

UNIT – 3

THE MONKEY’S PAW

3.0 Introduction

“The Monkey’s Paw” is a supernatural short story by the British author W. W. Jacobs. It was first published in England as a part of Jacobs’s short-story collection *The Lady of the Barge* (1902). William Wymark "W. W." Jacobs was an English author of short stories and novels. Although much of his work was humorous, he is most famous for his horror story "The Monkey's Paw". In the story, three wishes are granted to the owner of the monkey's hand, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate. The short story involves Mr. and Mrs. White and their adult son, Herbert. Sergeant-Major Morris, a friend who served with the British Army in India, introduces them to a mummified monkey's paw. An old fakir placed a spell on the paw, that it would grant three wishes to three separate men. The wishes are granted but always with hellish consequences, as punishment for tampering with fate.

3.1 Unit Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the constituents of a supernatural story.
- Appreciate the language full of suspense and premonition.
- Understand the art of characterization of W.W.Jacobs.

About the Author

W. W. (William Wymark) Jacobs was born in 1863 in London, England, in a poor family. He had a difficult childhood. His father, William Jacobs, managed a wharf in South Devon. His mother, Sophia, died when Jacobs was a young boy. He received his degree from Birkbeck College. In the early 1890s the satirical magazines *the Idler* and *Today* published some of his stories. Jacobs’s first short-story collection, *Many Cargoes* (1896), won popular acclaim, prompting him to quit working as a clerk which he had been doing till then and adopt writing as a full-time career . In 1900, Jacobs wed Agnes Eleanor, a prominent suffragette(a woman seeking the right to vote through organized protest) . They had five children together.

The success of Jacobs’s fiction enabled him to escape his hard, frugal and dull life as a civil servant. However his early experiences benefited him greatly. He had spent a lot of time hanging around the wharves in London, and many of his short stories and novels are based on seamen’s lives and adventures. Jacobs’s works include a novel *The Skipper’s Wooing*(1897) and anthologies *Sea Urchins* (1898), *Light Freights* (1901), *Captains’ All* (1902), *Sailors’ Knots* (1909), and *Night Watches* (1914). Jacobs published thirteen collections of short stories, five novels, and a novella, many of which sold tens of thousands of copies. He also wrote a number of one-act plays and many of his short stories were also-adapted as plays. His short stories got wider publicity and remuneration when the popular *Strand* magazine began publishing Jacobs’s short stories in 1898 and continued to do so throughout much of his

life. Jacobs died in 1943.

While modern readers relate Jacobs primarily with his exciting and frequently quoted short story “The Monkey’s Paw” and with another short story “The Toll House,” he was better recognized as a comic writer. Like many comic writers of the day, Jacobs explored the lives of the lower and middle classes and published many of his stories in magazines directed at this audience. The novellas *At Sunwich Port* (1902) and *Dialstone Lane* (1904) exemplify his ability to create humorous scenarios with vivid characters. Jerome K. Jerome, a popular comic novelist of the day, was an ardent admirer of Jacobs’s and praised his diligent and incisive approach. He said that Jacobs would often rewrite just one sentence for hours at a stretch. Many celebrated names of literature have complimented Jacob’s work, including G. K. Chesterton, Henry James, Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, and Mark Twain.

“The Monkey’s Paw” was published in Jacobs’s short-story collection *The Lady of the Barge* (1902), and the story’s popularity has been extraordinarily long-lasting. The story has been included in approximately seventy collections, from horror and gothic anthologies to the *New York Review of Books’* collection of classic fiction. The story has also been turned into a play and made into eight separate movies. Stephen King wrote about “The Monkey’s Paw” in *The Dead Zone* (1979) and *Apt Pupil* (1982) and based his novel *Pet Sematary*(1983) on its themes. The spare but realistic characterization of the White family, their fascination with wishes and wishing gone wrong, and the blending of humor and terror have made “The Monkey’s Paw” popular with generations of readers. With this short story, Jacobs established himself as a significant name in the genre.

