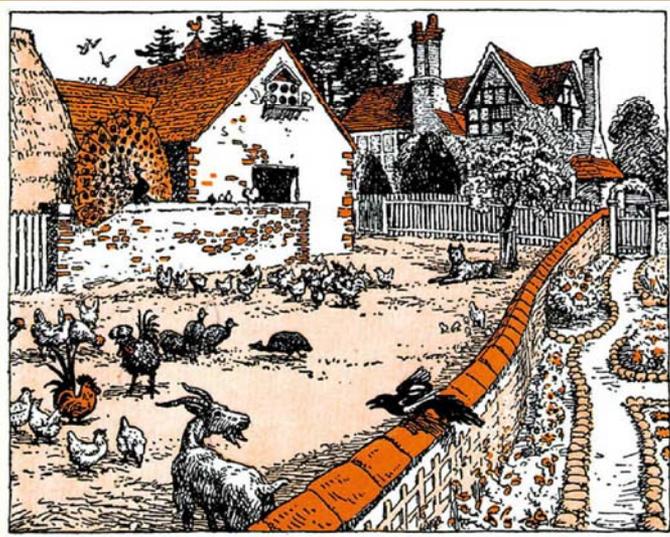


The Monkey's Paw



Adapted from the short story by W.W. Jacobs

Heather Lynn

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Norman Maine Publishing

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The Monkey's Paw

CLASSIC HORROR. Adapted from the short story by W. W. Jacobs. The White family is transformed into a family plagued with only death and misery after a family friend, Sergeant-Major Morris, gives them a mummified monkey's paw that will grant them three wishes. The Sergeant obtained the monkey's paw in India from a mystic, who placed a spell on the paw to show that fate governs people's lives. He warns the Whites that the monkey's paw brings only suffering to those who use it. Mr. White disregards the warning, and on a whim, wishes for enough money to pay off his house. The next morning, the Whites are told that their only child has died in a factory accident and that the company will give the Whites a monetary sum—the same sum they had wished for the night before. Devastated, Mrs. White insists that Mr. White make one more wish—to wish their child alive again. The suspense runs high as gates bang, doors creak, and the wind howls in this masterful horror classic.

Performance time: Approximately 30 minutes.



W. W. Jacobs (1863-1943)

About the Story

English author William Wymark Jacobs is best known for his horror stories “The Monkey’s Paw” (1902) and “The Toll House” (1909), though most of his works are humorous in tone. Jacobs was born in London and his mother died when he was a young boy. His father worked as a wharf manager and the family had little money. After his first short story collection *Many Cargoes* was published in 1896, Jacobs was able to quit his job as a civil service clerk. He married Agnes Eleanor in 1900 and the couple had five children. Jacobs published 13 collections of short stories, six novels, and several one-act plays.

Characters

(2 M, 1 F, 2 flexible)

MR. WHITE: Curious, content, practical man who enjoys hearing Sergeant-Major Morris's adventures in India; has a thin grey beard; male.

MRS. WHITE: Intelligent, attentive wife and mother who is transformed into a desperate, wild-eyed woman; female.

BERTIE/HERBERT: Mr. and Mrs. White's fun-loving, devoted daughter and only surviving child who works to support her parents and doesn't believe that the monkey's paw has magical powers; flexible. (Note: "Herbert" if male.)

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: A jaded, world-weary friend of the Whites who has returned after serving many years in India as a soldier in the British Army; tall and burly with beady eyes and a ruddy complexion; male.

STRANGER: A representative from Maw and Meggins who is assigned the task of telling the Whites that Bertie/Herbert has died; well dressed and wears a glossy silk hat; flexible.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Setting

The Whites' small parlor, evening.

Set

Small parlor and dining area. There is a fireplace with armchairs and/or sofa and a sideboard. There is a dining area with a kitchen table and four chairs off to one side. A window with blinds and a piano are optional.

Bedroom. There is a bed, armchair, and a window. The window is optional.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: The White's parlor, early evening.

Scene 2: The White's parlor, later that evening.

Scene 3: The White's parlor, the next evening.

Scene 4: The White's bedroom, evening, 10 days later.

Props

Monkey's paw (looks dirty
and shriveled)

Chessboard

Knitting needles and yarn

Kettle

Teacups

Pipe

Dishtowel

Cup or glass of "water"

Envelope

Water pitcher

Apron

Box of matches

Candle or lantern

Special Effects

Wind gusts	Footsteps ascending the stairs
Wind	Clock ticking
"Fire" in fireplace	Rat scurrying across the floor
Gate banging in wind	Stairway creaking
Heavy footsteps approaching	Knock at the door (echo)
Sound of a door opening	Candle or lantern flickering
Piano chords	Pulsating shadows from candle or lantern
Piano crash	Rapid footsteps descending the stairs
Banging door in wind	Chain
Projection of horrible monkey-like face	Creaking of deadbolt being drawn back
Knock at the door	Door creaking open
Door closing	Dragging a chair
Eerie shadows	
Footsteps descending the stairs	

**“As I wished,
it twisted in my hands
like a snake!”**

—Mrs. White

Scene 1

(AT RISE: *The White's small parlor, early evening. Outdoors it is cold, wet, and windy. The "fire" burns brightly. Wind gusts are heard. Mrs. White is sitting by the fire, knitting. Mr. White and Bertie are playing chess. Mr. White makes a daring move on the chessboard by placing his king in a position of unnecessary peril. Realizing he has made a mistake, Mr. White tries to distract Bertie from noticing.*)

MR. WHITE: Hark! The wind! It's really howling tonight.

