

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.

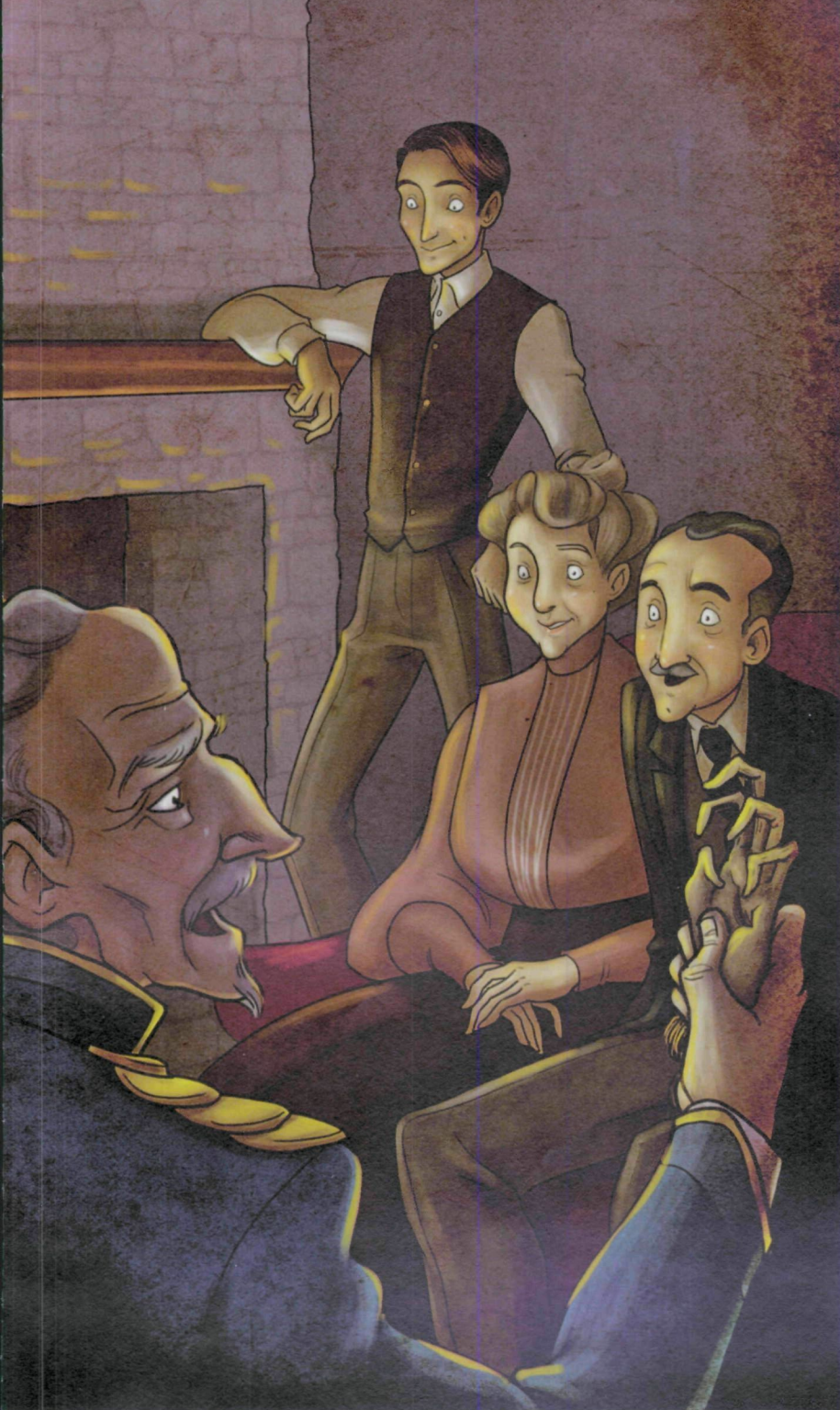
MRS. WHITE: How awful—to wish for death.

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 . . .

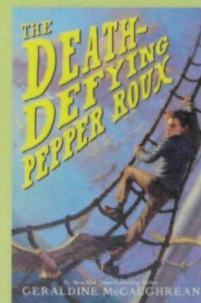
N3: . . . as a lamppost reveals . . .

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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