

THE MONKEY'S PAW

By L. Don Swartz

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PUBLISHED BY

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

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THE MONKEY'S PAW

A tale of terror in one act
Based on the short story by W. W. Jacobs
Adapted by L. Don Swartz

To Scott Lesinski for being there when it counted.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A contemporary American family comes face-to-face with an ancient evil curse that seems bent on their destruction. A mysterious storyteller leaves a grisly talisman with a Midwestern farm family, assuring them that it will grant them three wishes. Before he disappears into a stormy night, the storyteller warns the family members to pitch the monkey's paw on the fire, as it will bring them nothing but death. The father makes the first wish and before the night is over the family finds their lives spiraling hopelessly out of control.

The Monkey's Paw was originally produced as part of the play FRIGHT NIGHT by the Ghostlight Theatre Company at the Grant Street Theatre in North Tonawanda, NY, on October 16, 1997. Fright Night is also available from Eldridge Publishing.

THE MONKEY'S PAW was directed by Scott Lesinski. The cast in order of appearance was as follows:

MRS. WHITE.....Kathy Ellis Donner
MR. WHITE.....Carl Tamburlin
HERBERT WHITE.....Joseph Demerly
SERGEANT-MAJOR MORRIS.....Michael Leszczynski
THE VISITOR.....Gelia Woodward
THE MINISTER.....Scott Lesinski

*Note: Listing includes original cast before revisions.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w)

MARY WHITE: Middle-aged. Strong-willed, middle-class farm wife. Devoted mother.

JOHN WHITE: Middle-aged. Farmer. Supportive husband and father.

CHRISTINE WHITE: College senior, 21 years old. Smart. Ambitious. A good daughter.

SPECIAL MORRIS: An old friend of John's. FBI agent. Secretive.

HELEN MEGGINS: Adult. A supervisor from the shop where Christine works.

PLACE: A living room of a small farm house, rural Missouri.

TIME: End of summer. The present.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Evening.

Scene 2: Later that night.

Scene 3: The next morning.

Scene 4: Ten days later.

SOUND EFFECTS

Rainstorm, bang of fence shutting, footsteps on the walk, rushing wind, thunder, phone ringing, ominous music.

SETTING

The living room of a small farm house in a rural Missouri town. It is a tiny but cozy room with a fireplace on the DSR wall. There are two small lamps on the mantel. Two comfortable arm chairs and a rocking chair are grouped about the fireplace. A low table between the two armchairs holds a well-used chess set. Extreme DSR is an empty frame facing the audience that serves as the room's only window. Perhaps it has wooden sections to indicate window panes and pulled-back drapes along the sides of the frame. CS is a door that opens to the out-of-doors. SL there is a staircase that leads up to the second floor. On the landing is an antique clock that chimes the hours. SL of the stairs is a doorway which leads to the dining room and kitchen. Extreme DSL is a small love seat in front of an old-fashioned console television set. The screen is facing UPS, away from the audience.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: It is night. There is a small fire in the fireplace. The lamps are on. JOHN WHITE and his daughter, CHRISTINE, are engaged in a heated game of chess. MARY, his wife, sits nearby doing a crossword puzzle. Outside, a fierce RAINSTORM is raging.)

JOHN: Listen to that storm.

CHRISTINE: I'm listening. *(SHE moves a chess piece.)*
Check.

JOHN: He's not going to show. Not on a night like this.

CHRISTINE: Mate.

JOHN: *(Crossing to the window.)* You know, that's the worst of living so far out. Of all the beastly, swampy, out-of-the-way places to live, this has got to be the worst. Mud roads all spring long. It's no wonder we never have any visitors.

MARY: Maybe you'll win the next one.

CHRISTINE: *(With a smirk.)* Anything's possible.

JOHN: You've been pretty lucky, Christine, but I predict that before this night is over, your luck is going to change. *(From outside we hear the SOUND the front gate being thrown open with a loud bang and heavy footsteps coming up the walk.)* There he is. Remember, no mention of his wife's death. It's too soon to talk about it. And don't press him about the assignments he can't talk about. It makes him edgy.