(*Bertie takes no notice and continues to carefully survey the chessboard. She seizes on Mr. White's mistake and makes her move on the chessboard.*)

BERTIE: (*Gleefully.*) Checkmate!

(*With his hand poised over the chessboard, Mr. White looks for a way to save his king.*)

MR. WHITE: (*Nonchalantly, as if his king isn't in any danger. Trying to distract her with small talk.*) I should hardly think that he'd come tonight...

BERTIE: (*Firmly.*) Checkmate.

MR. WHITE: (*Realizes he has lost the game and delivers an angry rant.*) That's the worst of living so far out. Of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a bog, and the road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses on the road are let, they think it doesn't matter.

MRS. WHITE: (*Soothingly.*) Never mind, dear, perhaps you'll win the next one.

(*Mr. White looks up sharply, just in time to see Bertie and Mrs. White exchange a knowing glance and giggle. Mr. White is about to*

say something more but doesn't. The gate outside bangs loudly and heavy footsteps are heard approaching the door.)

MR. WHITE: There he is... *(Rises and hastily exits to answer the door. The sound of the door opening is heard. Mr. White exchanges greetings with Sergeant-Major Morris offstage. Mr. White enters followed by Sergeant-Major Morris. Introducing.)* Sergeant-Major Morris. *(Sergeant-Major Morris greets Mrs. White and Bertie before taking a seat by the fire. Mrs. White gets a teacup and kettle and pours Sergeant-Major Morris a cup of tea and then puts the kettle on the fire. The Whites circle Sergeant-Major Morris eager to hear his tales from India. Indicating Sergeant-Major Morris.)* Twenty-one years of it. When he went away, he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him!

MRS. WHITE: *(Politely.)* He don't look to have taken much harm.

MR. WHITE: *(To Sergeant-Major Morris.)* I'd like to go to India myself just to look round a bit, you know.

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: *(Shaking his head.)* Better where you are. *(Takes a drink, puts down his empty cup, and sighs softly.)*

MR. WHITE: I should like to see those old temples and mystics and jugglers. What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: Nothing. Leastways, nothing worth hearing.

MRS. WHITE: *(Curiously.)* A monkey's paw?

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: *(Offhandedly.)* Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps. *(Interested, Mr. White, Mrs. White, and Bertie lean forward, eager to hear more. Sergeant-Major Morris absentmindedly puts his empty glass to his lips and then sets it down again. Mrs. White refills Sergeant-Major Morris's teacup.)* To look at it... *(Fumbling to find something in his pocket.)* ...it's just an ordinary little paw, dried like a mummy.

The Monkey's Paw

12

(Sergeant-Major Morris takes the monkey's paw out of his pocket and shows it to them. Mrs. White grimaces and draws back. Curious, Bertie takes the monkey's paw from him and examines it.)

MR. WHITE: And what is there special about it?

(Mr. White takes the monkey's paw from Bertie, examines it, and then places it on the table.)

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: *(Serious tone.)* It had a spell put on it by an old mystic, a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it, did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it.

(The Whites chuckle at this and then stop laughing when Sergeant-Major Morris shoots them a serious, stern look.)

MR. WHITE: Well, why don't you have three wishes?

(Sergeant-Major Morris looks over at Mr. White like he is a naïve youth.)

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: *(Menacingly.)* I have...

MRS. WHITE: And did you really have the three wishes granted?

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: I did.

MRS. WHITE: And has anybody else wished?

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: *(Gravely.)* The first man had his three wishes, yes. I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw.

(Pause. A hush falls upon the group.)

The Monkey's Paw

13

MR. WHITE: If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now, then, Morris. What do you keep it for?

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: (*Shaking his head, slowly.*) Fancy, I suppose...

MR. WHITE: (*Eyeing him keenly.*) If you could have another three wishes, would you have them?

(*Sergeant-Major Morris ponders this.*)

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: I don't know...I don't know... (*Takes the monkey's paw, dangles it between his front finger and thumb, and then suddenly throws it into the fire. With a slight cry, Mr. White stoops down and snatches the monkey's paw out of the fire. Solemnly.*) Better to let it burn...

MR. WHITE: If you don't want it, Morris, give it to me.

SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS: I won't. I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again like a sensible man.

[END OF FREEVIEW]