

The Monkey's Paw – Abridged

Adapted from a story by W. W. Jacobs

The night was cold and wet. But in the small living room of one house, a fire burned brightly and a father and son played chess. The father was a good player, but the son was better. His wife watched them play and warmed her hands in front of the fire.

'Listen to that wind outside,' said Mr. White.

'I can hear it,' said Herbert, his son. He looked at the chess pieces and moved one of the pieces. '**Check!**' he said.

'It's bad weather out there,' said Mr. White. He wanted to **distract** his son, but it didn't work.

'**Checkmate,**' said Herbert and smiled.

'This is the worst thing about living far away from town,' said Mr. White. 'Almost no-one wants to come this far on a stormy night!' He was angry because he lost the game.

'Perhaps you can win the next game,' said Mrs. White.

Mr. White looked up quickly and saw his wife and son smile at each other. He smiled to himself.

Suddenly, there was a noise outside. His wife turned.

'It's him,' said Mr. White. He stood up and unlocked the door. Dead leaves blew across the floor. Then a tall man walked into the small room.

'Sergeant Major Morris!' exclaimed Mr. White.

'Good evening,' said the sergeant major and shook hands with his old friend Mr. White. Mrs. White greeted him and gave him a chair. Sergeant Major Morris sat down beside the fire and accepted a warm cup of tea that Mrs. Morris offered him.

He watched the fire and enjoyed its heat. When he finished the tea, he started to talk. The little family sat and listened carefully. They wanted to know all about his travels. He spoke of different countries, great adventures, and strange people.

'Twenty-one years of travel,' said the sergeant major. 'When I left, I was a young man...'

check – a position in chess in which the opponent's king is under attack

distract – take away someone's focus or attention

checkmate – the capture of the opponent's king

'I want to go to India,' said Mr. White, 'and see the country. It is very beautiful, I think.'

'Better to stay at home,' said the Sergeant Major, and he shook his head.

'Tell that story again,' said Mr. White. 'Tell the story about the monkey's paw.'

The sergeant major said nothing, but his face was serious.

'The monkey's paw?' said Mrs. White. 'That sounds interesting.'

The sergeant major looked into the fire. Mrs. White took his cup and put more tea in it.

'Very well,' said the sergeant major after some time. 'You want to hear the story of the monkey's paw, so here it is...'

Sergeant major Morris took a slow drink from his cup; then he put a hand inside his pocket. 'Look at it,' he said. On his hand was a small, dry, little **paw**. It was very old.

Herbert took it from the sergeant major and looked at it closely. He gave it to his father. 'What is special about it?' Herbert asked. He put it on the table. It did not feel very nice.

'A strange old man put a **spell** on it,' Sergeant major Morris told them. 'The spell gave three different people three wishes each.'

'What is bad about that?' Mr. White asked. 'Sounds good to me!'

'Wishes are dangerous,' said Morris. Suddenly, he looked afraid.

'Did you have three wishes?' Herbert asked.

'Yes,' said Morris. His face went white and his hand shook. He took a drink from his cup.

'Did the wishes come true?' Herbert asked excitedly.

'Yes,' said Morris quietly.

'Did anyone else ask for three wishes?' Herbert went on.

'The first owner of the paw had his three wishes,' Morris told him. 'I don't know his first two wishes – but for his last wish he wished for death.'

paw = an animal's foot

spell = words that have magical power

All the people in the room went quiet. The wind outside **howled**.

'I don't understand,' said Mr. White. 'Why do you keep it?'

'I don't know,' said Morris, and shook his head. 'I thought about selling it, but nobody wants to buy it. They think it is a **fairy story**. Some want to try it first and then buy.' He picked up the paw and looked at it. Suddenly he threw it on the fire.

Mr. White cried out and took it out the fire before it burned.

'Better to let it burn,' said Morris, seriously.

'Can I have it?' asked Mr. White suddenly.

'The fire is the best place for it,' said Morris.