3.2 The Story

3.2.1 Outside, the night was cold and wet, but in the small living room the curtains were closed and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were playing chess; the father, whose ideas about the game involved some very unusual moves, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary danger that it even brought comment from the white-haired old lady knitting quietly by the fire. “Listen to the wind,” said Mr. White who, having seen a mistake that could cost him the game after it was too late, was trying to stop his son from seeing it. “I’m listening,” said the son, seriously studying the board as he stretched out his hand. “Check.” “I should hardly think that he’ll come tonight,” said his father, with his hand held in the air over the board. “Mate,” replied the son. “That’s the worst of living so far out,” cried Mr. White with sudden and unexpected violence; “Of all the awful out of the way places to live in, this is the worst. Can’t walk on the footpath without getting stuck in the mud, and the road’s a river. I don’t know what the people are thinking about. I suppose they think it doesn’t matter because only two houses in the road have people in them.” “Never mind, dear,” said his wife calmly; “perhaps you’ll win the next one.” Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to see a knowing look between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty smile in his thin grey beard. “There he is,” said Herbert White as the gate banged shut loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

Explanation: These are the opening lines of the short story. Old Mr. White is busy playing chess with his young son named Herbert. Both play in a jovial mood though the father is irritated at his loss in the game. The father makes unusual choices in the game and most of his moves do not pay him well. In order to divert attention of his son, he makes various excuses. He talks about the wind blowing outside, the muddy surroundings of their house, his friend’s anticipated arrival and so on. Mrs. White realizes

his frustration at the loss in the game but encourages him anyhow. She assures him that he would win the next game. Mr. White realizes that the family can see through his tricks and gives a guilty smile. At that point of time the visitor bangs at the door and his arrival is announced.

3.2.2. "Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him to his wife and his son, Herbert. The Sergeant-Major shook hands and, taking the offered seat by the fire, watched with satisfaction as Mr. White got out whiskey and glasses. After the third glass his eyes got brighter and he began to talk. The little family circle listened with growing interest to this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and brave acts; of wars and strange peoples. "Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, looking at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a thin young man. Now look at him." "He doesn'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 around 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 the street entertainers," said the old man.

"What was that that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?" "Nothing." said the soldier quickly. "At least, 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, without first stopping to think. His three listeners leaned forward excitedly. Deep in thought, the visitor put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. Mr. White filled it for him again. "To look at it," said the Sergeant-Major, feeling about in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

Explanation: The visitor is the awaited guest and friend of old Mr. White. He is Sergeant-Major Morris. Mr. White recalls that his friend had been healthy and energetic 21 years back. He was a man of the outdoor world who had enjoyed many adventures and travels. He had also served in the army and was posted in India. Mr. White wishes that he too could have had a chance of visiting the land of fakirs and magic. But Morris thinks otherwise. The Sergeant-Major shares his experiences with the hosts. He talks about the magical experience he had with old temples, street entertainers etc. The old man reminds him of a dried up paw of a monkey about which Morris had told him. On the other hand Morris is reluctant to share this story and dismisses it as an incident of a worn out old, monkey paw.

3.2.3. "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 tried to change it would be sorry. He put a spell on it so that three different men could each have three wishes from it." The way he told the story showed that he truly believed it and his listeners became aware that their light laughter was out of place and had hurt him a little. "Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert, cleverly. The soldier looked at him the way that the middle aged usually look at disrespectful youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his 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?" continued 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." His voice was so serious that the group fell quiet.

Explanation: The Sergeant-Major gives an introduction of the paw and its formidable features. The

paw belonged to a fakir (saint) who put special powers on it. It was done to prove that man is dictated by destiny. If one tries to defy this fact then divine nemesis (punishment) would befall. It was ordained by the fakir that three people could ask for three wishes which would come true. But they would have to pay a heavy price for that. Previously people had availed this opportunity including the Sergeant-Major. Thereafter the person who asked for three wishes had wished for death as his third wish and that was how the paw came to the Sergeant-Major's possession. The account given by the guest evoked different response from the listeners. Whereas earlier they laughed mockingly but gradually their expression grew pensive and hushed.

