

# The Monkey's Paw



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF W.W. JACOBS

W. W. Jacobs grew up in a working-class family in London, where his father worked as a manager of the South Devon Wharf. His father's profession would greatly impact Jacobs' later work, as he earned fame for his sea stories and humor writing. As a young man, Jacobs worked as a clerk for the Savings Bank Department of the General Post Office. During this time, he began writing as a hobby and a way to earn extra money. After being published in several magazines, Jacobs recognized his passion for writing and felt successful enough to quit his job in civil service. Politically conservative, he had a rocky marriage to Agnes Eleanor Williams, with whom he had five children. Throughout his writing career, Jacobs published several short story collections, including *Snug Harbor*, a massive collection of his work, in 1931, but today he is most well-known for his horror story, *The Monkey's Paw*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By the mid-1800s, Britain had taken control, directly or indirectly, of most of India. While the colonization of India brought Britain access to unprecedented amounts of natural resources, land, and labor, many Britons at the time feared that the otherness and foreignness of the colony would negatively impact British culture. This is reflected in the supposed evil of the monkey's paw, which Morris brings from India. Jacobs grew up in Victorian England, an era characterized by the rule of Queen Victoria and an emphasis on morals and manners. Part of these morals celebrated the sacredness of family and the home, shown by the happy home life of the Whites at the beginning of the story. The Victorian era also saw rapid industrialization in England, shown by Herbert working and then dying in a factory.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Just as the monkey's paw comes from India to bring tragedy into the Whites' lives, [The Adventure of the Speckled Band](#) by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle also conflates objects from India with evil. Both stories reflect a common fear among Britons during the late 1800s and early 1900s of the otherness and foreignness of the countries Britain colonized. *The Monkey's Paw* also deals with the macabre, a term for works dealing with gruesome and ghastly subjects associated with death. This relates to other gothic stories such as *The Rats in the Walls* by H.P. Lovecraft, which like *The Monkey's Paw* also deals with subjects of grief and supernatural horror. The story also borrows directly from

*The Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folktales also known as the *Arabian Nights*, which Mrs. White references in the narrative. In the most popular of the tales, a boy named Aladdin receives a magic lamp that grants him wishes, just as the monkey's paw grants wishes.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Monkey's Paw
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1902
- **Literary Period:** Realism, Existentialism
- **Genre:** Horror, Short Story
- **Setting:** Laburnam Villa, the White's home in England
- **Climax:** A knocking at the door could be the mangled corpse of Herbert, while Mr. White desperately uses the third wish to make Herbert disappear.
- **Antagonist:** The monkey's paw, the unchangeability of fate
- **Point of View:** Third person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Adaptations, Adaptations, Adaptations.** *The Monkey's Paw* has been adapted hundreds of times for stage, radio, and film, including a play produced in 1903, a year after the story was originally published, and a 2013 movie by the same name. Popular TV shows such as *The Simpsons*, *The X-Files*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have aired episodes based on the story.

**Isn't It Ironic?** Jacobs experienced popular success and acclaim in his lifetime for his humor writing, but today his funny stories and essays are all but forgotten. Ironically, modern readers remember Jacobs only for *The Monkey's Paw*, a gruesome horror story.



## PLOT SUMMARY

While a storm rages outside, Mr. White and his son, Herbert, are playing chess and Mrs. White is knitting by the fire inside their home. Mr. White remarks about how he doesn't believe their guest will come on a stormy night like this. Herbert wins the game, and Mr. White shouts about how awful it is living in such a remote area when it storms.

The guest arrives, an old friend of Mr. White's named Sergeant-Major Morris. Morris entertains the family with stories from his travels abroad in India. Mr. White recalls that Morris recently told him about a **monkey's paw**. Morris reveals that the mummified monkey's paw came from a fakir, an Indian holy

man, who put a spell on the paw in order to teach people that fate ruled everyone's lives, and those who tried to alter fate would suffer. The spell grants three separate individuals three wishes each.

Mr. White asks Morris if he has used his three wishes. Morris reports that he has, and another man, the first to possess it, used the third of his wishes to cause his own death. Then Morris throws the paw into the fire, but Mr. White saves it from burning. Morris tells him he should destroy it. Instead, Mr. White decides to keep it, and Morris tells him that if he wishes upon it, there will be consequences. The group goes back to listening to Morris's tales of India and sits down to eat supper, forgetting about the paw for a while.

When Morris leaves, Herbert teases his father for giving Morris a small bit of money in exchange for the paw, which Herbert says must be an invented story like the rest of Morris's tall tales. Mr. White says he would not know what to wish for, since he has everything he needs already. Herbert playfully suggests that his father wishes for two hundred pounds, since that would be enough to pay off the family's mortgage, and his father complies. Mr. White cries out and drops the paw, claiming he saw it twist when he made his wish. Herbert remarks that the money does not immediately appear.

The next morning, the money has still not appeared, and Herbert leaves for his job in the factory. Though Mrs. White joked along with Herbert about the foolishness of believing in the paw's spell, she finds herself eagerly awaiting a visitor who may bring the money. When a well-dressed stranger arrives at the Whites' house, she excitedly greets him. He reveals that he represents the company that owns the factory where Herbert works. He states that Herbert was caught in the factory's machinery and has died. He says that while the company takes no responsibility for their son's death, he can offer the Whites monetary compensation—a sum of two hundred pounds. Mrs. White screams, and Mr. White collapse to the floor.

The Whites bury their son in a cemetery two miles from their house. Days pass and the couple resign themselves to their grief, barely speaking to each other. About a week after the funeral, Mrs. White has the idea to use one of the remaining two wishes on the paw to bring Herbert back to life. Mr. White hesitates, first saying that it was only a coincidence that the paw seemed to work before, and then saying that she would not want to see her son now, because he has been dead for ten days and his body was horribly disfigured by the accident that killed him.

