

Part I opens on a dark and stormy night as the three members of the White family relax inside their cozy house. Herbert White and his father are playing a game of chess while Mrs. White knits near the fire. After his son wins, Mr. White complains about the terrible weather and nearly deserted road they live near. A family friend, Sergeant-Major Morris, arrives for a visit. Over whisky, he tells stories of his exploits abroad. Mr. White expresses interest in going to India, but the sergeant-major says he would be better off staying at home. At Mr. and Mrs. Whites' urging, Sergeant-Major Morris takes a small, mummified paw out of his pocket. He explains that a fakir (a mystic miracle worker) placed a spell on the paw to prove that people's lives are governed by fate and that it is dangerous to meddle with fate. According to the sergeant-major, three men can wish on the paw three times each. The sergeant-major himself has already had his three wishes, as has another man, who used his third wish to ask for death. The sergeant-major has considered selling the paw, but he doesn't want it to cause any more trouble than it already has. Moreover, no one will buy the paw without first seeing proof of its effect. The sergeant-major throws the paw into the fire, and Mr. White quickly rescues it. The sergeant-major warns him three times to leave the paw alone, but he eventually explains how to make a wish on the paw. Mrs. White says the story reminds her of the Arabian Nights and jokingly suggests that her husband wish her a pair of extra hands to help her with all her work. The sergeant-major doesn't find this joke funny, however, and urges Mr. White to use common sense if he insists on wishing. After supper and more tales of India, the sergeant-major leaves. Herbert says he thinks the sergeant-major is full of nonsense and jokes that his father should make himself an emperor so that he doesn't have to listen to Mrs. White's nagging. In mock anger, Mrs. White playfully chases her son. Mr. White says he has everything he wants and isn't sure what to wish for. Herbert says that two hundred pounds would enable them to pay off the money owed for the house. Mr. White wishes aloud for two hundred pounds as Herbert accompanies him with melodramatic chords played on the piano. Mr. White suddenly cries out and says that the paw moved like a snake in his hand. After Mr. and Mrs. White go to bed, Herbert sits by the fire and sees a vividly realistic monkey face in the flames. He puts out the fire, takes the monkey's paw, and goes to bed. Part II begins on the next morning, a sunny winter day. The room seems cheerful and normal in contrast to the previous evening's gloomy atmosphere and the mummified paw now looks harmless. Mrs. White comments on how ridiculous the sergeant-major's story was but remarks that two hundred pounds couldn't do any harm. They could, Herbert jokes, if the money fell out of the sky onto his father's head. Mr. White answers that people often mistake coincidence for granted wishes. Herbert then leaves for work. Later that day, Mrs. White notices a stranger outside dressed in nice clothes. The stranger hesitantly approaches their gate three times before opening it and coming up to the door. Mrs. White ushers him in. He nervously states that he is a representative of Maw and Meggins, Herbert's employer. Mrs. White asks whether Herbert is all right, and the representative says he is hurt, but in no pain. For a moment, Mrs. White feels relieved, until she realizes that Herbert feels no pain because he's dead. The representative says that Herbert was "caught in the machinery." After a pause, Mr. White says that Herbert was the only child they had left. Embarrassed, the representative stresses that he is simply obeying Maw and Meggins's orders. He then explains that the company will not take any responsibility for the death but will give the Whites two hundred pounds. Mrs. White shrieks, and Mr.

White faints. In Part III, the Whites bury Herbert. Several days pass, and the couple feels exhausted and hopeless. A week after the burial, Mr. White wakes up and hears his wife crying by the window. He gently urges her to come back to bed, but she refuses. He dozes off again until Mrs. White suddenly cries out that she wants the monkey's paw. In hysterics, she tells him to go downstairs and wish Herbert back to life. Mr. White resists and tells her that Herbert's death and the two hundred pounds they had received had nothing to do with his wish the previous night. Mr. White says that he didn't want to tell her before, but Herbert was so mangled that he had to identify the body by looking at the clothes. Mrs. White doesn't listen, however, and continues to insist on wishing Herbert back to life with the monkey's paw. Mr. White retrieves the paw from its place downstairs. Mrs. White orders him to make the wish two more times until he finally complies. He makes the wish, and as they wait, the candle goes out. They hear the clock, the creak of a stair, and the sound of a mouse. At last Mr. White goes downstairs. His match goes out, and before he can strike another, he hears a knock at the door. Another knock sounds, and Mr. White dashes upstairs. Mrs. White hears the third knock and says it's Herbert. She realizes he hadn't returned right after the wish had been made because he'd had to walk two miles from the graveyard to their house. Mr. White begs her not to open the door, but she breaks free and runs downstairs. As she struggles to reach the bolt, the knocking becomes more insistent. Mr. White searches frantically for the paw, which had dropped to the floor. As Mrs. White pulls back the bolt, Mr. White finds the paw and makes a final wish. The knocking stops, and Mrs. White cries out. Mr. White dashes downstairs and sees that beyond the door, the street is empty.