3.2.4. “If you don't want it Morris,” said the other, “give it to me.” “I won't.” said his friend with stubborn determination. “I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't hold me responsible for what happens. Throw it on the fire like a sensible man.” The other shook his head and examined his possession closely. “How do you do it?” he asked. “Hold it up in your right hand, and state your wish out loud so that you can be heard,” said the Sergeant-Major, “But I warn you of what might happen.” “Sounds like the ‘Arabian Nights’”, said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the dinner. “Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me.” Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket, and all three laughed loudly as the Sergeant-Major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm. “If you must wish,” he demanded, “Wish for something sensible.” Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of dinner the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat fascinated as they listened to more of the soldier's adventures in India.

Explanation: Sergeant Morris seems disinclined to keep the paw so Mr. White suggests that he pass over the paw to him. The guest refuses to give it to the old man and asks him to throw it in fire as he (the Sergeant) had done a little while ago. The old man insists on keeping the paw with him and asks how a wish is to be asked for. The Sergeant tells him to hold it in his right hand and state his wish loudly so that it can be heard. But he again warns about the inherent danger. Mr. White is tempted to ask for a wish but his friend counsels him to be wise in this venture. Mrs. White thinks that the entire thing was a fantasy like the ‘Arabian Nights.’ After a while Mr. White drops the paw back in his pocket and they had dinner. Even during dinner, they talked about many adventures in India.

3.2.5. Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it doubtfully. “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 paid off the house, 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 and with an embarrassed look for his foolishness in believing the soldier's story, held up the talisman. Herbert, with a serious face, spoiled only by a quick smile to his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few grand chords. “I wish for two hundred pounds,” said the old man clearly. A fine crash from the piano greeted his words, broken by a frightened cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him. “It moved,” he cried, with a look of horror at the object as it lay on the floor. “As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake.” “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 shall.” “It must have been your imagination, father,” said his wife, regarding him worriedly. 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 higher than ever, and the old man jumped nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. An unusual and depressing silence settled on all three, which lasted until the old couple got up to go to bed. "I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he wished them goodnight, "and something horrible sitting on top of your wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten money. Herbert, who normally had a playful nature and didn't like to take things too seriously, sat alone in the darkness looking into the dying fire. He saw faces in it; the last so horrible and so monkey-like that he stared at it in amazement. It became so clear that, with a nervous laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing some water to throw over it. His hand found the monkey's paw, and with a little shake of his body he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

Explanation: The old man does not know what wish to ask for as he feels he has everything. Herbert, his son reminds him that he had to pay off some amount for the house so he should ask for that. The father feels embarrassed in going by what his friend had told about the paw. Finally he says aloud, "I wish for two hundred pounds." At that very moment, a sudden shriek is heard from his mouth and the piano being played by Herbert produces a crashing sound. The old man declares that just as he made his wish, the paw moved in his hand. The family is unwilling to accept it and consider it as the old man's imagination. When they sit down near the fire, the wind produces a howling noise outside and a door upstairs bangs loudly. The atmosphere grows tense. While the Whites decide to retire to bed, Herbert comments lightly that they would find money on their bed. When his parents were gone, Herbert who was a light hearted youth, looks intently in the fire burning near him and feels that he saw the face of a monkey in it. When he tries to douse the fire his hand mistakenly touches the paw and he washes his hand to get rid of a strange feeling.

3.2.6. In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. The room felt as it always had and there was an air of health and happiness which was not there the previous night. The dirty, dried-up little paw was thrown on the cabinet with a carelessness which indicated no great belief in what good it could do. "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 Herbert. "Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished not see the relationship." "Well don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table to go to work. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, greedy old man, and we shall have to tell everyone that we don't know you." His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him go down the road, and returning to the breakfast table, she felt very happy at the expense of her husband's readiness to believe such stories. All of which did not prevent her from hurrying to the door at the postman's knock nor, when she found that the post brought only a bill, talking about how Sergeant-Majors can develop bad drinking habits after they leave the army.

