran out of her room, dragging her left foot across the floor, and went down to the kitchen.

"What is happening to me?" Janet screamed.

Marnie just looked at her and smiled.

"What is happening to my foot? I can't move it," Janet yelled out.

"That's what happens to children when they don't obey," Marnie explained.

Not willing to give Marnie the satisfaction of telling her what to do, Janet just shrugged her shoulders.

"It doesn't matter. I still have my other foot. You can't make me do anything I don't want to do," Janet said defiantly.

It took a while for Janet to calm down, but after she finally stopped crying, she ate her meal.

"I'm only eating because I'm hungry, not because you told me to," Janet said to Marnie.

Marnie only smiled at her.

When Janet was finished, she returned to her room to play. Even though her foot was still wood, she continued to disobey Marnie.

Day after day Janet continued to do what she wanted. When Marnie asked her to do something, she ignored her.

During this time, Marnie left her alone in her messy room. She didn't clean the room, nor did she do anything to help Janet.

When Janet would yell and scream, Marnie would just smile. This made Janet even madder than before.

Little by little, Janet continued to change. Soon both of Janet's legs had turned into wood.

Even though she knew she was turning into wood, Janet continued to be very stubborn and didn't want to change. She was not going to give in to Marnie.

She could only make her legs move when she pulled on them.

She sat in her playroom yelling and screaming, while her legs moved from side to side, out of her control.

Over time, Janet's arms began to get hard as well. They were also turning into wood.

"I can't move my arms or my legs. What is happening to me?" Janet screamed at Marnie when she walked into the room.

"As long as you stay like this and don't listen to anyone, you will continue to change into a puppet."

"A puppet? I'm turning into a puppet?" Janet asked. But still not willing to change.

"It seems that you are okay with that," Marnie responded as she walked out of the room leaving Janet alone once again.

Not long after that, she could not move at all. She sat on the floor yelling but still refusing to do anything. She didn't listen to what Marnie told her to do. She continued to yell at Marnie and made threats to kill her. Even so, she was becoming even more

helpless.

Marnie fed her and made sure that she was comfortable, even though Janet was always yelling at her.

“I want my food. I want you to clean my room. I want you to feed the dog. I want you to put me in my bed,” Janet always directed Marnie to do what she wanted her to do. However, Marnie didn’t do anything that Janet requested.

Soon Janet’s entire body was like wood and only her head was normal.

“Today you will learn a new lesson. I’m going to show you that you can no longer refuse to do what I ask you to do,” Marnie said as she began to place Janet onto her bed.

“What are you doing to me? Why am I like this. Stop it or my parents will fire you!” Janet yelled, but she was not able to do anything.

“I don’t think so. This is exactly what they wanted. A good child who is quiet and obeys what she is told,” Marnie responded.

After laying her onto her bed, Marnie started to put strings on her back, hands, and her feet.

“What are you doing?!” Janet yelled. “Why are you putting those strings on me?”

“You said I wouldn’t be able to control you. You said I wouldn’t be able to get you to do anything you didn’t want to do. Well, now you’ll do everything I want you to do, and you won’t be able to fight me,” Marnie replied, as she continued to tie the strings on her hands and feet.

Marnie pulled the strings above Janet’s head and tied them to two sticks. Then she climbed a ladder over Janet and pulled on the strings, pulling Janet up onto her feet.

Janet began to dance, not because she wanted to, but because Marnie was pulling her strings.

“Stop it! I don’t want to dance. Put me down!” Janet yelled.

“It’s now my turn. You’ll do whatever I want you to do!” Marnie said calmly back at her.

Wherever Marnie wanted Janet to go, Janet had to follow. She had become a

marionette.

Janet screamed and complained, but it didn't matter. Marnie was used to all of the noise. She had done this before to other children who did not want to obey.

The next day, Janet's nose began to turn to wood and her face was beginning to become hard.

Janet realized that she had lost. She knew if she kept complaining, her head would also become wood, and then she would be a marionette forever.