Mr. White shook his head and smiled. He put the monkey's paw in his pocket. 'You worry too much. How do you do it? How do you make a wish?'

'You hold it in your right hand and make the wish, but I must tell you of the danger.'

'It sounds like a fairy story to me,' said Mrs. White and stood up.

Herbert and Mr. White laughed. Mr. White took it from his pocket again. Morris got hold of his arm and looked him in the eye. 'I warn you. Wish for something good.'

Sergeant Major Morris finished his stories and his dinner. It was time for him to leave and catch his train. They all said goodnight, and Mr. White closed the door behind his friend.

'I wonder...' said Herbert. 'Is the story about the monkey's paw is true?'

Mr. White said nothing.

'Did you give him some money for the little paw?' Mrs. White asked.

'A little,' said Mr. White. 'He didn't want anything. He told me to throw the paw away.'

'Well,' said Herbert with a smile, 'we are going to be rich, famous and happy. Wish to be a king, father!'

howled = blew hard and made a loud sound, like crying

fairy story = a tale, a fictional story

Mr. White took the monkey's paw out of his pocket and looked at it. 'I have everything that I want,' he said, looking at his family with love. 'Even kings don't have that.'

'What about buying the house?' Herbert said excitedly. 'We only need two hundred pounds.'

'Now that is a good idea,' said Mr. White and smiled at his wife. He held the monkey's paw up high in his right hand. 'I wish for two hundred pounds!' he said; but suddenly he cried out and dropped the paw. His wife and son ran to him.

'It moved!' he said, looking at the paw. It was now on the floor. 'It moved in my hand.'

'Well,' said Herbert, 'I don't see any money.' He picked up the monkey's paw and put it on the table.

'Did you really feel it move?' asked Mrs. White.

Mr. White shook his head. Now, he was not so sure. 'Never mind, no one was hurt. I am old and I get afraid easily.'

They sat by the fire and stared at the flames. The wind outside grew stronger and the windows shook. No one spoke. Finally, Mr. and Mrs. White got up and went to bed.

'Goodnight,' said Herbert. 'Perhaps the money is in a big bag in the middle of your bed,' he said and laughed.

Alone, Herbert sat and stared into the fire. At first, he felt good: the room was warm and the fire was bright, but then he began to see faces, faces in the fire. He watched. At first, the faces were not frightening, but then the faces began to change. The last face was so terrible he nearly cried out. He got up quickly from his chair and put a hand on the table. By accident, he touched the little paw. This time, he cried out.

The next morning, it was sunny. Mr. White laughed at himself. 'Why was I so afraid last night?' he wondered. He sat at the kitchen table and ate his breakfast. The sun shone through the window and everything seemed well. He looked at the monkey's paw and shook his head.

Mrs. White came into the room. She looked at the monkey's paw too. 'All soldiers are the same,' she said. 'They have lots of stories, but none of them are true.'

'Perhaps it is true,' said Herbert to his father. 'Perhaps the money is going to drop on your head from the sky.' Herbert laughed but Mr. White did not.

'Sergeant Major Morris believed the story. And the paw moved in my hand. I felt it,' said Mr. White.

Herbert stood up. 'Well, I have to go to work. But when the money comes, don't spend it all. Please wait until I get back home,' he said with a smile.

Mrs. White laughed and followed her son to the front door. Herbert opened the door and said goodbye. Mrs. White watched her only child walk down the path and go off to work.

She closed the door and sat back down at the table with her husband. 'Herbert likes joking,' she said.

'Yes,' said her husband, 'he does.'

Later that day, there was a knock at the door. It was the postman. Mrs. White took the letters from him and looked at them. There was a bill. Mrs. White sighed. She showed it to Mr. White. 'We don't have any money to pay it,' she said.

'The paw moved in my hand last night. I felt it,' said Mr. White.

'Perhaps you made a mistake...' suggested Mrs. White.

'No!' said Mr. White. 'It...' Mr. White stopped talking and looked at his wife. 'What's the matter?'

