



The Monkey's Paw

William Wymark Jacobs

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"The Monkey's Paw" is a horror short story by author W. W. Jacobs. It was published in England in 1902. The story is based on the famous "setup" in which three wishes are granted. In the story, the paw of a dead monkey is a talisman that grants its possessor three wishes, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate. The story involves Mr. and Mrs. White and their adult son, Herbert. Sergeant-Major Morris, a friend of the Whites who has been part of the British Armed Forces in India, leaves them with the monkey's paw, telling of its mysterious powers to grant three wishes and of its journey from an old fakir to his comrade, who used his third wish to wish for death. Sergeant-Major Morris throws the monkey's paw into the fire and White quickly retrieves it. Morris warns White, but White, thinking about what he could use the paw for, ignores him. Mr. White wishes for £200 to be used as the final payment on his house. Following that, Herbert is killed by machinery at his company, but the couple gets compensation of £200. Ten days after the funeral, Mrs. White, almost mad with grief, asks her husband to wish Herbert back to life with the paw. Reluctantly, he does so. After a delay, there is a knock at the door. Mrs. White fumbles at the locks in an attempt to open the door. Mr. White knows, however, that he cannot allow their son in, as his appearance will be too grotesque. Mr. White was required to identify the body, which had been mutilated by the accident and then buried for more than a week. While Mrs. White tries to open the door, Mr. White makes his third wish, and the knocking stops. Mrs. White opens the door to find no one there. The theme of the story is contained in this description of the paw: "It had a spell put on it by an old fakir,' said the sergeant-major, 'a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did it to their sorrow.'" A great number of novels, stories, movies, plays and comics are variations or adaptations of the story, featuring similar plots built around wishes that go awry in macabre ways, occasionally with references to monkey's paws or to the story itself. The story is frequently parodied on television shows and comic books, including a Simpson's tree house of horrors episode.

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