The Monkey's Paw

W. W. Jacobs · 1902

A wet night, a chessboard, a sergeant-major home from India with a dried paw that grants three wishes. The Whites wish for two hundred pounds. Jacobs's one horror story, complete — the fakir's warning, the man from Maw and Meggins, and the knocking at the door.

Performed and printed exactly as Jacobs published it in 1902, including his spelling of Laburnam Villa. The companion edition is free to print for classroom use.

LISTEN FOR

— Three parts, three men, three wishes each, and three quiet knocks before the loud one: count the threes as they come.

— Where the paw is at every moment: Morris's pocket, Herbert's hand, the table, the fire, Mr. White's pocket, the floor, the sideboard, the bracket, the floor again.

— The sum of two hundred pounds is spoken by four different people across the three parts; listen for who says it and when.

— Part III is told almost entirely in sounds: a clock, a stair, a mouse in the wall, a match going out, the chain, the bolt, and the knocks.

THE PEOPLE, AS THE BOOK NAMES THEM

The Narrator	
Mr. White	father · an old man with a thin grey beard
Herbert White	the son · at the chessboard
Mrs. White	mother · white-haired, knitting by the fire
Sergeant-Major Morris	twenty-one years in India
A Stranger	from Maw and Meggins

THE PLACES

London · Bombay

CHAPTERS, WITH THEIR TIMES IN THE VIDEO

0:00	Part I · Laburnam Villa, a wet night
2:20	Sergeant-Major Morris
3:56	The paw
10:05	The first wish
12:02	Part II · The next morning
15:20	Maw and Meggins
18:33	Part III · Ten days later
20:07	The second wish
21:31	The candle
24:41	The knock
27:16	The third wish

WORDS AND THINGS, FROM THE MARGIN

Chess Mr. White plays recklessly and loses. The first thing we learn about him is that he does not think ahead.

Only two houses in the road are let A new street on the edge of town, half empty — two miles from the nearest neighbour who matters, as the ending will remind us.

Fate ruled people's lives The fakir's lesson, stated plainly before any wish is made: those who interfere with fate do so to their sorrow. Everything that follows is the demonstration.

The third was for death The first owner's last wish. Jacobs tells us the shape of the ending here, and we do not listen.

Two hundred pounds What remains owing on the house. Roughly £25,000 today — an ordinary, modest sum, which is the point.

Maw and Meggins The firm Herbert works for; the machinery is never described. The name is Jacobs's invention.

The candle From here to the end the story is told in sounds: a clock, a stair, a mouse, a match, and the knocks.

The knock Jacobs never says what is at the door. Three knocks, then another and another, then a fusillade; a chair against the door; a bolt. Nothing is described.

PASSAGES TO HEAR AGAIN

"He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

Morris on the fakir, in Part I, before anyone has laughed.

"I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said, slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

Mr. White with the paw in his hand, just before Herbert names the sum.

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank—"

Part II: the stranger has just said 'not in any pain'; listen for where she stops.

"I was to say that 'Maw and Meggins' disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

The firm's message, word for word, and then the two words Mr. White asks.

"He has been dead ten days, and besides he—I would not tell you else, but—I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?"

Part III: the one thing Mr. White has kept from his wife, said in the dark.

"The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road."

The last paragraph; note what is said and not said about the third wish.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Mr. White loses the chess game by putting his king into 'sharp and unnecessary perils'. What else does the first page tell us about him, about Mrs. White and about Herbert, before the sergeant-major arrives?
2. Morris warns the Whites several times. List each warning in order, and what each of the three Whites says or does in reply.
3. Morris says the first owner's third wish 'was for death' and that he himself has had his three. What does the text tell us about what Morris wished for, and what does it leave out?
4. The first wish is Herbert's idea. Trace how the sum of two hundred pounds is arrived at, and then find each place the words are repeated across the three parts and who says them.

5. The morning after, Mrs. White says ‘How could wishes be granted in these days?’ and then hurries to the door at the postman’s knock. What does the text show each of the three believing, and when?
6. The man from Maw and Meggins takes a long time to say what he has come to say. Read his speeches in order. What does he say about the firm, and what does he say about himself?
7. In Part III it is Mrs. White who remembers the paw. Compare how husband and wife each speak about the second wish, and what Mr. White says to try to stop her.
8. From the second wish to the end, what sounds does the text describe, and in what order? Where is each of the two old people when each sound comes?
9. The third wish is never written out. What does the text actually tell us the old man did with the paw, and what does it tell us was at the door?
10. Compare the end of Part I, Herbert alone by the fire, with the end of Part III, Mr. White at the gate. What does each man see, and what does the text say the light shows?

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