Explanation: The next morning was a pleasant winter day and the room had a happy and healthy air. The darkness of the previous night was gone. The paw was lying abandoned on the cabinet with no one showing any concern towards it. The old lady joked about what the visitor had told them yesterday and if it was a soldier's imagination. She wondered how wishes could be fulfilled this way and how getting

money could hurt anyone. The father reminded them that all happened so naturally that one could overlook the connection. Herbert was about to leave for work comments jokingly that they should not find the money before he returned home. The mother sees him off to work and comes back in the house thinking about her husband's credulous nature, the bill just delivered by the postman and drinking habits of retired soldiers.

3.2.7. His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, looking in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of shiny newness. Three times he stopped briefly at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden firmness of mind pushed it open and walked up the path. Mrs White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, hurriedly untied the strings of her apron, and put it under the cushion of her chair. She brought the stranger, who seemed a little uncomfortable, into the room. He looked at her in a way that said there was something about his purpose that he wanted to keep secret, and seemed to be thinking of something else as the old lady said she was sorry for the appearance of the room and her husband's coat, which he usually wore in the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to state his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

Explanation: The mother observes the presence of a well-dressed man outside the house .He looked at the house in an undetermined way as if unsure about coming in. After hesitating for a while he decided to come in. The mother guessed that he might have brought the promised money as wished by the old man from the monkey's paw. She regretted that they were not formally dressed when the man came. The man was strangely silent.

3.2.8. "I – was asked to call," he said at last, and bent down and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.'" The old lady jumped suddenly, as in alarm. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?" Her husband spoke before he could answer. "There there mother," he said hurriedly. "Sit down, and don't jump to a conclusion. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure sir," and eyed the other, expecting that it was bad news but hoping he was wrong. "I'm sorry – " began the visitor. "Is he hurt?" demanded the mother wildly. The visitor lowered and raised his head once in agreement. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain." "Oh thank God!" said the old woman, pressing her hands together tightly. "Thank God for that! Thank – " She broke off as the tragic meaning of the part about him not being in pain came to her. The man had turned his head slightly so as not to look directly at her, but she saw the awful truth in his face. She caught her breath, and turning to her husband, who did not yet understand the man's meaning, laid her shaking hand on 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, too shocked to think clearly, "yes." He sat staring out the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he used to do when he was trying to win her love in the time before they were married, nearly forty years before. "He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard." The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wishes me to pass on their great sadness about your loss," he said, without looking round. "I ask that you please understand

that I am only their servant and simply doing what they told me to do.” There was no reply; the old woman’s face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath unheard; on the husband’s face was a look such as his friend the Sergeant-Major might have carried into his first battle. “I was to say that Maw and Meggins accept no responsibility,” continued the other. “But, although they don’t believe that they have a legal requirement to make a payment to you for your loss, in view of your son’s services they wish to present you with a certain sum.” Mr. White dropped his wife’s hand, and rising to his feet, stared with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, “How much?” “Two hundred pounds,” was the answer. Without hearing his wife’s scream, the old man smiled weakly, put out his hands like a blind man, and fell, a senseless mass, to the floor.

Explanation: The nervous old couple enquires from the man as to who he is . He tells them that he had come from a firm named Maw and Meggins. Unfortunately he had come with a bad news about their son. He was caught in the machine and passed away. The company had no legal liability but keeping in mind their loss and the boy’s services they had decided to compensate with two hundred pounds. The old couple is stunned and at a loss for words. The old man falls down in an unconscious state and the old woman is left lamenting.

3.2.9. “THE PAW!” she cried wildly. “THE MONKEY’S PAW!”

He started up in alarm. “Where? Where is it? What’s the matter?”

She almost fell as she came hurried across the room toward him. “I want it,” she said quietly.

“You’ve not destroyed it?”

“It’s in the living room, on the shelf above the fireplace,” he replied. “Why?”

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

“I only just thought of it,” she said. “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 quickly. “We’ve only had one.”

“Was not that enough?” he demanded angrily.

“No,” she cried excitedly; “We’ll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again.”

The man sat up in bed and threw the blankets from his shaking legs. “Good God, you are mad!” he cried, struck with horror.