CHRISTINE: Yes, Dad. This afternoon's briefing was very thorough. I'll do my best not to jeopardize our nation's security.

(JOHN crosses to the door and opens it. There is the SOUND of rushing wind. A LARGE MAN in a black overcoat fills the doorway.)

JOHN: Come in, come in, so I can close the door.

MORRIS: *(Entering the house.)* John, good to see you again.

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JOHN: *(Closing the door.)* Mary, this is Special Agent Morris. Dan, my wife, Mary.

MARY: Agent Morris, it's a pleasure.

MORRIS: The pleasure's all mine. And please, call me Dan.

JOHN: This is my daughter, Christine.

MORRIS: Christine. Nice to meet you.

CHRISTINE: Nice to meet you, Dan.

MARY: Here, Dan, let me have your wet things.

MORRIS: *(Handing HIS coat to HER.)* Thank you.

(MARY exits into the kitchen with them.)

JOHN: Dan, sit here by the fire and warm those old bones of yours. Christine, grab a bottle of the good stuff.

MORRIS: Now you're talking.

(HE limps to a chair by the fire. CHRISTINE crosses to the cabinet near the stairs and retrieves a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. JOHN pours them each a drink.)

JOHN: How are the roads?

MORRIS: A bit soggy. Not too bad. Christine, your father tells me you're going to be a school teacher.

CHRISTINE: That's right.

MORRIS: How many more years of school?

CHRISTINE: One more year. Day after tomorrow I leave.

MORRIS: Good for you.

CHRISTINE: Tomorrow's my last day of work.

MORRIS: That's a great feeling, isn't it?

CHRISTINE: It is and it isn't. I've worked at Maw and Meggins every summer since my junior year at high school. It's a stone and monument business. My specialty is carving names and dates on the tombstones.

MORRIS: Well, that's always something to fall back on if teaching doesn't pan out.

CHRISTINE: I've really liked working there. The last piece I'm working on is the biggest and most beautiful monument we've ever gotten. It's a gorgeous 15-foot group sculpture, in Italian marble, hand-carved by the best studio in Milan.

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CHRISTINE: *(Continued.)* Easily over two tons of stone. The grouping is Christ lifting Lazarus out of a sepulcher as Mary and Martha stand by awestruck. We're talking significant art here. It's an honor to take a chisel to it, but it also scares me to death. Rumors are flying that *Time* magazine wants to do a feature on it. Matthew Grunewald, the richest man in the state, ordered it for himself. He's at death's door. I've already done his name, the verse, birth date and now Mr. Meggins is making me carve in the month of death. "Died: September," leave a single space for a one digit number, and then the year. He said since I'm the best carver he wants me to do it before I leave.

MORRIS: That's quite a compliment.

CHRISTINE: Freaks me out to do it. What if the poor guy lives a couple more months?

MORRIS: What would your boss do then?

CHRISTINE: He said he'd sandblast and start over. I guess it's a pretty done deal. I mean, everyone says the old man's singing the last verse...it still makes me feel creepy.

MORRIS: I can see that.

CHRISTINE: You must have better stories than that. Being an FBI agent all these years.

MORRIS: It's not like in the movies. Most of the time I'm afraid it's pretty routine.

CHRISTINE: Not to hear my dad tell it.

MORRIS: *(Laughing.)* I've had a few interesting cases.

(MARY enters.)

JOHN: Mary, pull up a chair. We'll see if we can get any decent stories out of him tonight.

MARY: You'd better make it a new one. I've read every letter you've sent my husband over these 20 years, and heard every story you've ever told. I feel like I know you.

MORRIS: I'm not sure if that's good or bad, but I'll give it a whirl. A new story, huh?

JOHN: Twenty-one years of stake-outs and serial killers and international espionage. You gotta give us something new.

End of Freeview

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