

**CLASSIC**  
a story with  
timeless appeal

Readers Theater Play

# THE MONKEY'S PAW

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR.  
IT MIGHT COME TRUE.

BASED ON  
W. W. JACOBS'S  
CLASSIC HORROR  
STORY.

ADAPTATION  
BY MACK LEWIS.  
ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY LISA K. WEBER.

## CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

**W. W. JACOBS:** the author of  
"The Monkey's Paw"

**\*NARRATORS 1, 2, 3, & 4**  
(N1, N2, N3, & N4)

**SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS**

**\*MR. WHITE**

**\*MRS. WHITE**

**HERBERT:** the Whites' son

**MESSENGER 1**

**MESSENGER 2**

*\*Starred characters are major roles.*

TURN THE PAGE  
to read this creepy play. →



## AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

This story deals with *fate*—a force or power that controls what happens. The conflict between humans and fate is a major theme of literature. Do we control our own destinies—or does fate?

### PROLOGUE

**W. W. JACOBS:** Some disregard the tale you are about to hear. A silly ghost story, they call it—mere entertainment. But I warn you: Do not so lightly dismiss this story. Rather, heed its warning! Meddle with fate, and you will suffer the consequences. (*pause*) This tale takes place in a small English village in the year 1900. And like most good horror stories, it begins on a dark and stormy night . . .

### SCENE 1

**N1:** It's a nightmarish evening, with howling winds and biting cold.

**N2:** Inside by the fire, Mr. and Mrs. White and their son, Herbert, are entertaining an old friend.

**N3:** A burly man with a ruddy face, Sergeant Major Morris has just returned from 20 years exploring the country of India.

**MORRIS:** It seems you've done well for yourself, Mr. White. A good family, a nice home . . .

**MRS. WHITE:** Nearly paid for, too! We owe but 200 pounds.

**MORRIS:** And Herbert, what a strapping boy you are.

**MRS. WHITE:** Our Herbert. He has a

good job at Maw & Meggens.

**HERBERT:** It's tedious working the machinery, but my school term begins soon enough.

**MRS. WHITE:** Yes, Herbert will be off to college. Oh, I shudder to think what it'll be like without him! One less mouth to feed, I suppose.

**HERBERT:** One less mouth to criticize your cooking!

**N4:** Mrs. White playfully swats him.

**HERBERT:** I'd like to visit India.

**MORRIS:** No, you wouldn't. Nothing but war and plagues there.

**HERBERT:** Just imagine, all those bustling markets and beautiful old temples.

**MR. WHITE:** That's right! What was it you started telling me the other day, Morris? Something about a monkey's paw?

**MRS. WHITE:** Oh, do tell!

**N1:** Morris stares into the fire, momentarily lost in thought.

**MORRIS:** No . . . no, it's best we leave that alone.

**MRS. WHITE:** Come now. What harm can it do?

**MORRIS:** Very well. It's just a bit of magic, perhaps.

**HERBERT:** Magic? This sounds fun!

**N2:** Morris fumbles in his pocket.

**MORRIS:** To look at it, it's just an ordinary little paw.

**MR. WHITE:** What's special about it?

**MORRIS:** A fakir put a spell on it.

**N3:** Morris leans forward as if to confess a secret.

**MORRIS:** He wanted to show that fate rules our lives, that those who interfere with it do so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three men could each be granted

three wishes.