“Get it,” she said, breathing quickly; “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,” his voice shaking. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“We had the first wish granted,” said the old woman, desperately; “why not the second?”

“A c-c-coincidence,” said the old man.

“Go get it and wish,” cried his wife, shaking with excitement.

Explanation: The old woman is suddenly reminded of the monkey’s paw and becomes excited to use it again. In a frenzied way she asks the husband if the paw was still there with him. He cannot understand her excitement after the horrible loss due to the paw and restrains her. She insists that the husband ask for another wish to be granted so that if the son died because of the first wish, he can be brought alive with the second wish. The husband tries to convince her that it was a coincidence and it should not be tried again. The wife insists on the wish to be asked for so that the paw is used again.

3.2.10. The old man turned and looked at her, and his voice shook. “He has been dead ten days, and besides he – I would not tell you before, but – I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?”

“Bring him back,” cried the old woman, and pulled him towards the door. “Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?”

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the living room, and then to the fireplace. The talisman was in its place on the shelf, and then a horrible fear came over him that the unspoken wish might bring the broken body of his son before him before he could escape from the room. He caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His forehead cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table and along the walls until he found himself at the bottom of the stairs with the evil thing 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,” he said weakly.

“WISH!” repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. “I wish my son alive again.”

Explanation: The old man was aware of the danger if the second wish came true. The boy had been dead for ten days . When he met with the accident at his work-place, the body got so distorted that the father had to identify it with the help of the clothes. The mother lacked the will to see it at that time so how could she cope with it now. The old man went downstairs to bring the paw but he was very nervous and cold. When he came upstairs, his expression was still distorted whereas the wife seemed white and expectant .Despite the husband’s reluctance, she insisted on the second wish. The old man wished that the son be alive again.

3.2.11. Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. They heard nothing else other than the normal night sounds. The darkness was depressing, and after lying for some time building up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and lighting one, went downstairs for another candle. At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he stopped to light another; and at the same moment a knock sounded on the front door. It was so quiet that it could only be heard downstairs, as if the one knocking wanted to keep their coming a secret. The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless,

not even breathing, until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and ran quickly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

“WHAT’S THAT?” cried the old woman, sitting up quickly.

“A rat,” said the old man shakily – “a rat. It passed me on the stairs.”

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

“It’s Herbert!” she screamed. “It’s Herbert!”

She ran to the door, but her husband was there before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

“What are you going to do?” he asked in a low, scared voice.

“It’s my boy; it’s Herbert!” she cried, struggling automatically. “I forgot it was two miles away.

What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door.”

“For God’s sake don’t let it in,” cried the old man, shaking with fear.

“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 pull broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the top of the stairs, and called after her as she hurried down. He heard the chain pulled back and the bottom lock open. Then the old woman’s voice, desperate and breathing heavily.

“The top lock,” she cried loudly. “Come down. I can’t reach it.”

But her husband was on his hands and knees feeling around wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If only he could find it before the thing outside got in. The knocks came very quickly now echoing through the house, and he heard the noise of his wife moving a chair and putting it down against the door. He heard the movement of the lock as she began to open it, and at the same moment he found the monkey’s paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish. The knocking stopped suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair pulled back, and the door opened. A cold wind blew up the staircase, and a long loud cry of disappointment and pain from his wife gave him the courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate. The streetlight opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

Explanation: The old man made the second wish at the insistence of his wife. However nothing happened for a while. Then he went downstairs to bring another candle. At that moment he heard a faint knocking outside. The old man feels so terrified that he runs back upstairs. Then the knocking became louder and the old lady wanted to know who it was. The husband tried to dissuade her that it was only a rat on the stairs. The old woman realizes that it could be her dead son who had come alive due to the second wish and was now knocking at the door outside. She ran downstairs to open the door but could not open the upper lock. She cries for the husband to open it so that the dead son could enter in. She sees no reason to be scared of their own son although he was dead now. The knocking grows louder and more insistent. The old woman tries to open the upper lock by placing a chair near the door. As she is about to open the door, the old man gets hold of the paw and makes the third wish. Immediately the knocking stops and the old woman shrieks with disappointment. The old man rushes downstairs to

comfort her. The entire place is deserted and quiet.

