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

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

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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?

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**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 . . .

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**SCENE 1**

N1: It’s a nightmareish 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.

MRS. 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!

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.

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.

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**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.