His wife desperately begs him to make the wish, though, so Mr. White wishes upon the paw that their son would come alive again. The Whites wait, but no one appears. Eventually, they go to bed for the night. Suddenly, a knock comes from the front door, and then two more. Mrs. White believes it's Herbert. She runs to the front door but can't reach the bolt to open it. Mr. White frantically searches for the monkey's paw, knowing he

cannot let whatever horror is outside into the house. He finds the paw and makes his third wish.

The knocking ends suddenly. Mrs. White drags a chair over to the door and is able to reach the bolt. She opens the door and cries out in disappointment. Mr. White runs out the door and to the gate of their property, and sees only an empty road.



## CHARACTERS

**Mr. White** – Mr. White is an old man who is tempted to alter fate and who suffers dire consequences as a (possible) result. Jacobs characterizes Mr. White as a man who cannot accept his own fate, whether it's a chess game he knows he is going to lose because of a reckless move or his quiet life in a remote part of Britain compared to his friend Morris's exciting adventures in India. At the beginning of the story, Mr. White lives a cozy, domestic life with his wife, Mrs. White, and his son, Herbert, who amusedly accept his father's frustrated outbursts over his fate. Mr. White appears drawn to the power of the **monkey's paw**, even though his son teases him about believing in the paw's magic and Morris warns him of the consequences. By the end of the story, a grief-stricken Mr. White has learned the consequences of trying to alter fate. Mr. White's progression from a content, if somewhat restless, family man to a childless man apathetic to his wife, shows how one should accept fate and not try to alter it through reckless or treacherous means, unless they want to lose what they hold dear. By the climax of the story, Mr. White himself seems to fully learn the consequences of tempting fate, as he fears that after wishing his son back alive, a mangled corpse will come to their home. Yet Mr. White's relationship to reality is dubious throughout the story. He claims he sees the paw move on its own, but no other character verifies this. The tragedies that befall him could be a direct result of his wishing on the paw, but they could also just be coincidences that he subscribes supernatural meaning to because of his belief in fate-altering magic. Mr. White's opaque, shifting relationship to reality shows the troubled state of mind one enters when they attempt to change destiny through supernatural means.

**Mrs. White** – Mrs. White is the wife of Mr. White and the mother of Herbert. She represents the happy domesticity present inside the house at the beginning of the story, as she knits by the cozy fire, soothes her husband's temper, and enjoys spending time with her son. The appearance of the **monkey's paw** disrupts this domesticity, because although Mrs. White teases Mr. White for giving credence to the paw, she also anxiously awaits the arrival of any visitor that might bring the wished-for money. However, the stranger who does bring the money also brings the news that her son is dead, thus shattering her once happy home life. Herbert's death leaves Mrs. White feeling apathetic and surrounded by her grief. She is emotionally separated from her husband, as after the death

of their son they speak little to each other. Her grief makes her frantic and argumentative, and she then comes to believe that she can bring her son back to life using the monkey's paw. At the end of the story she experiences tragedy once again, as she opens the front door, expecting to see her son come back from the dead, and instead sees nothing. One could interpret her disappointment and misery at the end of the story either as a consequence of her attempts to alter fate by wishing on the paw or as a consequence of her belief that she could change fate, rather than accepting the loss of her son.

**Herbert White** – Herbert is the young adult son of Mr. White and Mrs. White. He is a happy, loving son to his parents, indicative of the domestic bliss shown at the beginning of the story. Though he teases his father for believing in the magic of the **monkey's paw**, Herbert himself has a moment of fear when, after his parents have gone to bed, he sees the image of a horrific monkey's face in the fireplace and picks up the monkey's paw. Herbert represents how even the sceptic can be briefly made to believe in the ability to magically alter fate. Herbert works in a factory, where he dies midway through the story in a machinery accident. His death exhibits a common occurrence in the period of industrialization in Britain, as many young people left their family homes to work in factories and many died due to dangerous working conditions created by careless and exploitative factory owners. However, Herbert's death is also possibly a consequence of his father's wish upon the monkey's paw. Both Mr. and Mrs. White believe that Herbert returns at the end of the story, as they use the second wish on the paw to bring him back to life. While Mrs. White believes her beloved son has come back to her, Mr. White fears the consequences of the monkey's paw, which will only bring back a mangled and decaying version of their son. Notably, the narrative does not explicitly state that Herbert is or isn't returned before Mr. White wishes him away again, leaving the reality of Herbert's return, and therefore the magic of the paw, dubious. The reader can interpret the fate of Herbert's character through two perspectives, one that views Herbert's death as a part of one's punishment for trying to alter fate, or as a casualty of the real issue of industrialization that was going to happen regardless of Mr. White's actions.

**Sergeant-Major Morris** – Morris is an old friend of Mr. White who has been a soldier abroad in India for 21 years. His fantastical stories of his travels show the allure of adventure in exotic places, adventures that Mr. White himself claims he would like to experience. Morris also brings the sinister **monkey's paw** from India to Mr. White, which also shows how people at the time viewed objects from faraway places (particularly Britain's colonies) with both suspicion and temptation. Morris himself has wished upon the paw and seems to regret it, showing the consequences of one who tempts fate. Still, when Mr. White asks him if he would take three more wishes if he could, he says, "I don't know...I don't know,"

suggesting that even when one suffers from attempting to change their fate, the power can still be attractive enough for one to possibly try again. However, the reality of Morris's stories is dubious. Both Herbert and Mrs. White remark that soldiers commonly tell fictional or exaggerated accounts of their adventures abroad, and the story of the paw's origins and its supposed magic may be another tall tale. In fact, the narrative never definitively states whether or not the paw actually grants Mr. White's wishes, so Morris's claims that the paw can alter fate may indeed be false.