Check Your Progress

1. What kind of a story is “The Monkey’s Paw”?
2. What does the paw symbolize?
3. What is the meaning of foreshadowing? How does it work in the story?
4. Give an assessment of Sergeant-Major Morris?
5. What are the three wishes made by the Whites?
6. Comment on the ending of the story.

3.4 Summary

“The Monkey's Paw" is a suspenseful and amazing story with supernatural theme. It has an underlying message for the reader. Human nature is greedy and acquisitive wanting more than what one has. But fate wills otherwise so that if one gets what one desires through the wrong method, a heavy price has to be paid. In the story, the monkey's paw is a magical artifact. Anyone who owns it gets three wishes granted. The wishes come true—but never precisely as wished. So one gets what one wants but at a great cost to oneself. The Whites get the paw from Sergeant-Major Morris. When they wish for wealth, they get money in a bizarre manner. It comes as a compensation from the company where their son worked because he is “caught in the machine” and killed in an accident. As a second wish, Mrs. White asks for their son to be brought back to life. The parents hear the knocking at the door announcing his coming back from the dead. The father makes the third wish sending the son back to the peace of the grave for good.

3.5 Key Terms

- Living room: a room in a house for general everyday use.
- Violence: physical force
- Associated: connected with something or someone
- Visitor: guest or caller
- Curiously: showing eagerness
- Fakir: a monk who possesses to material goods.
- Paw: an animal’s claws or hoofs
- Spell: here used as a noun meaning magic
- Fate: destiny
- Fancy: desire
- Stubborn: obstinate
- Determination: resolve
- Talisman: an object that is thought to have magic powers and to bring good luck.
- Fascinated: to captivate
- Chords: a group of notes sounded together
- Twisted: to move with force or jerk
- Amazement: surprise

- Cabinet: a cupboard with drawers
- Indicated: specified
- Mass: lump
- Requirement: need
- Cemetery: graveyard
- Tenderly: lovingly
- Coincidence: co-occurrence, by chance
- Secret: something hidden
- Desperate: craving
- Echoing: reverberation of sound
- Frantically: in a disorganizes way
- Still: quiet

3.6 Answers to check your progress

1. "The Monkey's Paw" is a supernatural short story by author W. W. Jacobs first published in England in 1902. It has a background of suspense, thrill and premonition. In the story, three wishes are granted to the owner of the monkey's hand, but the wishes come with an enormous price for interfering with fate.
2. The monkey's paw is a symbol of desire and greed. Its owner could wish for three things , having unrestricted ability to make things come true. This power makes the paw alluring, even to those who desire nothing and have everything they need.
3. Foreshadowing is a technique in which the writer hints at the events to come. Sometimes, the writer depicts events early in a story that give clues of the plot soon to be unfolded. At other times, the writer creates this effect by developing an atmosphere that projects the tone of what is about to happen. Jacobs uses both types of foreshadowing techniques in "The Monkey's Paw". For instance in the beginning the father is seen playing chess in a reckless manner as if inviting defeat. He repeats this action when he makes the first wish without giving it due thought leading to a grave loss. Then an atmosphere of isolation and horror is created when there is knocking at the door at the end of the story. These are some examples of premonition.
4. Sergeant-Major Morris is the main character, in fact the stimulant for the story. He brings the monkey's paw to the Whites' household. He is "a tall, heavily built man who is fond of drinking. Once he is drunk, he becomes more friendly and talkative. Morris and Mr. White began their lives in approximately the same way. Mr. White remembers his friend as a slim framed man who had grown fat with years of experience, adventure and soldiering. Morris has seen the world and has brought back tales of bravery, war, disease and strange people. Morris also carries with him the monkey's paw, which changes all the lives of the Whites forever.
5. The Whites are not fully convinced about what Morris tells them about the paw nor are they sure what they should ask as a wish. In a light hearted manner they decide to test the paw. As the first wish, the father asks for two hundred pounds to pay back the amount due for their house. At the insistence of the wife, as the second wish, the father asks that their dead son come home alive. The third wish is a sequel to the second one and he wishes that their dead son go back to the grave and rest in peace.