When Marnie entered the room, Janet was sitting in the corner with the strings hanging from a nail in the wall. She was helpless.

"Please turn me back into a girl. I don't want to be a puppet. I want to be a normal girl again!" Janet begged. "I'll do anything you say, just turn me back into a girl!"

Marnie just smiled at her.

"It's too late Janet. I warned you about this, but you didn't listen. Now you are the perfect child. You will never talk back again. You will do whatever your parents want you to do. It was your choice, not mine," Marnie said in a sympathetic voice.

She turned and left the room.

Janet didn't know what to do. She could not move and she could not get Marnie to listen to her. She began to cry. The muffled sound of crying was heard in the hallway.

Soon, the sounds went away. The house was completely quiet.

Later that day, Janet's parents returned unexpectedly from their holiday.

They had not told Marnie that they were coming home. They were curious to see if Marnie had made any progress in correcting Janet's behavior.

When they walked into the house, it was very quiet. They didn't hear Janet yelling. It was nice to have a quiet house. It had not been this quiet for a very long time.

They went to her room and she was not there. Then they went to the playroom. In the corner was a new puppet, but they could not find Janet.

Janet looked up and saw her parents in the doorway.

Janet yelled out as best as she could in desperation, "Mom, Dad, help me. Marnie

has turned me into a puppet. I don't want to be a puppet! I want to be a girl again. Please make Marnie stop!"

They were amazed to see that Janet was now a puppet. Only her mouth was moving. The rest of her was wood.

Her parents laughed out loud!

Roger exclaimed, "Ha ha! This is great. You can no longer disobey us. This is the best thing that has happened to us in a very long time."

Marta agreed and said, "Marnie was correct. We now have the perfect child. What can be better than a puppet?"

They walked out of the room, closing the door behind them.

Janet fell forward as her face continued to slowly turn into wood.

Her dog walked up to her and gently rubbed against her leg. Then he lay beside her and began to chew on her hand. There was nothing she could do about it.

As her parents left the room, they met Marnie in the hallway. She was just leaving her room to check on Janet.

"What are you doing here?!" Marnie exploded angrily. "You were supposed to stay away for four weeks. Why are you here?"

"We wanted to see how things were going. We must say, we are very pleased." Marta answered, surprised at how angry Marnie had become.

"You've just ruined everything. I told you that you had to stay away and out of my way or it wouldn't work. I wanted Janet to be a puppet so she would never bother you again. Now you've made that impossible," Marnie explained.

"We didn't realize that we were creating a problem," Marta said in response.

"Did you talk to Janet?" Marnie inquired.

"Yes, we told her that we were happy that she was going to become the perfect girl," Roger admitted.

"Do you realize that when you talked to her, you undid everything I was trying to accomplish?" Marnie's face was red.

“I’ve failed, so now I’ll leave. I’m sorry. This is the first time that I’ve failed to do my job,” Marnie said in a sad voice.

“Were you going to turn her back into a normal girl?” they asked Marnie.

“NO! She is such a bad girl, it is better if she had stayed a puppet,” Marnie explained.

With that, Marnie went down the stairs and out of the front door never to be heard from again.

Janet’s parents were in a panic. What were they to do? Janet was going to return to her old self. How were they going to deal with her?

Roger decided to peak in on Janet to see how she was doing. He opened the door and looked over at where Janet was sitting.

Janet was crying, and her face had returned to normal. She seemed to be changing back into a girl.

Janet saw her dad and smiled.

“Dad, I’m hungry, could you bring me something to eat?” Janet asked her dad.

Roger was shocked. Janet had never asked for anything before. She had always demanded that her parents do things for her.

“Sure, what would you like?” Roger asked.

“May I have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, please?” Janet asked in a gentle tone.

“I’ll be right back,” Roger answered, and then he left the room to fix the sandwich for her.

When he met Marta in the hallway, she asked curiously, “What happened?”

“Janet asked for a sandwich,” Roger answered.

His face showed how shocked he was.

“Why do you look so surprised?” Marta asked.

