

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 that 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, 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 that she never wanted to listen to anyone. She always wanted to do what she wanted without obeying.

She was selfish and rude to people. No matter what her parents tried, Janet continued to disobey them and only did what she wanted to do. It only got worse.

Over time, 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 while in a restaurant. Everywhere they went, Janet would cause a problem.

Her parents became frustrated and did not know what to do. They began to search for answers to the problems with Janet.

When she was five years old they took her to a doctor. While she talked to the doctor, Janet acted like a princess, but as soon as they left the office, she would return to her old ways. The doctor thought that her parents were making up the stories. She said there was nothing wrong with Janet.

After they left the doctor's office, she 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.

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

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

"I'm Stacey. I'm going to be your nanny, and we are going to have a wonderful time," the new 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 will help us take care of you," Roger answered.

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

"We're going to give it try. Please be nice to her," Marta asked.

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

Roger and Marta looked at each other. They were surprised at the reaction 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 become better behaved, but Janet just yelled at her to leave her alone.

Then, Janet told the nanny that she would kill her if she did not 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 and 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 and having her arrested and put in jail. They didn't know what to do.

One day, as Roger was reading the newspaper, a small 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 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 in the advertisement.

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

Her clothes were also unique. She wore a long black cape draped over her shoulders with a pointed hood on her head. Her jacket was yellow and had writing in strange words across the front. She did not 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 to change Janet into the daughter they had always dreamed about.

Marnie entered and looked around. Roger and Marta gave Marnie a tour and inspected each room. She did not say a thing as she looked around the house.

Roger and Marta followed behind her, very curious about what she was doing, and how she was going to treat Janet 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, “Are you the 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 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.

Janet’s parents took Marnie to the room where she would sleep. Curiously, Marnie did not have any luggage.

“This room will do fine. I’ll be very comfortable here,” Marnie stated, as she sat 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 adopted Janet.

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

Janet did not 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 did not 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 you? I don’t have to do anything you tell me to do.”

“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!” 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 will turn into something that will be quiet and peaceful. It is your choice.”

Janet ran past Marnie to her playroom where she began to make a big mess. All of her toys were now on the floor.

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

Janet responded to Marnie “No, you are going to clean up my toys. All of my nannies have cleaned up after me. That’s your job.”

“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 lunch ready for you.”

Janet ignored her and continued to play with her toys.

While she was playing with her toys, suddenly Janet noticed that her left hand was changing. It was turning into wood.

Janet ran out of her room 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 hand? 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 hand. 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 lunch.

“I’m only eating my lunch 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 hand 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 did not clean the room, nor did she do anything to help Janet.

It was becoming a war between the two of them. When Janet would yell and scream, Marnie would just smile. This made Janet even madder than before.

Soon both of Janet’s arms had turned into wood.

Even though she knew she was turning into wood, Janet continued to be very stubborn and did not want to change.

Over time, Janet’s legs had turned into wood as well. She could not walk.

Janet still did not listen to what Marnie told her. She continued to yell at Marnie and made threats to kill her.

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

Marnie placed Janet onto her bed. Marnie started to put strings on her hands and her feet.

“What are you doing to me?!” 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 strings.

Marnie pulled the strings above Janet’s head and tied them to two sticks. She then 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 yelled back at her.

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

Janet screamed and complained, but it did not matter.

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,” Marnie said in a sympathetic voice.

She turned and left the room.

Janet did not know what to do. She could not move and she could not get Marnie to listen to her. She began to cry.

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 did not hear Janet yelling. It was nice to have a quiet house. It had not been this quiet for a very long time.

Janet’s parents found Janet in her room sitting in the corner. They were amazed to see that she was now a puppet.

Janet yelled out, “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!”

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 slowly turned into wood.

Janet’s dog walked over to her and rubbed against her leg. Then he lay beside her and began to chew on her hand.

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?
