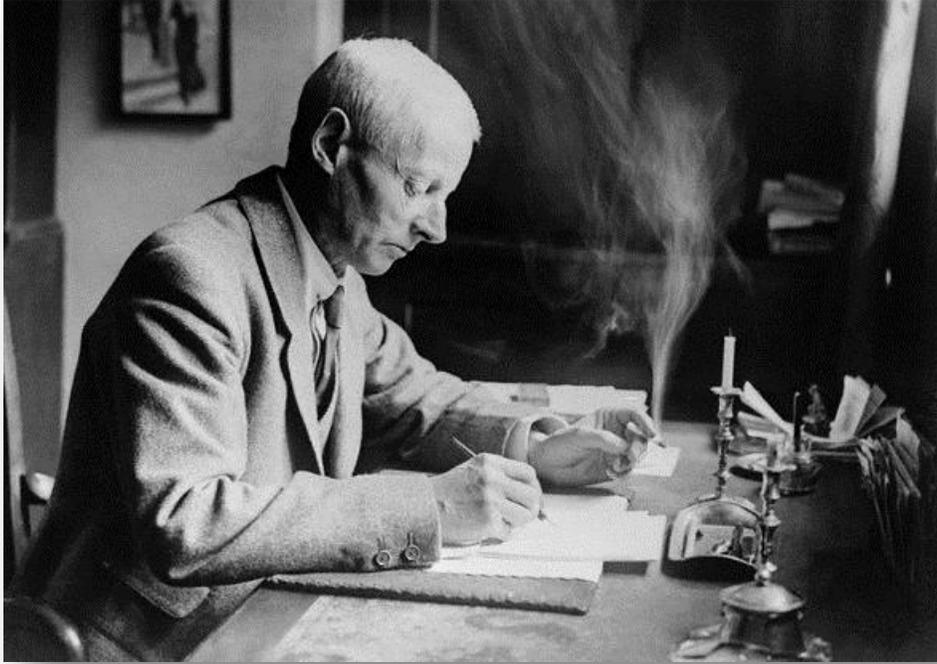


THOUGHTAUDIO



THE MONKEY'S PAW

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Produced by ThoughtAudio.com

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Adaptation by Garcia Mann

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THE MONKEY'S PAW

I.

Outside, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlor of Laburnam Villa, the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly where father and son were playing chess. The father, who possessed unique ideas about the game involving radical changes, put his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Listen to that wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the son, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come tonight," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live, this is the worst. The pathway is a bog, and the road is a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking. I suppose because only two houses on the road are occupied, they think it doesn't matter."

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"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged and loud and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, greeted the new arrival. The new arrival returned the greeting. Mrs. White interrupted with a soft, "Tut, tut!" and gently coughed as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

"Sergeant Major Morris," her husband said, introducing the guest.

The Sergeant Major shook hands, and taking the seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whisky and tumblers and placed a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass, his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of strange scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

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"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White, politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

"Better where you are," said the Sergeant Major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was it that you started telling me the other day about a Monkey's Paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily. "Anyway, nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's Paw?" said Mrs. White curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the Sergeant Major off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absentmindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the Sergeant Major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little Monkey's Paw, dried to a mummy."

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He took something out of his pocket and began to show it to his guests. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is special about it?" inquired Mr. White, as he took it from his son and, having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"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 so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the Sergeant Major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" inquired the old lady.

"The first man had his three wishes, yes," was the reply. "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw."

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His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now, then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said slowly.

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man, eyeing him keenly, "would you make them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his front finger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the old man, "give it to me."

"I won't," said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again, like a sensible man."

Mr. White shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the Sergeant Major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

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"Sounds like the Arabian Nights," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the Monkey's Paw from his pocket and then all three burst into laughter as the Sergeant Major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back into his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. During supper, the Monkey's Paw was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second installment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the Monkey's Paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time for him to catch the last train, "we shouldn't make too much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A little," he said, coloring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

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"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, father, to begin with; then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with a dish towel.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "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."

"If you only cleared the house mortgage, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the Monkey's Paw, as his son, with a solemn face somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

"It moved", he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor. "When I made my wish, it twisted in my hands like a snake."

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"Well, I don't see the money," said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never will."