Mrs. White did not reply. She looked out the kitchen window and Mr. White looked too. They watched a man outside their house. The man walked past their house and stopped; then he came back. Then he walked away again. Then he stopped, shook his head and returned. Three times he did all of this and Mr. and Mrs. White watched him do it. Finally, he walked away, stopped suddenly, opened the garden gate, and walked to their front door.

Mrs. White stood up and went to the door.

Mrs. White welcomed the stranger into the house. The man did not look happy. He stood silently and Mr. and Mrs. White waited quietly for him to speak.

After a while the man started. 'I'm from...' he said but stopped. He looked at the floor and moved his feet. He started again. 'I'm from Maw and Meggins Company, the factory in town.'

Mr. and Mrs. White recognized this name immediately. Their son, Herbert worked at Maw and Meggins.

'Is there something wrong?' Mrs. White asked suddenly. 'Did something happen to Herbert? What is it? Tell me.'

'Please, dear,' said Mr. White. 'Sit down for a moment. We do not know anything yet. Perhaps this man has good news for us.' Mr. White looked at the man, but the man looked

sad. 'I'm sorry,' the man said. 'I have very bad news. Your son is badly hurt, but he is not in any pain.'

Mrs. White started to speak: 'Thank God for that. Thank...' she said, but then she stopped and looked at her husband. His face was very sad. Suddenly, she understood. Her mouth dropped open, but no noise came out. Mr. White slowly reached out and took his wife's hand.

'Herbert fell into the **machinery**,' said the man in a low voice.

'Fell into the machinery,' Mr. White repeated quietly. He squeezed his wife's hand and looked out of the window. No one spoke and a heavy silence fell over the room. Mr. White held his wife's hand tightly. When he spoke again, his voice was weak. 'He was our only child,' he said. 'Our poor, poor boy.'

The man nodded and walked to the window. 'Maw and Meggins want me to tell you...' He stopped. The next words were difficult for him to say. 'Well, they are very, very sorry.'

There was no reply. The old woman's face was white and the old man's eyes were red and **tearful**. But the man had to continue. 'Maw and Meggins want you to know that they are not to blame for the accident, but...they will pay money to you as **compensation**.'

The old man stood up. He looked very afraid. 'How much money?' he whispered.

'Two hundred pounds,' the man from Maw and Meggins said.

Mrs. White screamed and a moment later, she fell onto the floor.

In a big **cemetery** two miles from their house, Mr. and Mrs. White **buried** their son. Then they came back to their house, their hearts heavy with sadness. Their son was dead. It all happened so quickly. Mr. and Mrs. White could not think of life without Herbert. The days passed, long, lonely and silent. They did not speak to each other. There was nothing to talk about.

About two weeks after Herbert's death, Mr. White woke up in bed. It was the middle of the

machinery – machines for producing goods

tearful – full of tears

compensation – money award to someone when there has been an accident

cemetery – a place where dead bodies are put under the ground, a burial place

buried – put under the ground

night. He put out his hand... his wife was not there. It was dark in the room, but he could hear the sound of his wife's crying hear him. He lay and listened.

'Come back to bed,' he said after a while. 'It's cold.'

'It is colder for Herbert,' said his wife.

Mr. White's eyes were heavy with sleep, and he soon fell asleep again. But then a long cry from his wife awoke him again.

'The paw,' she cried, 'the monkey's paw!'

Mr. White sat up in bed. 'What? What is the matter?'

Mrs. White came out of the darkness of the room. Her eyes were wild and staring. 'I want the paw,' she said. 'Where is it?'

'Downstairs in the cupboard,' said Mr. White. 'Why?'

Mrs. White laughed and cried at the same time. 'We have two more!'

'Two more of what?' Mr. White asked.

'Two wishes,' said Mrs. White. 'We have two more wishes!'

'Was one not enough?' Mr. White said angrily.