6. The ending of the story is very powerful yet convincing. It ends like a true suspense thriller. The father asks that their dead son comes back home from the grave. The wish comes true and there is knocking at the door. The mother is desperate to have the son back, so she runs downstairs to open the door. At that moment the father asks for the third wish that the son may rest in peace. So the ending is truly the climax point of the story.

3.7 Important characters

Herbert White - He is the young and fun-loving son of Mr. and Mrs. White. Herbert is an affectionate, loyal and carefree young man and the only surviving child of the Whites. He is employed with a company which makes heavy machinery. The name of the company is Maws and Meggins. Herbert does not give much credence to the story of Morris and even jokes about it. He knows that his family needs money so he suggests that they wish from the paw a sum of two hundred pounds to meet their expenses for the house. Though he is dismissive about the paw he grows serious when he listens to his father's reaction to the twisting of the paw in his (father's) hand. He even has hallucinations about some figures in the fire burning in the heath. He has to pay with his life in order to earn two hundred pounds.

Mrs. White- She is Herbert's mother and Mr. White's wife. Mrs. White is a devoted lady who has a closely knit family. She is tolerant towards her husband's silly habits and is indulgent for her son. She is not fully convinced about the story of the paw and considers it as a hangover effect of Morris who had many drinks. But she aligns with the husband to ask for a wish which results in the loss of her only son. She is distraught after that and asks for the son to be revived as a second wish from the paw. We see her transformation from a loving house wife to a hysterical mother who wants her dead son back at every cost.

Mr. White— He is Herbert's father and Mrs. White's husband. Mr. White is a loving old man who has great attachment for his family. He is a good host also. The arrival of his friend reminds him of the many adventurous opportunities that he had missed in life. Although he has his doubts about the paw, he feels inclined to use it for his family. So all the three wishes are made by him at the behest of his family. As far as his own ambition is concerned, he has no wish to ask for as he thinks he has everything already. Mr. White is a noble and simple person dedicated to his family. He provides strength to his distraught wife and saves her from further trauma by asking for the third wish.

Sergeant-Major Morris – He is a friend of the Whites. He is a heavily built person who likes to drink and share tales of adventure. He tells the family about many of his exploits abroad. He does not want the Whites to use the monkey's paw and throws it in the fire. Morris has been a Sergeant Major in the army and traveled a lot but feels that staying back home is better. He is a symbolic figure who comes from the unknown and brings the message of greed, loss and death for a happy, gullible family. He introduces avarice in a peace loving and contented house hold and their lives are changed forever.

3.8 Questions and Exercises

Short Answer Questions

Q1. Explain the title of the story.

Ans: The title of the short story is "The Monkey's Paw". The entire plot moves around the cursed paw which wrecks havoc on their lives.

Q2. What attitude do the different characters display towards the paw?

Ans: The White family is reluctant to believe the story of the paw. However they decide to try out its real worth which creates havoc in the family. Sergeant Major Morris is convinced about its attributes and warns the Whites not to use the paw.

Q3. What kind of life do the Whites lead?

Ans: The Whites are a close-knit, loving and contented family. They share a lot of mutual affection and invite guests to their home. They are simple and credulous people.

Q4. How does the tone of the story change?

Ans: The story starts on a jovial note when the father and the son are seen enjoying the game of chess. Gradually the tone changes with the asking of the wish from the monkey's paw. It results in death, appearance of the son's ghost and return of the ghost to the grave.

Q5. What message does the story give?

Ans: The story suggests that fate is all-powerful. Humans should not tamper in the ways of God. It could cause serious consequences.

