

Marnie on the Hill:

My name is Marnie, and I live on a fence-post, next to the Manpuku shrine, near the top of Mt. Oyama, overlooking Tokyo. I never leave, because my legs are nailed to the post, and because that is how I was left. I am a doll.

Sometimes, when people come to visit the shrine, they visit me as well. This is good, because all alone, a doll is just a piece of wood. But when people see a doll, it can become whatever they imagine. *Precisely*, whatever they imagine. That is the magic of a doll.

Of course when it comes down to it - what I am is a doll, a simple doll. That is what most people see, and that is what I always return to. My blank slate. But I can be so much more. Children always assume I have a life, a personality, a favorite food. Sometimes I have an important job at the shrine, or a whole family of doll children. Once, I was here looking for a lost friend, and a turtle named Kurasshu had carried me on his back. Once, I moved out here because I married a squirrel! I'm always whatever people think I am. I've had so many names. But normally, when my guests can read, I am Marnie. That's my favorite. No matter how many names I'm given, Marnie is still me, and I am still Marnie. It is written on the soul of my boot.

As the seasons change, so do I. In the spring mist, at a distance I could be mistaken for a god of the shrine — and up close, perhaps the house of a god. That is a glorious feeling indeed. Divine purpose. I bless the people as they pass. Cursing any who do not pay their respect, who think they can get away, forgetting us smaller gods.

Or maybe just the house of a god — that is just as well. I can feel him peering out my eyes, sipping tea in my torso, coming and going through the zipper in my back. He blesses the passers by, and curses no-one. Smiling in the morning dew. That's how it is sometimes. In the cold and the wet of a spring dawn. And when the Dew God lives with me he pats my wet wooden cheek and says: this is a good house. And that is what I am.

But spring moves on, and the Dew God goes away. Or rather, goes away the dew, and nobody thinks much of the smaller gods of the Manpuku shrine. Summer comes, families visit, and I am a simple doll, once again. People even start to think I might be a lost toy. Abandoned on the hill. Its so sad to be left behind. To be unwanted, to be loved and then forgotten... When I think of some little girl, crying, unable to find me... I can't take it, all I do is cry. I sit on my post every day, waiting for her to come back for me. It hurts.

But there is only so much a doll's heart can ache. Mostly it's just... sad. The Tragedy of Marnie on the Hill.

In autumn the leaves begin to fall. And bit by bit people seem more frightened by me. "It's so creepy they say." They don't go near me. Girls giggle and shriek and run away. They tell stories, and for months all I can think about it cutting flesh and haunting schools. It's terrible. But then the snow begins to fall and those few that visit see only a statue, a frozen sentry. And so for early winter I am that noble guard, protecting the shrine untill spring, listening for footsteps in the snow.

But in the dead of winter no-one comes, and I feel myself fade away. Dead, just a lump of wood once more. Maybe forever. Then suddenly light floods into my eyes and I'm a doll again. It is spring, and there are people at the shrine.

Like anyone or anything, I have good days and bad. Time has taken its toll; sometimes people don't even see a doll. Just something broken. It hurts to feel like that: a piece of wood that used to be a doll. The worst is when people don't even notice me. Then I'm back to a piece of wood, but not just a piece of wood; a piece of wood that knows it's meant to be something more; a failure of a piece of wood.

My favorite though, is when people see me looking out over Tokyo. And they think of me, sitting on my post, day after day, year after year, watching over them; watching over all the people of Tokyo. Keeping an eye on them from my mountain perch. Putting in a good word for them with the gods of the shrine.

They imagine me watching on their first day of school, their first date and their first heartbreak. Their little advocate: Marnie on the Hill. And they say, "Thank you Marnie." That always makes me smile, and sometimes I swear they can see me smiling.

So for awhile that's what I am: the doll that watches over Tokyo. If they think of me I can see them down there, laughing and crying and dreaming and kissing. And I tell the Shrine gods: they are doing good down there, you could send them some luck. And they grumble back something about people not visiting like they used to, what can they even do. Because gods, I am told, work something like the magic of dolls.

But most of the time I am just a piece of wood nailed to a post. Such is fate.

I am nailed there because someone who had visited me before was sad to find me on the ground. I was on the ground a lot in those days, and people who found me would usually put me back on the fence (on one post or another), until someone had enough and thought I ought to stay on the fence, where I belonged. People always start to think something "belongs" somewhere once they have seen it a few times, and they are quite disappointed if one day it's gone. I'm not sure if the post I'm nailed too is my original post. Everyone has long since forgotten and so have I.

Who put me here? I've forgotten that too. Everybody assumes something different; it's all fuddled. To some it seems like I have always been here, and that's how it sometimes seems to me. But one thing I know, that everyone knows, is that a doll is not forever. I've got moss on my back, and rot between my joints. Eventually wood turns into dirt, and dirt isn't magic like a doll. Nobody is scared by dirt. Nobody thinks dirt is a child's toy. And nobody thanks the dirt for watching over Tokyo. One day winter will come and spring, at least for me, will not. But I'm not scared. Nobody thinks of a doll that's scared to die. That'd be a waste of the magic don't you think? I think so, anyway. I'd rather you make me a pretty dress, or an umbrella for the rain, or set a few more nails, I think the old ones are rusting out.

Or maybe a little sign.

Just a little one, and it could say:

My name is Marnie.

I live on a fence post, next to the Manpuku shrine, near the top of Mt. Oyama,

I am a doll,

and I watch over the people of Tokyo.

Thank you for visiting

1. A doll can be, and always is: anything, everything, and not ever any more nor less than what a human being sees.

2.