**The Company Representative / The Stranger** – The company representative visits Mr. White and Mrs. White to tell them their son Herbert is dead. He represents the company that owns the factory where Herbert worked before he was killed in a machinery accident. When he speaks, he is visibly uncomfortable, and awkward and indirect in his speech, so much so that it takes the Whites a few moments to realize that their son is dead. The representative states that he only came to the Whites because his company asked him to, and that the company takes no responsibility for Herbert's death. In his cold and formal attitude, the representative shows the exploitative, inhumane nature of industrialization and the capitalist factory owners, who do not really care about the violent deaths of their workers.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### FATE VS. FREEWILL

Mr. White, the protagonist of "The Monkey's Paw," struggles to accept his fate in life. However, when an acquaintance gives him a magical dried **monkey's paw**, which supposedly has the power to grant three wishes, Mr. White believes that he can finally exert his will on the world in a quick and consequence-free manner. When he tries to do this by wishing for money, though, his wish goes awry: the money comes as compensation for the work-related death of his only son, Herbert. The result of this wish, and the sinister results of the other wishes to which the story alludes, suggest that meddling with fate comes at a cost, one that outweighs its benefits. In this way, W.W. Jacobs suggests that it's best to make the most of one's fate, rather than trying arrogantly to intervene through cheap or treacherous means.

From the beginning of the story, Jacobs presents Mr. White as a man who cannot accept his fate. In the opening scene, Mr. White is playing a chess game with his son, Herbert, when he

realizes too late that his son is going to win. He tries to distract Herbert by telling him to listen to the storm outside and by discussing their expected visitor, but Herbert wins anyway. When Mr. White erupts in anger, Herbert and Mrs. White share a “knowing glance,” showing that this response is typical of Mr. White’s character. Thus, this scene establishes Mr. White as someone who is always trying to change or avoid his fate—and, with significant foreshadowing, as someone who always fails in these attempts.

The arrival of White’s friend Sergeant-Major Morris with a magical, wish-granting monkey’s paw presents Mr. White with an opportunity to change his life, making him believe that he will be able to exert his free will to control his own destiny. However, Jacobs immediately establishes that this power is sinister: of the last two men who wished on the monkey’s paw, the first man’s final wish was for death, and the second man (Morris himself) deeply regrets ever owning the paw. In fact, the fakir (an Indian holy man) who created the enchanted paw said himself that he did so because “he wanted to show that fate ruled people’s lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow.” Yet Mr. White wishes upon the monkey’s paw anyways, even though he claims he has everything he could ever want already. Mr. White’s actions show the human tendency towards arrogance: one can be tempted to try to design their destiny, even when their present circumstances are pleasant and even when warned of the consequences of meddling in fate.

As promised, the monkey’s paw brings disaster, teaching the White family the fakir’s lesson. Mr. White’s first wish is for the 200 pounds he would need to pay off his mortgage, and he receives this sum from Herbert’s company as compensation for his death in a machinery accident. Herbert’s death proves that the fakir’s words are true: when one tries to control their own fate, they will suffer the consequences. However, Mrs. White still believes that she can fix their tragic fate through more meddling: in her grief, she goads Mr. White into wishing for Herbert to come back to life. Mr. White, cautious after the disastrous results of their first wish, is certain that this next wish would summon a grotesque, decayed version of his son, but he acquiesces to his wife nonetheless and later hears a sinister, persistent knocking at the door. In this moment, Mr. White knows that he has erred, and he uses the monkey’s paw to make an unnamed wish that seemingly causes the knocking to cease.

While it might seem like this final wish—a reversal of his second wish—is an indication that Mr. White has learned his lesson, he has, in fact, meddled once more in fate. Jacobs never specifies what the consequences for this final wish will be, but his writing suggests that its effects will reverberate in more sinister ways to come. While the supernatural knocking has stopped, “the echoes of it were still in the house,” and a cold wind rushes into the Whites’ house as he and his sobbing, grief-stricken wife run

towards the street into an unknown fate.



## THE UNCERTAINTY OF REALITY

The seemingly-supernatural events of “The Monkey’s Paw” cause both the characters and the reader to question the nature of reality. While those who wish on the **monkey’s paw** seem to have their wishes supernaturally granted, and then seem to be supernaturally punished for their hubris, nobody knows for sure whether the wish fulfillments and their consequences are supernatural or simple coincidence. After all, Morris’s stories about the paw’s powers could just be fanciful tales, Herbert’s death after the first wish could have been just a coincidence, and the knocking at the door could have many causes. The story never takes a firm position on whether its events are natural or supernatural, and Jacobs is careful to cast doubt at every turn. This leaves the reader grasping for clues and questioning their interpretation of every event, mirroring the troubled state of mind of the story’s characters. Ultimately, this persistent ambiguity suggests that the mere possibility of the supernatural can upend people’s reality and cause them to behave in unwise, erratic ways.

From the moment the monkey paw enters the Whites’ life, it is dubious whether or not it can actually grant wishes and magically change one’s fate. Morris says he cannot get anyone to buy the paw from him because everyone thinks the paw’s power is “a fairy tale,” and he himself doesn’t seem wholly convinced of its powers, telling the Whites that when one makes a wish, “things happen so naturally...that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence.” Furthermore, Herbert casts doubt on Morris’s story of the paw, since the traveler tells many stories about his adventures that seem too incredible to be true; perhaps, then, Morris is something of a fabulist. Even Mr. White, who seems to believe most in the paw’s power, feels embarrassment at his own gullibility when Herbert mocks him for buying the paw. All of this doubt cast on the paw’s magical properties suggests the power of magical thinking: perhaps those who want badly enough to believe they can change their fate invent supernatural possibilities, regardless of the evidence.

