



Read Rhyme Repeat

The Monkey's Paw

Theater Adaptation
by Jill Craddock

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Characters

MR. WHITE

MRS. WHITE

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS/MESSENGER/NARRATOR

MRS. WHITE

That keen and clever son of mine left you with a bewildering board.

MR. WHITE

You wait. When he returns to the game, it will be check and mate.

MRS. WHITE

But not tonight. The weather's a beast; the bog's a slushy ford.

No one alive could traverse our path this late.

(A knock is heard.)

MR. WHITE

Oh, I hate to unleash my chess tactics, the art of the attack!

On the other hand, delightful! My son has come back.

MRS. WHITE

It isn't fair, dear; you've had all this time to think.

MR. WHITE

So has he! Would you be a love and go get us something hot to drink?

Who—? Wha—?? Sergeant Major Morris! Is it you? How many years?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Fifteen.

MR. WHITE

Come in. Come in. Sit down. Good heavens. Meet my wife.

Here... are you still drinking gin?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

White, White, White. It is simply splendid to see you, old friend.

You have no idea where I've been.

MR. WHITE

My dear, you can't imagine this man's bold voyage of a life.

If I could have the merest fraction of his adventures...

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Don't be a fool, White. Why adventure when you've got her?

MRS. WHITE

Oh, sir.

MR. WHITE

Now, Morris, tell us about India. Tell us your stories of the war.

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Eh. Plagues, peculiar people, very brave men.
The important part—what I care about now—is I'm at the end.

MRS. WHITE

Oh, I should like to see Indian jugglers and temples—and visit a mystic!

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

This parlor, the fire, a family, that's what I'd pick.
Whose turn in chess? Good looking game you've got.

MR. WHITE

Upon his return, I'll checkmate my son.

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

He's a bright boy?

MR. WHITE

Both kind and smart.

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

White, you've hit the jackpot.

MR. WHITE

Say, Morris. When you were in India, did they speak about a monkey's paw?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

They did. But nothing worth hearing. See for yourself—it's a magic fraud.

(He pulls out a monkey's paw.)

Now, I can't get rid of this rotten piece of mummy.

MR. WHITE

You have one?!

MRS. WHITE

Get that filthy thing—

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Yes. Filthy, as well as crummy.
This mystic, holy man—whatever you call him—put it under a spell.
Three wishes for three men.
Mine didn't go well.

MR. WHITE

Who's the second man? Can I try?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

I was the second. The first man wound up wishing to die.
That's how I'm stuck with this parasitic fairy tale.
No one believes me, and the pest has been for sale.

MR. WHITE

I'll buy it!

MRS. WHITE

We should try it!

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Where's your garbage? Better yet, the fire pit.
This paw has caused quite enough mischief.

MR. WHITE

No! What if...?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

Throw it out. Be sensible, man.
It is a harbinger of only bad news.
Whatever happens will all be on you.

MR. WHITE

That's quite all right, friend. I understand.

MRS. WHITE

You could wish me diamonds for my hands!

MR. WHITE

Morris, how does it work? What do I do?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

If you must. Hold it in your right hand and wish aloud.

MRS. WHITE

Oh, now this is getting silly.

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

I've warned him, ma'am. I'm not proud.

MR. WHITE

How much does it cost, Morris?

SERGEANT MAJOR MORRIS

For you, it's free.
Keep the wretched thing away from me.
I can't stay.
If you use it, please... try to... be careful.

MR. WHITE

Anything you say.
But why hurry away?

MRS. WHITE

He left so quickly.

MR. WHITE

He looked quite sickly.
I don't know why he wouldn't take my money.

MRS. WHITE

You get what you pay for, darling. That's why it's free.
Maybe you should wish to be an emperor so you won't be henpecked by me.

MR. WHITE

That's tempting, but I've grown accustomed to you.
Now that I have this power, I don't know what to do.
Ha! I don't even need a winning chess strategy.

MRS. WHITE

You have time on your side with that game.

MR. WHITE

And our son! So does he!
Let's not rehash that argument, again.
He'll be back soon enough, and I'll win.

MRS. WHITE

All right then, my love, what shall it be? May as well give it a try.
What's the first wish?

MR. WHITE

I wish... I wish... Well, I'm looking around.
And it seems to me I've got everything I want, here and now.

MRS. WHITE

Well, you don't have two hundred pounds.

MR. WHITE

All right. I wish for two hundred pounds.
Aaaaaahhhh!!! The thing moved like a snake!

MRS. WHITE

Oh, honey. Come here. It's only a superstition.

(She picks up the paw.)

This paw is foul... and a fake.

NARRATOR

No magical bag of money appears. Mr. White feels ashamed.
But he has to wonder, all the same.
Two hundred pounds would help anyone more than get by.
Maybe it will fall on his head from the sky.

MR. WHITE

Maybe I'll walk outside and trip over the trove.

MRS. WHITE

Just don't spend it without me.

MR. WHITE

Agreed.

(A knock is heard.)

MRS. WHITE

Hello and welcome, sir. Come in. Forgive us; the room is a mess.

MR. WHITE

My wife and I, well, we're under some stress.

MESSENGER

I... I was asked to call. Your son works at my factory.

MRS. WHITE

Oh, dear, is he hurt?

MR. WHITE

Dear, settle down; there's no reason for worry.

MESSENGER

He's been badly hurt. He's... not... in any pain.

MRS. WHITE

(pause)

He—

MESSENGER

(finishes)

—was caught in the machinery. I'm dreadfully sorry.
I'm here to convey the company's most sincere sympathy.
And to disclaim the firm from any legal responsibility.

MR. WHITE

You mean to—

MESSENGER

I know a sum of money can do nothing for you now.
But it is my obligation to give you—

MR. WHITE

Two hundred pounds.

MRS. WHITE

Get out! Out!

MR. WHITE

Where is... ? Did...?

MRS. WHITE

The monkey's paw!

MR. WHITE

Don't speak those words. You saw what it did.

MRS. WHITE

We still have two wishes left on the grid.
It's in your pocket. We're getting him back.

MR. WHITE

Have you lost your mind? Are you some type of maniac?

MRS. WHITE

Don't you see? We've used only one wish.

MR. WHITE

And it's been the worst day of our lives!

MRS. WHITE

No. Think. We're grieving our son and desperately sad.

NARRATOR

Was the answer so simple? To just wish him alive?

MR. WHITE

Good heavens, you are crazed, raving mad!

MRS. WHITE

Wish it. We got our first wish on the very first try.

MR. WHITE

A horrible coincidence, by the by!

MRS. WHITE

Wish.

MR. WHITE

It is wicked and foolish.

MRS. WHITE

Wish!!

MR. WHITE

I wish my son returned to life.

(A knock is heard.)

MRS. WHITE

Oh! Did you hear that?

MR. WHITE

A mouse.

MRS. WHITE

Well, then what's that?

(Another knock is heard.)

MR. WHITE

Vermin. A rat. I saw it. Nothing more than that.

MRS. WHITE

It's him. Open the door.
He's alive again.

MR. WHITE

No. Don't let it in.

NARRATOR

It. He called him "it."

MR. WHITE

He's dead. If he's not, he's nothing but gore.

MRS. WHITE

You're afraid of your own blood.
He's all we've left for kin. Move. I'm letting my boy in.

(The knocking gets louder, more harrowing. Chains, bolts, and creaking doors opening. MR. WHITE grabs the monkey's paw, holds it up for the third wish, which the audience cannot hear. The door opens, and the sound of a gust of wind is heard. MRS. WHITE wails in misery.)