Long-Answer Questions**Q1. Analyze the structure of the story?**

Ans: "The Monkey's Paw" is a horror story dealing with elements of the supernatural in an atmosphere of suspense and thrill. The plot is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the building of the hypothesis. The White family is introduced to the reader as a well-knit, loving and caring lot who are satisfied with what they have. The family friend, Sergeant-Major Morris comes to spend an evening with them. He shares many of his experiences as a soldier to India and other parts of the world. He tells about the story of a monkey's paw which had a curse upon it put by a fakir. The paw grants three wishes to three people in a natural manner but it created catastrophe in their lives so that whosoever used the paw regretted later. The first part tells about how father wished two hundred pounds from the paw. The second part tells about the coming true of the first wish in the death of the son. They receive the said amount as compensation for his death. The third part pertains to the second and third wishes. They are a sequel to the first. The father wishes for the dead son to be revived and then to rest in peace. Thus the structure of the story is tightly woven and it keeps the reader engrossed. The element of suspense is maintained till the end.

Q1. Discuss the plot of "The Monkey's Paw"?

Ans: The plot of the story is filled with suspense, tension and horror. It centers on a monkey's paw which has supernatural powers. It gives to its owner three wishes. The monkey's paw is given to a family of the Whites- father, mother and son. They wish for some money, and the next day an employee of the company where the son is working arrives at the family's house and tells the parents that their son has died in an accident and they will receive a monetary compensation. The amount is exactly two hundred pounds which they had wished from the paw. About a week later, the mother compels the father who makes the second wish that their son would return home

alive. When knocking is heard at the door, the father realizes what has happened and before the mother can open the door, the father uses the last wish. The knocking stops and when the door is opened, no one is there. Thus the plot is engaging, organic and well-knit.

Q2. Which are the major themes discussed in the story?

Ans: This is basically a horror story which deals with themes such as superstition, greed, fate, desire to be immortal and so on. The story never explicitly states that the paw was the reason for Herbert's death, nor does it reveal whether the mysterious knocker at the White's home at the end of the story is in fact the dead Herbert. So there is superstition guiding many facets of the story. Secondly, the Whites are a content, happy family. They want nothing more in life. Mr. White does not know what to ask for as his first wish. He wishes out of greed, not out of necessity. So greed is another salient theme. Fate is all powerful and one should not interfere in the ways of God. Asking for things about which one is not sure or asking for things which humans can not grant leads to ruin. All these themes have been discussed in the story.

Essay type questions

Q1. What are the elements of horror, mystery and the supernatural in "The Monkey's Paw"?

Ans. There are many different aspects of the short story that bring out the element of mystery, horror and the supernatural. W. W. Jacobs, in this story, gives us a horrific retelling of the traditional "three wishes" tale that can be found in literature all over the world. The difference between this tale and its many variations is the way that it incorporates terror and suspense in its narration. One key element that makes this story terrifying is the description of the monkey's paw and the way it gets a life of its own. The paw comes to life after Mr. White makes his wish for money. There is a crashing sound from the piano and the old man gives a shuddering cry. His wife and son ran toward him. The old Mr. White claims that the paw twisted in his hand. The sound of the piano is used to foreshadow the disaster that is going to befall the White family. The crash is emotionally jarring, suggesting that something sinister would follow. The crash is highly suggestive. It indicates that the money will be provided but in a way which nobody can foresee. The way the monkey's paw twisted "like a snake" in the hand of the old man reminds that snakes are creatures that we associate with evil. So horror is made vivid through this comparison. The tale is full of mysterious happenings. The death of the son, the gloominess of the atmosphere in and outside the house, the candles and matchsticks going out, the unexplained knocking at the door after the second wish has been made and the cessation of knocking after the third wish – all these incidents to give the story a gripping form. The idea of the supernatural colours the entire story. The paw is an extraordinary and bizarre object and seems to be a living entity. It reminds of the furies in classical literature which punish humans for follies and frailties. The old couple is destined to get money but through a grotesque twist of fate. The horrible consequences of the first wish do not restrain the couple from asking for the remaining two wishes. The arrival of the dead son and then his departure to the grave are all supernatural happenings. All these features make it a horror story with premonition inherent within.

3.9 Further Reading:

Alfred Hitchcock's "Knife"

Ernest Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"