Even as the White family wishes on the paw and odd things begin to occur, Jacobs casts doubt on what is happening. Mr. White appears stricken after he speaks his first wish aloud, claiming that, “As I wished, [the paw] twisted in my hand like a snake.” However, his wife and son, who have both witnessed this event, remain skeptical: Herbert says he doesn’t believe he’ll ever see the money they wished for, while Mrs. White dismisses her husband’s feeling that the paw moved as mere “fancy.” Even Mr. White appears to retreat from his certainty that something supernatural happened. “Never mind, though,” he says, and Jacobs notes that, by the next day, the paw has been carelessly discarded (“which betokened no great belief in



its virtues"). Furthermore, the atmosphere in the house is one of "prosaic wholesomeness," undercutting any sense that something supernatural has occurred. When Herbert dies in a machinery accident later that day and the family's wish for 200 pounds is granted in the form of workplace compensation, the story never specifically states that the paw actually magically caused Herbert's death. In fact, machinery accidents in unsafe factories were common during the time period of the story, so Herbert's death isn't so remarkable after all. Perhaps, then, the characters' desire to believe that they can change their fate has led them to interpret something ordinary as supernatural.

Further associating the supernatural with magical thinking, Mrs. White only truly believes in the magic of the monkey's paw after the loss of her son has driven her mad. Desperate to have her only child back, she asks her husband to wish Herbert back to life, and she is certain that the subsequent knocking at the door is indeed her son returned from the grave. Mr. White—who has always believed in the paw's magic—states that the knocking is coming from a rat, but by this point this seems like an attempt to convince himself that his fears of reanimating his son's mangled corpse have not come true. When he opens the door, the road stands empty, either because he used the third wish to get rid of the corpse or because there was no person at the door in the first place. Neither the characters nor the reader will ever know what really happened, thus showing how trying to supernaturally change their fate has left the Whites unable to interpret their reality. Perhaps magical thinking alone can drive a person mad.



### INSIDE VS. OUTSIDE

From the storm that rages outside the family's home in the beginning of the story, to the supposedly cursed object Morris brings back from his travels abroad, to the knocking at the door (potentially by a reanimated corpse), all of the story's dangerous elements come from outside to menace the safety of the home. As such, "The Monkey's Paw" can be read as an allegory of British anxiety over their changing homeland, particularly addressing the xenophobia of white Britons. Jacobs published "The Monkey's Paw" at a time when his native Britain was drastically expanding its empire beyond its borders. While imperialism offered Britain more land, natural resources, and monetary wealth, many white Britons feared seeing their familiar world change under the influence of foreign cultures, particularly if that meant changing racial demographics. Jacobs, however, questions the basis of that fear. At the end of the story, when Mr. White opens the door to find an empty road rather than a sinister corpse knocking, it seems possible that he has been afraid over nothing. Jacobs thereby suggests that white Britons' anxiety over changing culture is rooted in imagined threats, not real ones.

The story begins with the lines, "Without, the night was cold

and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly." This establishes immediately that outside the family home, the world is unpleasant and cold, while inside, it is safe and cozy. As expected, harm befalls the family only when someone comes in from outside, an acquaintance described as a "visitor from distant parts." The visitor, Sergeant Major Morris, speaks of "strange scenes and doughty deeds, of wars and plagues and strange peoples," which gives his travels a sinister air. The danger of admitting this outsider into the home becomes clear when the **monkey paw** the Whites purchase from him appears to lead to the death of their son. The notion that outside influence brings misfortune to a once-safe family thereby establishes a dichotomy of the inside being safe and familiar, while the outside is dangerous and unknown.

Crucially, Jacobs associates danger with faraway places, making a specific connection between India (then a British colony) and the sinister. This gives the characters' anxiety about dangers from outside a specifically racist and xenophobic overtone, especially since the family's surname is "White" and they associate India with evil. This is clearest in the fact that Morris has brought the magical monkey paw from India, and he notes that the paw is dangerous because a fakir (a holy man) put a spell on it to teach others a lesson about fate. This references an antiquated, colonial view that people who lived outside of Europe and did not practice Christianity practiced black magic, and it shows that the characters share a basic belief that the influence of Indian culture is a threat, even as they are also fascinated by it (and want to enjoy its material resources).

The most horrific outside threat to the family home is the possibility that the mangled, decaying corpse of their son Herbert is knocking at their door. As he thinks he hears his undead son knocking at the door, Mr. White searches frantically for the monkey's paw, thinking "if he could only find it before the thing outside got in." The emphasis Jacobs puts on the dichotomy of outside and inside during this scene emphasizes the family's fear of the outside world and their feeling of safety inside their home. However, once Mr. White opens the door, he sees nothing but a "quiet and deserted road," either because he successfully used his third wish to get rid of his undead son, or because there was no one at the door in the first place. One reading of the story—the one in which Herbert's corpse really was at the door—would suggest that outside threats are real and should be guarded against. The family seemed to truly *be* happy and content before the outside influence of Morris and his foreign object. However, if Herbert was never at the door and the paw wasn't magic at all, then Mr. White opening the door to an empty road would suggest that the dangers of the outside world are actually imagined. (And further, would mean that the cause of Herbert's death was the greed and callousness of homegrown British factory owners, not foreign cultures.) Regardless, both readings are somewhat damning of

British imperialism: in the latter reading, the British are irrationally racist, and in the former, their lives have been ruined by the fakir teaching them a lesson about meddling with fate. If the White family represents white Britons, then the fakir's lesson is also about the price of imperialism, whereby Britain tried to meddle in the fates of other countries. Perhaps the real "outside threat" that they fear is British colonial subjects taking revenge.



## INDUSTRIALIZATION

During Jacobs' lifetime, Britain underwent rapid industrialization. Jacobs shows the harms caused by industrialization in Herbert's death through a machinery accident and the company representative's cold response to the Whites. With this tragedy, Jacobs grounds the horrors of "The Monkey's Paw" in the real life social issues surrounding industrialization, such as dangerous working conditions and worker exploitation.