"It must have been your imagination, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was blowing higher than ever, and the old man jumped up nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he bade them goodnight, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe, watching you, as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

Mr. White sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, when suddenly he began seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so ape-like that he gazed at it in amazement. The image got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the Monkey's Paw, and with a little shiver, he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

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II.

In the brightness of the wintry sun the next morning, Mr. White laughed at his fears as the sun beams streamed over the breakfast table. There was an air of ordinary wholesomeness in the room that it lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shriveled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?"

"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert, as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, greedy man, and we we'll have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him walk down the road. Returning to the breakfast table, she was very jovial at the expense of her husband's gullibility. All of her merriment did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring to

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the retired Sergeant Major's bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; "but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say that it did," replied Mr. White. "There is no doubt about it; I had just ---
- What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. As she thought about the two hundred pounds for some reason, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed and wore a silk glossy new hat. He paused three times at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand on the gate and then with sudden resolution, flung it open and walked up the path. At the same moment, Mrs. White placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, stuffed it beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized

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for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment that he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently for him to broach his business, but at first, he was strangely silent.

"I was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from Meggins & Company."

The old lady was startled. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You haven't brought any bad news, I'm sure, sir" and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry ---- " began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

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

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face.

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She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length, in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion

"Yes," said the man

Mr. White sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had done in their old courting days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The gentleman coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking round. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the Sergeant Major might have carried into his first action.

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"I was to say that Meggins & Company disclaim all responsibility," continued the gentleman. "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."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

III.

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead son, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of expectation as though something else would happen -- something else that would lighten this load, that was too heavy for old hearts to bear.

However, the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation -- the hopeless resignation of the old, that turns into deep gray apathy. Sometimes

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they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long and wearisome.

It was about a week after that that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back, Mother" he said tenderly. "You will get cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, as she started weeping again.

The sound of her sobs died away in his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed restlessly, but eventually fell asleep until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him.

"The paw!" she cried wildly. "The Monkey's Paw!"

He rose up in alarm. "Where? Where is what? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said quietly. "You haven't destroyed it have you?"

"It's in the parlor, on the bracket," he replied, gaping "Why?"

She cried and then laughed, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

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"I just thought of it," she said hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't you think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.

"The other two wishes," she replied rapidly. "We've only had one."

"Wasn't one enough?" he demanded fiercely.

"No," she cried, triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bedclothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish ---- Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said, unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman, feverishly; "why not the second."

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried the old woman, quivering with excitement.

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The old man turned and stared at her with trepidation, as his voice shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he – No, I should not speak to you of this -- but at his funeral it was so dreadful that we could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too disfigured for you to see then, how can it be different now?"

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlor, and then to the mantelpiece. The Monkey's Paw was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him before he could escape from the room seized him with fear. He caught his breath and began to panic as he realized he had lost the direction to the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way around the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome Monkey Paw in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"Wish!" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," as his voice faltered from the thought of his wife's request.

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"Wish!" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand, voice trembling as he uttered, "I wish my son alive again."

The Monkey's Paw fell to the floor, as fear ran through the marrow of his bones. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until the cold uncomfortably chilled him, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle end, which had burnt below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it fizzled out. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the Monkey's Paw wish, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and laid apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but both lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time building up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

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At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another. At the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"What's that?" cried the old woman, raising up.

"A rat," said the old man, in shaking tones -- "a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband leaped in front of her, and catching her by the arm held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered in a stuttering panic-filled tone.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling forcefully to get away from her husband's grasp. "I forgot it was two miles away. Why are you holding me? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake, don't let it in," cried the old man trembling.

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"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then a loud shuddering cry came from the woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

However, her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the Monkey's Paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfectly timed and sustained burst of knocks reverberated through the house. He heard the scraping of a chair that his wife carried through the front room. He heard her place the chair against the door and then the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back. At the same moment, he finally found the Monkey's Paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly. Yet, Mr. White could still hear its echoes reverberating through the house. He heard the chair drawn back and the door opening. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and then he heard a long loud wailing cry of misery and disappointment from his wife. At this, he bolted down the stairs to save his wife from whatever grave evil had befallen her.

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As he entered the room there was nothing but silence and a cold breeze from the open door. He stood silently by his wife; yet again only hushed stillness chilled the room. The two stepped outside to the gate that was teetering back and forth with a squeaking, eerie jangle. They looked up the empty street where a lone lamp flickered on a quiet and deserted road.

THE END