“She asked for the food and said ‘please’,” Roger informed her.

“Really? I can’t believe it,” Marta responded in surprise herself.

Marta went down to the kitchen and fixed just what Janet had asked for, as well as a glass of milk.

When she returned, Marta and Roger took the food into the room.

Janet was now sitting up. The strings were still tied to her hands and feet, and she was trying to get them off.

“Would you please help me get these strings off of me? They hurt,” Janet asked her parents in a sweet voice.

“Of course,” answered Marta.

She untied the strings and gently rubbed Janet’s hands and feet.

“Thank you, mom, that’s much better.”

Then looking around the room, she asked, “Where’s Marnie?”

“She left. She was angry with us for coming home early. She said that we made her plan fail,” Marta responded.

Looking down at Janet and seeing how sweet she looked, Marta continued, “I’m so sorry we put you through all of this.”

Janet looked up at her mom.

“You know what? I understand now. Almost turning into a puppet has helped me to realize how bad I have been. I don’t want to be a puppet. I want to be a girl,” Janet informed them of how she was feeling.

She then reached up and gave her mother a hug. Tears began to flow down Marta’s cheeks. Roger was also crying.

“We’re glad we came back early. I’m glad that we made Marnie’s plan fail. We’ve always wanted you to be our daughter. We love you more than you will ever know,” Roger said, as he gave Janet a hug.

By the end of the day, Janet was completely back to normal, only her attitude had changed.

Marnie’s plan had actually worked, even though she said it had failed. Janet had changed and that was the goal from the very beginning. Her parents were very thankful.

From then on, whenever Janet became like her old self, her parents would threaten her that she could always be turned into a puppet again. That was the last thing Janet wanted to happen.

From that day forward, she always looked at the scars on her hand where the dog had chewed it, as a reminder of what had happened to her, and why she didn't ever want it to happen again.

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. orphanage _____ | a. defy, not do what is asked |
| 2. disobey _____ | b. nosey, interested, inquiring |
| 3. nanny _____ | c. penalties, costs |
| 4. cape _____ | d. home for children without parents |
| 5. rude _____ | e. caring, supportive, feeling sorry for |
| 6. curious _____ | f. impolite, impudent, bad mannered |
| 7. adopt _____ | g. disregard, not pay attention |
| 8. consequences _____ | h. babysitter, child caregiver |
| 9. ignore _____ | i. make a child your own |
| 10. sympathetic _____ | j. cloak, shawl, wrap |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Roger and Marta were childhood friends. | T / F |
| 2. Roger and Marta got married. | T / F |
| 3. Roger and Marta had a big family. | T / F |
| 4. Janet was an orphan. | T / F |
| 5. Five nannies tried to change Janet. | T / F |
| 6. Marnie was tall and thin. | T / F |
| 7. Janet was kind to her toys. | T / F |
| 8. Janet refused to listen to Marnie. | T / F |
| 9. Marnie became a marionette. | T / F |
| 10. Janet's parents killed Marnie. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. Where did Roger and Marta find Janet? _____
 - a) on the street
 - b) at the zoo
 - c) on a farm
 - d) in an orphanage

2. How many nannies did Janet chase away? _____
 - a) one
 - b) two
 - c) three
 - d) four

3. What happened to Janet's hand? _____
 - a) it became cold
 - b) it became like wood
 - c) it fell off
 - d) it was eaten by the dog

4. Who put strings on Janet's feet and hands? _____
 - a) Roger
 - b) Marta
 - c) nanny
 - d) Marnie

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. When did Roger and Marta meet?

2. How many years had Roger and Marta been married when they adopted Janet?

3. What did Janet do to her doll?

4. Why did Roger and Marta go on a holiday?

5. What was the first thing that turned into wood?

6. What did Janet threaten to do to Marnie?

7. Who tied strings onto Janet's hands and feet?

8. What did Marnie make Janet do after tying strings to her feet and hands?

9. Who came home early from their holiday?

10. What lay next to Janet as she turned into a puppet?