**HERBERT:** What, like a rabbit's foot?

**MRS. WHITE:** What silliness!

**HERBERT:** Three wishes? Well, if that's true, why don't you have three wishes, sir?

**N4:** Morris's tone is very grave.

**MORRIS:** I have.

**MR. WHITE:** And you actually had three wishes granted?

**MORRIS:** I did.

**MRS. WHITE:** Has anyone else wished?

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

**N1:** The room falls silent as the Whites consider Morris's eerie words.

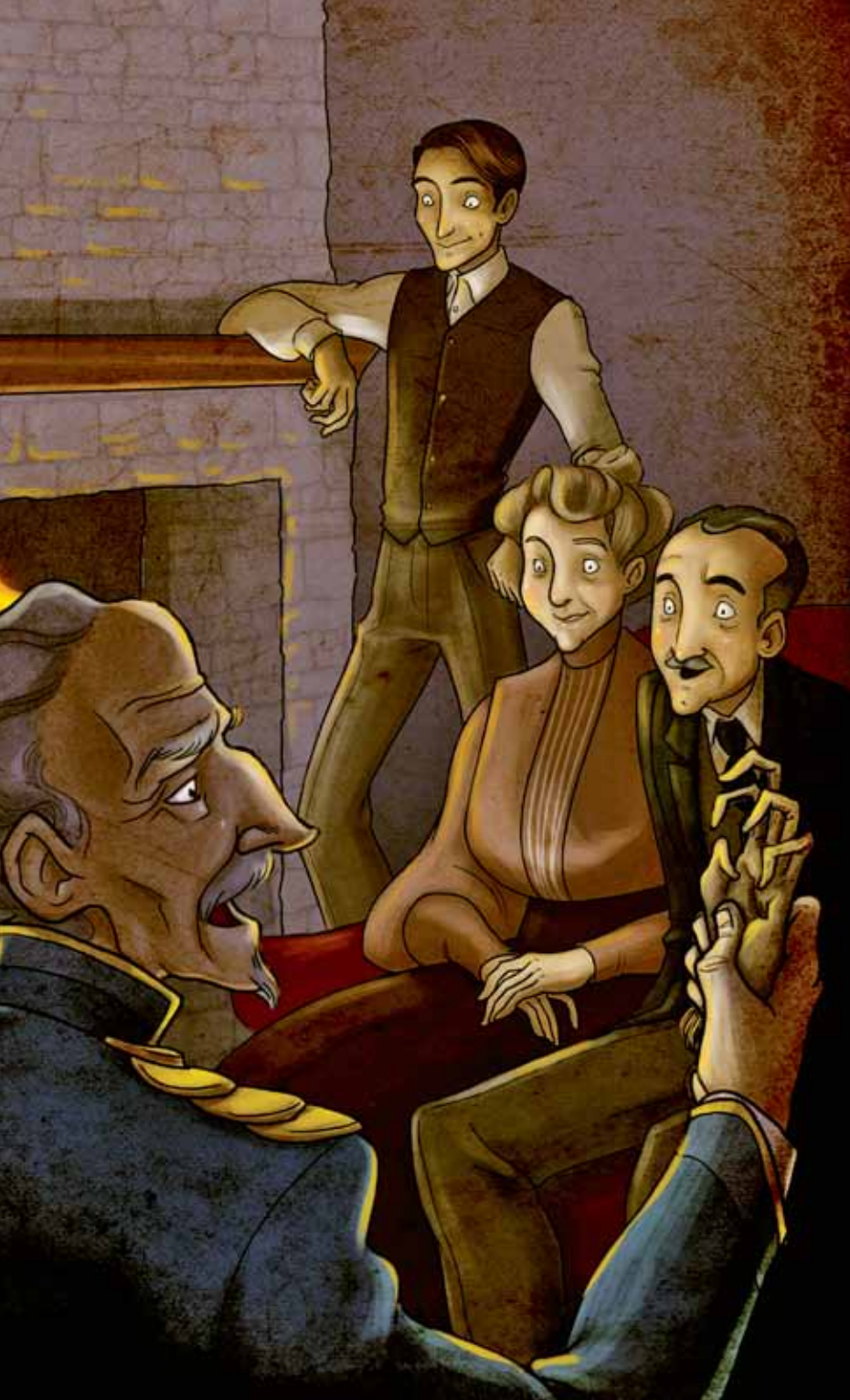
**MRS. WHITE:** How awful—to wish for death.

**MR. WHITE:** If you've already had your three wishes, Morris, why do you keep the monkey's paw?

**MORRIS:** I had some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already.

**N2:** Morris stares at the paw. Then, suddenly, he throws it into the fire.





**MORRIS:** Better to let it burn.

**N3:** Mr. White lunges forward and snatches the paw from the flames.

**MR. WHITE:** Well, if you don't want it, Morris, give it to me at least!

**MORRIS:** No, sir, I won't! I wash my

hands of it. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens.

**N4:** But Mr. White is already examining his new possession.

**MR. WHITE:** How do you wish?

**MORRIS:** Hold it up and wish aloud.

But I caution you: It's a curse, not a blessing.

**MRS. WHITE:** How about wishing me four pairs of hands with which to serve dinner?

**N1:** The Whites burst out laughing, but Morris grabs Mr. White by the arm.

**MORRIS:** If you must wish, at least wish for something sensible.

**MR. WHITE:** Very well. You've convinced me. Now let's eat before the food gets cold.

## SCENE 2

**N2:** Later, having spent the evening telling all kinds of wild stories, Morris bids the Whites farewell and disappears into the night.

**HERBERT:** Father, I think your friend is a good salesman. If the story of the monkey's paw is as far-fetched as his other stories, I'm afraid it will be of little use to us.

**MRS. WHITE:** Such nonsense!

**MR. WHITE:** Before he left, Morris pressed me again to throw the paw away. I must say, even if it really *was* magic, I don't know what I'd wish for. I've got all I want.

**MRS. WHITE:** Well, if wishes could be granted, I suppose wishing for some extra money couldn't hurt.

**HERBERT:** I can hardly believe that a smelly old monkey's paw is going to make us rich.

**N3:** Herbert thinks for a moment.

**HERBERT:** Ah, but you would be happier if the house were paid for, wouldn't you, Father? Go ahead, wish for 200 pounds and see what comes of it.