'You don't understand,' cried Mrs. White. 'We can use the paw. Go and get it and we can wish for our boy to be alive again.'

Mr. White stared at his wife. 'Are you **mad**?' he asked.

'Get it,' cried Mrs. White, 'get it quickly and wish...Herbert's life depends on it.'

'Get back into bed,' said Mr. White. 'You don't know what you are saying.'

But Mrs. White continued. 'The first wish came true,' she said, her eyes full of tears. 'Why not the second? Go and get it and make a wish!'

'Herbert died more than ten days ago,' said Mr. White, his voice shaking. 'We cannot wish for this...'

'Bring him back,' said Mrs. White. 'Bring my boy back.'

*mad – crazy

Slowly, Mr. White got out of bed. He went downstairs and into the kitchen. Then, he opened the cupboard and looked in. The monkey's paw was still there. The wind howled outside and in the dark Mr. White became afraid. His body went cold and his legs shook. With the paw in his hand, he went back upstairs and into the bedroom.

His wife sat on the bed waiting. She watched him closely from mad eyes. Mr. White was afraid of his own wife.

'Make a wish,' Mrs. White cried in a strong voice. 'Bring my boy back. Do it.'

'I can't,' said Mr. White. 'I...'

'Do it!' cried Mrs. White.

Slowly, Mr. White held up his right hand and began to say the words... 'I wish my son alive again.'

Mr. White sat and waited. A candle burned in the corner of the room. Mrs. White looked out the window. But nothing happened. 'The wish didn't come true,' thought Mr. White, and he felt glad. Then the candle spluttered and went out. In the darkness, Mr. White slowly walked over to his bed and got in. After some time, his wife came and sat on the bed. They didn't speak. Both heard the ticking of the clock downstairs. It was a windy night, and the house made other noises too: the stairs **squeaked** and the gate banged outside. After some time, Mr. White got out of bed. His wife sat silently. She stared into the dark. Mr. White found some matches. He lit one and went back downstairs for a candle.

The wind still howled outside. At the bottom of the stairs, the match went out. Mr. White tried to light another. Then he heard it. At first, he thought it was the wind. But it was a knock, a soft knock: the sound of **knuckles** against wood. **Terror** flooded through Mr. White's body. He dropped the matches on the floor. He stared at the door. The knock came again. This time, he turned and ran up the stairs to his room. He closed the bedroom door, but there was another knock from downstairs.

'What is that?' Mrs. White cried.

'Nothing,' said the old man.

Another knock. This time, it was loud and heavy.

squeaked – a high-pitched sound

knuckles – the bony part of the fist

terror – great fear

'It's Herbert,' said Mrs. White excitedly. 'It's him!' She ran to the bedroom door, but Mr. White stood in front of her. He took her by the arm and held her. 'What are you going to do?' he shouted.

'It's my boy. It's Herbert,' she cried. 'I forgot the cemetery was two miles away. Why are you holding me? Let me go, I must open the door.'

'No please,' begged Mr. White, 'don't let it in!'

'Are you afraid of your own son?' screamed Mrs. White. 'Let me go. I'm coming Herbert! I'm coming!'

There was another knock, and then another and another. The old woman broke free of her husband and ran down the stairs. He called after her, but she didn't stop. He followed her and heard the first **bolt** on the door start to open. 'Come quick,' his wife cried, 'I cannot free the second bolt. It is too high.'

But Mr. White did not come to help her. He wanted to find the monkey's paw. He wanted to find it before the thing outside got in. More knocks at the door: long, slow and loud. Mr. White looked up and saw his wife put a chair against the door and stand on it. His wife began to pull at the second bolt; but at the same moment, Mr. White found the monkey's paw, and he made his last wish.

Suddenly, the knocking stopped. Mr. White heard the bolt slide, the chair go back and the front door open. Then the cold wind howled, and so did his wife. He ran to the door.

Outside, there was nothing but a quiet, empty street.

*bolt – a large, metal pin that is used to stop a door from opening