Herbert goes to work in a factory every day, like many young people in Britain during the period of industrialization and, like so many factory workers, Herbert dies in a machinery accident. His death exposes one of the main harms of unchecked industrialization; dangerous working conditions in factories. When the representative of the factory's owners comes to inform the Whites of their son's death, the stranger is awkward and indirect. However, he makes sure to clearly state that the company claims no responsibility for what happened in their factory. Here, Jacobs shows the cold and exploitative nature of factory owners during the period of industrialization, who maximized profit while caring little for safe working conditions for their employees. In contrast to the supernatural and ambiguous nature of the **monkey's paw**, the consequences of industrialization are unequivocally present in the harsh realities of Jacobs's era. This contrast allows the reader to question whether or not Herbert's death is the result of Mr. White's use of magic or an unfortunately common occurrence due to the poor working conditions of factories, thus further blurring the lines of reality and the inevitability of fate within the story.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE MONKEY'S PAW

The central object and symbol of the story, the monkey's paw is "an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy." Sergeant-Major Morris brings the monkey's paw to the Whites' house from his travels in India. According to Morris, a fakir, or holy man, put a spell on the paw so that "three

separate men could each have three wishes from it"—so that he could "show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow." The paw represents individuals' attempts to change their fates through their own actions and the dire consequences they will face because it. Jacobs shows this by having Mr. White wish upon the paw and suffer horrible consequences after getting what he wished for, in the form of the monetary reward after his son Herbert is killed, and a potentially mangled corpse at his door after he wishes his son would come back alive.

Another interpretation of the monkey's paw depends on the fact that the story never explicitly states whether or not the paw is actually magic, and the tragedies that befall the Whites after their wishes are not just coincidences or made up by their fearful imaginations. If one accepts the possibility that the paw does not grant wishes, then the symbol represents the false illusion that one can change one's fate at all, and the disappointment one will experience when they ultimately do not get what they wished.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Academy Chicago Publishers edition of *The Monkey's Paw and Other Tales of Mystery and the Macabre* published in 1997.

### Part I Quotes

Without the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess, the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes.

**Related Characters:** Herbert White, Mr. White

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 17



### Explanation and Analysis


This quote opens the story, introducing the setting within the Whites' home and introducing the characters of Mr. White and Herbert. The wording of this quote (the inside being warm and cozy and the outside being cold and stormy) sets up the dichotomy of the safe indoors versus the dangerous outside world, which will run throughout the story. This safe and pleasant domestic life will be challenged by outside influence, specifically the monkey's paw, which will come inside the home to harm the family. This passage also establishes a key aspect of the protagonist Mr. White's character. The "radical changes" he makes in the chess game

reflect the radical changes he will try to make to his fate. Though Mr. White seems content with his happy domestic life, he will make the reckless decision to wish on the monkey's paw, just as he makes reckless decisions in chess. His inevitable loss of the chess game reflects the inevitable suffering he will endure.

“[The monkey's paw] had a spell put on it by an old fakir...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.”

**Related Characters:** Sergeant-Major Morris (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 19


### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Morris explains the origins of the monkey's paw he brought from India to the Whites' home in Britain. The quote explicitly states one recurring perspective in the story concerning fate, that those who try to alter fate will suffer dire consequences. Notably, Mr. White still wishes on the paw even after Morris gives him this warning (and several more warnings), showing the temptation he feels to alter his fate. The specific mention of the “old fakir” in this quote relates to the story's frequent association of people and objects from India with sinister and tempting implications. This references the xenophobia that was rampant in Britain during Jacobs' lifetime, as colonialism exposed Britons to cultures that seemed exotic and unknown. Specifically, in this scene, a foreign non-Christian used magic to create an object which may bring harm into the Whites' once happy home, showing the fear of the other present during this era.

“If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us...we sha'nt make much out of it.”

**Related Characters:** Herbert White (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 21


### Explanation and Analysis

Herbert makes this statement after Morris, having told many incredible stories about India, leaves the Whites' home. At this and other points in the story, both Herbert and Mrs. White remark how soldiers (such as Morris) stereotypically tell tall tales, so the story of the paw's origin and its impact on Morris's life might be another invented or at least embellished tale. If the paw's magic is a tall tale, then the notion that Mr. White can alter his fate is also false. Herbert's statement here suggests that these stories are only believed by those who wish them to be true, and in that case, Mr. White only believes in the magic of the paw because he wants to be able to alter his fate.

“I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact...It seems to me I've got all I want.”

**Related Characters:** Mr. White (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 21


### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. White says this to his son as Herbert teases him about how he should wish that they were all rich as royalty. Much of the story so far would suggest that Mr. White tells the truth in this quote, as he enjoys a happy home life with his wife and son. But the story also reveals that Mr. White is attracted to radical and sometimes reckless changes to his fate (as shown by the opening chess game) and to adventure (as shown by his desire to visit India). If Mr. White truly feels that he has everything he needs, then his decision to wish on the monkey's paw shows that the ability to alter fate is extremely tempting, regardless of whether there is even a good reason to alter it. This quote also reveals the irony prevalent in the story, as Mr. White will lose much of what he possesses (his beloved son, his empathetic relationship with his wife, his happiness) by wishing upon the paw.

“He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian that he gazed at it in amazement.”

**Related Characters:** Sergeant-Major Morris (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 22

### Explanation and Analysis


After Mr. and Mrs. White go to bed, Herbert stays up by the fire. He sees a face which is not only frightening, but also looks a lot like a monkey. The language of the quote, describing the face as “so horrible and so simian” characterizes the creepy and ominous tone of this horror story. This event might foreshadow Herbert’s horrific death as a possible side effect of the paw. However, the vision might also show how even a skeptic like Herbert can believe in supernatural forces under the right circumstances, the circumstances here being a dark room late at night. Once again, the reality of the monkey’s paw and its powers remains dubious for the reader. Perhaps the wish really does alter the Whites’ fate and Herbert sees an actual premonition of the consequences, or perhaps both the face and the paw’s powers only exist in the characters’ imaginations.

## Part II Quotes

“There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.”