**N4:** Mr. White holds up the



**talisman**, winks at his son, and in a **melodramatic** tone makes his wish.

**MR. WHITE:** I wish for 200 pounds!

**N1:** He cries out and drops the paw.

**MR. WHITE:** It moved! As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake!

**HERBERT:** Don't be ridiculous.

**MRS. WHITE:** You must have imagined it, dear.

**MR. WHITE:** There's no harm done, but it gave me quite a shock.

**N2:** Herbert picks up the paw and examines it, then shrugs.

**HERBERT:** I expect you'll wake to find a big bag of cash in the middle of your bed—and probably some little monkey ghost watching you pocket your ill-gotten gains. Ha!

### SCENE 3

**N3:** In the brightness of the next day, Mr. and Mrs. White laugh at their superstitions. By dinner, they've nearly forgotten the paw entirely.

**MRS. WHITE:** Herbert must be running late.

**N4:** There is a knock on the door.

**MESSENGER 1:** We're here from Maw & Meggens.

**MRS. WHITE:** Has something happened to Herbert?

**MR. WHITE:** There, there. Don't jump to conclusions.

**MESSENGER 2:** We're very sorry . . .

**MRS. WHITE:** Is he hurt? Is my dear boy hurt?

**MESSENGER 1:** Badly hurt.

**MESSENGER 2:** But at least he is not in any pain.

**N1:** The messenger pauses, allowing his meaning to sink in.

**MESSENGER 1:** I'm afraid your son was caught in the machinery.

**N2:** Mr. White stares blankly. Mrs. White begins whimpering.

**MESSENGER 2:** The firm wishes to convey its sympathy. Maw & Meggens admits no **liability** whatsoever, but in consideration of your loss, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation.

**N3:** Mr. White looks up, **aghast**.

**MR. WHITE:** How much?

**MESSENGER 1:** Here is 200 pounds.

### SCENE 4

**N4:** The Whites bury Herbert in a



cemetery near their house. Their grief is almost too intense to bear.

**N1:** A week later, in the middle of the night, the sound of Mrs. White's wild cry **jars** Mr. White awake.

**MRS. WHITE:** The monkey's paw! The monkey's paw! Do you still have it?

**MR. WHITE:** Yes, on the mantel. Why?

**MRS. WHITE:** We've had only one wish! Get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again!

**MR. WHITE:** You don't know what you are saying.

**MRS. WHITE:** We had the first wish granted! Why not the second?

**MR. WHITE:** That was a coincidence.

**MRS. WHITE:** Go get it and wish!

**MR. WHITE:** He has been dead 10

days and besides, when I identified the body, I could recognize him only by his clothing.

**MRS. WHITE:** I don't care!

**MR. WHITE:** If he was too disfigured to recognize then, how will he appear now?

**N2:** Mrs. White growls at him through gritted teeth.

**MRS. WHITE:** Bring him back!

**N3:** As Mr. White goes to the mantel, a horrible fear seizes him.

**MRS. WHITE:** What are you waiting for? Wish!

**MR. WHITE:** It is foolish and wicked.

**MRS. WHITE:** Wish!

**MR. WHITE:** What if he does

come back, and he is utterly decayed and mangled?

**MRS. WHITE:** Wish! NOW!

**N4:** Mr. White raises his hand and speaks meekly.

**MR. WHITE:** I wish my son alive again.

**N1:** He trembles as the paw twists in his hand.

**N2:** Mrs. White rushes to the window and stares out into the night.

**N3:** But no one appears.

**N4:** Relieved, Mr. White returns to bed. His wife eventually gives up too.

**N1:** They listen to the ticking of the clock and the howl of the wind.

**N2:** Suddenly, a loud knock resounds through the house.

**MRS. WHITE:** What's that? Is it Herbert?

**N3:** She rushes toward the noise, but her husband catches her arm.

**MRS. WHITE:** It's my boy! Let go. I must open the door!

**MR. WHITE:** For goodness sake, don't let it in!

**MRS. WHITE:** You're afraid of your own son? Let me go!



**N4:** There is another knock. Then another. Mrs. White breaks free.

**MRS. WHITE:** The bolt. I can't get it open!

**N1:** Mr. White gropes wildly for the monkey's paw.

**MRS. WHITE:** I'm coming, Herbert. I'm coming!

**N2:** The knocking grows louder.

**N3:** Mrs. White fumbles frantically

with the lock.

**N4:** Mr. White seizes the paw.

**MR. WHITE:** I wish . . . I wish . . . I wish it would GO AWAY!

**N1:** Mrs. White flings open the door.

**MRS. WHITE:** Herbert . . . ?

**N2:** A cold wind rushes in. There is a long wail of disappointment . . .

**N3:** . . . as a lamppost reveals . . .

**N4:** . . . an empty street. ●

## CONTEST

**Write About Fate** U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once said, "Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds." Explain what you think Roosevelt meant and whether *The Monkey's Paw* supports this statement. Use textual evidence to back up your opinion. Send your response to **MONKEY'S PAW CONTEST**. Five winners will each get *The Death-Defying Pepper Roux* by Geraldine McCaughrean. See page 2 for details.

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