



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Monkey's Paw

By W.W. Jacobs written in 1902

## PART I

*Without*, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlor 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, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white haired old lady knitting *placidly* by the fire.

*Without: Outside*

*Placidly: Calmly*

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was *amiably* desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

*Amiably: hopefully*

"I'm listening," said the latter, *grimly* surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

*Grimly: sternly, harshly*

"I should hardly think that he'd come tonight," said his father, with his hand *poised* over the board.

*Poised: hold in a steady position*

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a *bog*, and the road's a *torrent*. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses on the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

*Bog: wet swampy area*  
*Torrent: rushing stream of water*

"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged to loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

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✓ **Comprehension Check- answer these questions before you continue to the next page.**

1. What is the setting?
2. What is one word to describe the atmosphere inside the house?
3. What is one word to describe the atmosphere outside the house?
4. How does the setting and atmosphere help establish the mood of the story?
5. Who won the game of chess?

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard *condoling* with the new arrival. The new arrival also condoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut!" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and *rubicund* of *visage*.

*Condoling*: to express sympathetic sorrow

*Rubicund*: reddish  
*Visage*: face

"Sergeant Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant major shook hands, and taking the *proffered* seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whisky and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

*Proffered*: offered

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of strange scenes and *doughty* deeds, of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

*Doughty*: brave, strong

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don'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 round 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 jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

*Fakir*: members of a religious group in India who often walk on coals or charm snakes

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily. "Leastways, 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 offhandedly.

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6. What does Sergeant Major Morris look like?
  7. Who are the four characters of the story so far and how are they related to each other?
  8. Where did the sergeant major serve in the army?
  9. Why do you think the sergeant major was hesitant to talk about the monkey's paw?

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absentmindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

“To look at,” said the sergeant major, fumbling in his pocket, “it’s just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy.”

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a *grimace*, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

**Grimace:** facial expression that shows disgust

“And what is there special about it?” inquired Mr. White, as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

“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 interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it.”

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter *jarred* somewhat.

**Jarred:** harsh sounding

“Well, why don’t you have three, sir?” said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard *presumptuous* youth. “I have,” he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

**Presumptuous:** going beyond what is proper/ cocky

“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?” inquired 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.”

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10. What does the monkey’s paw look like?
  11. Who put the spell on the monkey’s paw?
  12. Why did the fakir say he put a spell on the monkey’s paw?
  13. What was the spell put on the monkey’s paw?
  14. What happened to the first man who had the monkey’s paw?

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

“If you’ve had your three wishes, it’s no good to you now, then, Morris,” said the old man at last. “What do you keep it for?”

The soldier shook his head. “*Fancy*, I suppose,” he said slowly. “I did have some idea of selling it, but I don’t think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won’t buy. They think it’s a fairy tale, some of them, and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward.”

**Fancy:** based on a whim

“If you could have another three wishes,” said the old man, eyeing him *keenly*, “would you have them?”

**Keenly:** mental sharpness

“I don’t know,” said the other. “I don’t know.”

He took the paw, and dangling it between his front finger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

“Better let it burn,” said the soldier solemnly.

“If you don’t want it, Morris,” said the old man, “give it to me.”

“I won’t,” said his friend *doggedly*. “I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don’t blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again, like a sensible man.”

**Doggedly:** stubbornly

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. “How do you do it?” he inquired.

“Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud,” said the sergeant major, “but I warn you of the consequences.”

“Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*,” said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. “Don’t you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?”

**Arabian Nights:** a set of fairy tales including Aladdin

Her husband drew the *talisman* from his pocket and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

**Talisman:** a magic object or charm

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15. What is fate? Do you believe in it?
  16. Your Opinion: why isn’t the sergeant major happy to have had 3 wishes?
  17. What does the sergeant major do with the paw?
  18. How do you make a wish with the paw?

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something *sensible*."

**Sensible:** useful

Mr. White dropped it back into his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an *enthralled* fashion to a second installment of the soldier's adventures in India.

**Enthralled:** to observe closely as if by magic

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time for him to catch the last train, "we shan't make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, Father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A *trifle*," said he, coloring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

**Trifle:** small amount

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, Father, to begin with; then you can't be *henpecked*."

**Henpecked:** a husband who is ruled by a wife/woman (this is an insult but was meant as a joke)

He darted around the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an *antimacassar*.

**Antimacassar:** a covering that prevents the arms and back of a chair or sofa from getting dirty

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "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 *cleared 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."