**Related Characters:** Herbert White

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis


Following his fear the night before, Herbert feels calmer in the morning and no longer gives any importance to the paw, casting it aside and continuing to tease his father for believing in its magic. This shows that one often believes in the ability to radically alter fate when one is already in a troubled state of mind, but not in the clear light of day. The language of this quote also diminishes the power of the paw, calling it “dirty” and “shrivelled.” This further emphasizes the

dubious reality of the paw and by extension casts doubt on the possibility that one can exercise their freewill over their fate. Also, the “prosaic wholesomeness” inside the room celebrates the warmth and safety of family home, which soothes Herbert’s troubled mind and neutralizes the sinister qualities of the paw. This stands in contrast to the spooky atmosphere of the night before and the horrific feeling of the home after Herbert’s death.

“Morris said the things happened so naturally...that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence.”

**Related Characters:** Mr. White (speaker), Sergeant-Major Morris

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 23

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. White says this in the morning while his son is joking about the wished-for money dropping from the sky. The mention of “coincidence” in this quote is significant because it suggests that the magic of the paw is up to interpretation. The paw may alter fate and bring suffering to those who use it, or the user may assign supernatural causes to events that are actually coincidence. This quote takes on further significance as the narrative never specifically states whether or not the paw actually grants wishes and causes the tragedy of Herbert’s death. The paw may only seem to work within the narrative because Mr. White wants to believe that one can dramatically alter his own fate. This all suggests that one cannot alter their own fate; individuals only believe they can because they have convinced themselves of it.

“I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility...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.”

**Related Characters:** The Company Representative / The Stranger (speaker), Herbert White

**Related Themes:** 



**Page Number:** 25

### Explanation and Analysis

The representative clearly states that the company takes no responsibility after he tells Mr. and Mrs. White that their son died in a machinery accident in the company's factory. This shows the detached and exploitative nature of industrialization, as industrial companies create unsafe working environments and then refuse to take responsibility for the accidents these conditions cause. The company also believes that they can reduce a human life to a "certain sum," as if this will offer the Whites any significant comfort in the horrific loss of their only child, further showing the exploitation present in industrialization. With this scene, Jacobs grounds the supernatural horrors of the story in the real-life issue of industrialization.

## Part III Quotes

☝☝ But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled, apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. White, Mr. White

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Mr. and Mrs. White's emotional state after they bury their dead son, showing the Whites' transformation from a happy, loving family to a grieving, resigned couple. This tragedy and transformation is either a result of the monkey's paw granting their wish for money, or just a tragic consequence of industrialization. Whether or not the paw actually caused Herbert's death, Mr. White seems to think that it did (as shown by him fainting at the end of Part II), so the state described by this quote also depicts his guilt over trying to alter his fate and causing suffering because of it. While this "resignation" might be "hopeless," it may have its positives: when Mrs. White does not accept her grief and decides they must again use the paw to change their fate, the Whites only suffer further.

☝☝ "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?"

**Related Characters:** Mr. White (speaker), Herbert White, Mrs. White

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 27


### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. White makes this argument when Mrs. White insists that he should wish for Herbert to come back to life. The horrible mutilation of Herbert's body emphasizes the "be careful what you wish for" attitude towards altering fate taken throughout the story; while the Whites may get their son back, they will be horrified by the state of him. This quote shows the progression of Mr. White's character, as he now clearly recognizes that when one tries to radically change their fate, they will suffer greatly, a dramatic change from his reckless choices and infatuation with the monkey's paw at the beginning of the story. The idea of Herbert being "too terrible" for his own mother to see also contributes to the macabre nature of the story and builds up the tone of horror as the story approaches its climax.

☝☝ But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. White, Mr. White

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 30

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. White frantically searches for the paw because he fears that the mangled corpse of his son is outside and he does not want it to get in the house. The specific wording of "outside" and "in" within this quote uses the established dichotomy of the dangerous outside and the safe (but vulnerable) inside to create a horrific and tense atmosphere. While Mr. White hesitated with the second wish, knowing that trying to alter fate has serious consequences, he now wants to use the paw again because he is fearful and desperate. Notably, the narrative never reveals what (if anything) exists on the other side of the door, so Mr. White's fear here could just be the result of the troubled state of mind created when one tries to change fate.

●● 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...The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. White, Mr. White

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 30

### Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of the story, after Mr. White uses his third wish, Mrs. White opens the door and the couple finds

nothing outside. Regardless of whether the paw made Herbert disappear, Mrs. White has experienced the acute suffering of trying to alter fate: she believed that she would get her son back, but instead she is left with only disappointment and grief. The story ends on a note of uncertainty regarding whether or not the paw actually magically granted the family's wishes, but it clearly suggests that attempting to alter one's fate, whether or not one actually succeeds, only leads to suffering. The empty road complicates the outside vs. inside dichotomy, as it suggests that there might have never been anything outside to fear in the first place.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PART I

On a chilly, rainy night, the blinds are drawn and the fireplace is burning inside the White family's home, Laburnam Villa. Mr. White and his son, Herbert, are playing chess. Mr. White makes a daring move with his king, so unnecessary and dangerous that Mrs. White, who is knitting by the fire, comments on it.

Mr. White realizes, too late, that he is going to lose because of his mistake, so he tries to distract Herbert by telling him to listen to the wind raging outside. Herbert "checks" Mr. White's king anyway. Then Mr. White remarks about how their expected guest might not be coming on such a stormy night. Herbert captures his father's king and wins the game.

Mr. White suddenly begins angrily shouting about how the worst part of living in "out-of-the-way places" like they do is how muddy and dangerous the roads become when it rains. Mrs. White tells him that he might win the next game, and she and Herbert share a "knowing glance." Mr. White's anger fades and he hides his "guilty grin."

The expected guest arrives and Mr. White introduces him to the others as Sergeant-Major Morris. Mr. White gives the guest some whiskey and after three glasses, Morris entertains the Whites with stories of his adventures in faraway places. Mr. White remarks that he would like to go to India someday. Morris says, "Better where you are."

Mr. White says that Morris mentioned something about a **monkey's paw** the other day, but Morris says that it's "nothing worth hearing." Mrs. White asks about it and Morris reveals that "it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps." The Whites lean forward in interest, so Morris pulls the mummified paw from India out of his pocket.

*Jacobs sets the scene of a cozy, happy family home, showing the domesticity that will be disrupted by the appearance of the paw. This scene sets up the dichotomy of the safe, happy inside and the dangerous outside. This also reveals the recklessness of Mr. White's character.*



*Mr. White tries and fails to change his fate of losing the game. This foreshadows the other events in the plot where Mr. White attempts to alter his fate but still suffers defeat. Here, Mr. White believes that he can alter his fate, but that turns out to be an illusion, as he loses anyway.*



*Mr. White becomes angry when he cannot change his fate through his own actions. His wife and child's reactions show that this outburst is typical of his character. Their acceptance of his personality and his fading anger show the Whites' happy family life.*



*The Whites' fascination with Morris's stories shows the allure of exotic places, in contrast to the sinister foreign elements that will appear later. Also, the reader sees Mr. White's restlessness and desire for more than he currently possesses.*



*Morris's hesitation to talk about the paw suggests his knowledge of the trouble it brings. The sinister nature of the paw is highlighted by the fact that this object comes to the Whites' homes from India, a place considered to be mysterious and potentially dangerous.*



Morris says the **paw** “had a spell put on it by an old fakir...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.” The fakir’s spell has given the paw the power to grant three wishes to three different men.

Herbert asks if Morris has had his three wishes. Morris says that he has, and his wishes really were granted. Morris also reveals that he got the **paw** after the first man used his third wish to wish for death. He only keeps it now either for “fancy” or because he cannot sell it, because it has “caused enough mischief already” and because no one else will believe in its magic.

Mr. White asks whether, if Morris had three more wishes, he would use them again, and Morris says that he doesn’t know. He then he throws the **paw** into the fire, but Mr. White grabs the paw before it can burn. Morris tells him that the paw should be burned, but Mr. White can keep it if he wants. He tells Mr. White how to use it, but warns him there will be consequences. Morris tells Mr. White, “If you must wish...wish for something sensible.” After that, the family returns to the entertaining stories of India.

After Morris leaves, Herbert says that the family shouldn’t put much importance on the **monkey’s paw**, since Morris told many tall tales that night. Mr. White reveals, slightly embarrassed, that he made Morris take a small amount of money for the paw, at which point Morris told him again to destroy it. Herbert teases his father, telling him to wish that the family become “rich, and famous and happy.” Mr. White says he would not know what to wish for, since he already has everything he would ever need.

Herbert suggests that Mr. White should wish for the money they need to pay off the mortgage on their home, two hundred pounds. Herbert then winks at Mrs. White and sits down to play the piano. Mr. White wishes upon the **monkey’s paw** for the two hundred pounds.

Mr. White drops the **paw** and cries out, saying that he felt the paw twist in his hand “like a snake.” Herbert remarks that he doesn’t see any money and “I bet I never shall.” Mrs. White says that the movement must have just been Mr. White’s imagination. The family sits down by the fire to relax, but Mr. White is still jumpy. Herbert continues to tease his father about the supposed magic of the paw.

*The paw’s creator, a fakir, or an Indian holy man, evokes the xenophobic attitude that associated non-white, non-Christian people with suspicion. The spell itself directly warns against trying to tamper with one’s own fate, which Mr. White clearly has a predilection for.*



*The consequences of wishing on the paw are so great that its first owner chose death due to the suffering brought on by his first two wishes. However, the fact that Morris cannot sell the paw because no one believes the story of its magic raises the possibility that the paw may not be able to grant wishes and cause suffering after all.*



*The consequences of altering fate are so great that Morris wishes to destroy the paw, yet, if he had the chance to wish all over again, he’s not certain he would say no, thus showing the attraction of being able to alter fate, even when one knows the consequences. Mr. White also covets the power of the paw, even though Morris has warned him of the suffering it will bring.*



*Herbert casts doubt on Morris’s credibility, and by extension the credibility of the paw’s magic. His teasing of his father represents a skeptical point of view which does not believe that one can drastically alter their own fate. Mr. White’s statement that he already possesses everything he needs shows the irresistible temptation he feels when he wishes on the paw anyway.*



*This scene marks a turning point in the story, when Mr. White makes the impactful choice to change his life by wishing upon the paw, a choice which will be followed by tragic consequences for his family.*



*Mr. White feels the paw move, seeming to prove its magic, but neither of the other characters see it, so the reality of the magic remains uncertain. Herbert remains skeptical of the Whites’ fate actually changing at all due to the paw and, at this moment, he appears to be correct.*



After Mr. and Mrs. White go to bed, Herbert stays up, watching the fire. He sees faces in the flames, one of which looks like a terrifying monkey's face. Herbert gives an "uneasy laugh," puts the fire out, and picks up the **monkey's paw**. "With a little shiver," he goes to bed.

*Herbert's fright shows that one can be made to believe in the power of the paw under the right (spooky) circumstances. This vision foreshadows Herbert's coming death and builds an atmosphere of horror.*



## PART II

In the light of the next morning, Herbert laughs at his fright the night before. The **monkey's paw** has been set aside "with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues." Mrs. White remarks at the silliness of Morris's tale of magic, and besides, she says, "how could two hundred pounds hurt you?" Mr. White says that "Morris said the things happened so naturally...that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence." Herbert playfully mocks the wish as he leaves for work, asking his father not to come into money and become a mean and greedy man while he's gone.

*Herbert's dismissal of the supernatural in the light of day suggests that one only believes in altered fates and magic under a troubled state of mind. Morris's statement suggests that the paw's supposed magic really could be only consequence. Herbert's joke about his father becoming mean while he's gone hints at the real tragedy which will happen once Herbert leaves the safety of the house.*



Mrs. White laughs along with her son, but throughout the day, she finds herself scurrying to the door when the mailman knocks. She also feels uneasy when she sees a well-dressed stranger lingering outside their gate. When he finally enters the gate to the property, Mrs. White throws off her apron and rushes to bring him inside the home.

*Mrs. White, against her better judgement, believes in the magic of the paw, showing that she too would like to believe one can alter fate. Her taking off the apron shows a shedding of domesticity caused by the sinister intervention of the outside object (the paw).*



The stranger seems troubled and distracted as the Whites welcome him. He says he is a representative of the owners of the factory where Herbert works. Mrs. White immediately becomes worried, asking if Herbert is hurt. The representative says, "Badly hurt...but he is not in any pain." Mrs. White is initially relieved, but then she realizes what this phrasing means. After a long silence, the representative says that Herbert was "caught in the machinery." Mr. White says that Herbert "was the only one left to us...It is hard."

*Herbert's death shows a common consequence of industrialization, the death of workers due to unsafe factory conditions. The representative's awkward and indirect manner and the fact that he is a stranger shows the exploitative practices of industrialization. Additionally, this outside agent coming into the home and destroying the family further emphasizes the danger of the outside world.*



The representative says that the company wished him "to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss." He begs that they "will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders." The Whites do not reply, their faces colored by shock and grief.

*Both the representative's rejection of responsibility (by blaming the company) further emphasizes the exploitation of workers and the dehumanizing aspects of industrialization.*



The representative says that while the company takes no responsibility for Herbert's death, they can offer monetary compensation for his "services." With a feeling of horror, Mr. White asks how much. The representative answers, "Two hundred pounds." Mrs. White screams and Mr. White faints.

*This company values its employees' lives only in terms of dollar amounts. The fact that the amount awarded is the exact same as the amount wished for suggests that Herbert's death is Mr. White's consequence for attempting to alter his fate.*





## PART III

"In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant," Mr. and Mrs. White bury Herbert. They return to their house, which is now dark and quiet. At first, they can hardly believe their loss, but as a few days pass, they resign themselves to their grief. They speak to each other during their weary days.

A week later, Mr. White wakes to find himself alone in bed. He finds Mrs. White standing by the window, sobbing, and he asks her to come back to bed because it's cold. She refuses, and he falls back asleep. His wife shakes him awake, crying out that she wants the **monkey's paw**. She has just realized that they have only used one of their wishes. Mr. White questions, "Was not that enough?" But Mrs. White says that they must use the paw to wish their son alive again.

Mr. White hesitates, saying that Mrs. White must be crazy, but she says that their first wish came true so their second will, too. He says that it was just a coincidence, and when she begs further, he replies that Herbert "has been dead ten days, and besides he...I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you then, how now?" Mrs. White continues to beg, saying she would not fear her own child.

Horrified by the thought of "his mutilated son before him," Mr. White finds the **paw** and brings it to Mrs. White. Her face, "white and expectant," frightens him, as she begins to cry out, "Wish!" He wishes his son alive again. They wait, her excited and him afraid, but nothing happens. Mr. White feels relief and they go back to bed, laying there silently.

A knock comes from the front door, shocking Mr. White. He hears another knock, and then another. Mrs. White sits up, asking what that noise was. Mr. White claims that it is just a rat, and the knock repeats. Mrs. White screams that it must be Herbert and runs to the door while Mr. White tries to stop her. She begs him to let her go, saying that it must be Herbert, since the cemetery is two miles away, so he would only just be arriving now.

Mr. White begs Mrs. White not to let "it" in. She breaks free from his grasp and runs to the front door, but she cannot reach the top bolt to unlock it. As the knocking continues and Mrs. White pulls up a chair to unlock the door, Mr. White frantically searches for the **monkey's paw**, knowing he must "find it before the thing outside got in."

*The Whites appear to be deeply suffering as a result of Mr. White's tempting of fate. The happy interior life of their home has been shattered by either the paw or by the consequences of industrialization (depending on whether Herbert's death was a consequence of the wish or not).*



*Mr. and Mrs. White's relationship has turned from love to apathy because of Herbert's death (potentially at the hands of the paw). Due to her grief, Mrs. White is willing to overlook the consequence they suffered before for their wish on the paw because she wishes to alter their fate rather than accept their tragedy.*



*Herbert's death could have been a coincidence, rather than a result of the paw, or Mr. White could only be saying that in order not to cause further suffering by wishing again. Belief in the ability to alter fate is contingent upon one's state of mind. On the other hand, Mr. White also seems to truly believe that a mangled corpse would be the consequence of the second wish.*



*Mr. White's vision of his mutilated son contributes to the building atmosphere of horror. Pressured by his grief-mad wife, he chooses to once again to tempt fate by wishing upon the paw, but, like the first time, the results aren't immediately apparent.*



*Just as Herbert's death might be a coincidence, the knocking might just be a rat. Mrs. White is so desperate to alter her tragic fate that she will make excuses for the paw seeming not to work right away. Both Mr. and Mrs. White believe in the paw's power to alter fate, but only Mr. White appears to fully understand the consequences of this power.*



*Mr. White is overcome with fear of the consequences of the paw. This scene emphasizes the threat of outside dangers coming inside the house. The tension of the plot ramps up as Mr. White races against time in order to find the paw.*



Mr. White hears the bolt opening at the exact same minute he finds the **monkey's paw**. Frantically, he makes his third and final wish. The knocking ceases and he hears Mrs. White open the door.

Mr. White hears Mrs. White cry out in “disappointment and misery” and he feels brave enough to run to her side and then go out the front door to the gate. All he sees outside is “a quiet and deserted road.”

*Mr. White presumably uses his final wish to wish away whatever is on the other side of the door, as shown by the knocking ceasing as he makes his wish.*



*Mr. White might have altered his fate by wishing away his son, or there could have been nothing at the door to begin with. The reality of the paw's magic remains dubious. When Mr. White opens the door to find an empty road, it suggests that there could have been nothing to fear outside all along.*





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