**Cleared the house:** pay off the mortgage  
**Pounds:** money in England

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own *credulity*, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face somewhat *marred* by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

**Credulity:** willing to believe things without evidence

**Marred:** spoiled

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

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19. How does the sergeant major feel about the monkey's paw?
  20. What does the sergeant major want Mr. White to do with the paw?
  21. Does the White family actually believe in the magic of the paw? How do you know?
  22. What is the first wish?

“It moved,” he cried, with a glance of disgust 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 *fancy*, Father,” said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

*Fancy: imagination*

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 started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

“I expect you’ll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed,” said Herbert, as he bade them good night, “and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your *ill-gotten gains*.”

*Ill-gotten gains: money you didn’t work for; money you got through deceit*

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. It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey’s paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went to bed

*Simian: resembling a monkey*

## PART II

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table, Herbert laughed at his fears. There was an air of *prosaic* wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shriveled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which *betokened* no great belief in its virtues.

*Prosaic: ordinary*

*Betokened: hinted*

“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 the *frivolous* Herbert.

*Frivolous: lacking in seriousness*

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

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23. What happens when Mr. White makes a wish?

24. What did Mr. White see in the fire?

25. What is the mood of the story at the end of Part I?

26. What is different about the setting for Part II? How does this change the mood of the story?

“Well, don’t break into the money before I come back,” said Herbert, as he rose from the table. “I’m afraid it’ll turn you into a mean, *avaricious* man, and we shall have to disown you.”

*Avaricious: greedy*

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the road, and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband’s *credulity*. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman’s knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant majors of *bibulous* habits, when she found that the post brought a tailor’s bill.

*Credulity: gullibility*

*Bibulous: fond of drinking alcoholic drinks*

“Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home,” she said, as they sat at dinner.

“I daresay,” said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; “but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I’ll swear to.”

“You thought it did,” said the old lady soothingly.

“I say it did,” replied the other. “There was no thought about it; I had just— What’s the matter?”

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering 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 glossy newness. Three times he paused at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of *apparel* beneath the cushion of her chair.

*Apparel: clothing*

*Furtively: done in an uneasy manner*

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed *furtively* at Mrs. White, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized for the appearance of the room, and her husband’s coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to *broach* his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

*Broach: begin*

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27. Where do you think Herbert is going when he *leaves* (hint: where do adults usually go when they leave the house in the morning)?

28. What is the stranger wearing?

29. How does the stranger act when approaching the house and when he is in the house?

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from Maw and Meggins."

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, Mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir," and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry—" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother.

The visitor *bowed* in *assent*. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

*Bowed: nod your head*  
*Assent: agreement*

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank—"

She broke off suddenly as the *sinister* meaning of the assurance dawned upon her and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's *averted* face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

*Sinister: evil, bad*  
*Averted: look away*

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length, in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old *courting* days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

*Courting: dating*

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking around. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

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30. When the stranger says he is from "Maw and Meggins," Mrs. White immediately asks if Herbert is ok. Why would she immediately think of Herbert?
  31. What does he mean when the stranger says that Herbert "is not in any pain?"
  32. Mrs. White says "He was the only one left to us." What can you infer from this statement?

“I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility,” continued the other. “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*.”

*Liability: responsibility*  
*Compensation: money given to make up for something*

Mr. White dropped his wife’s hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, “How much?”

“Two hundred pounds,” was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife’s shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

### PART III

IN THE HUGE NEW cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of expectation, as though of something else to happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear. 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, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness.

*Resignation: acceptance*  
*Apathy: lack of interest*

It was about a week after that that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of *subdued* weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

*Subdued: quiet*

“Come back,” he said tenderly. “You will be cold.”

“It is colder for my son,” said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was -warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He *dozed* fitfully, and then slept until a sudden cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

*Dozed: napped*

“The monkey’s paw!” she cried wildly. “The monkey’s paw!”

He started up in alarm. “Where? Where is it? What’s the matter?” She came stumbling across the room toward him. “I want it,” she said quietly. “You’ve not destroyed it?”

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33. Why is Maw and Meggins giving the White’s 200 pounds?
  34. How does Mr. White react when he learns that Maw and Meggins is giving them 200 pounds?
  35. About how much time has passed between Herbert’s death and Mrs. White asking about the monkey’s paw?
  36. Predict: why do you think Mrs. White is asking for the paw?

"It's in the parlor, on the *bracket*," he replied, marveling. "Why?"

**Bracket:** shelf

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

"I only just thought of it," she said hysterically. "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 rapidly. "We've only had one."

"Was not that enough?" he demanded *fiercely*.

**Fiercely:** aggressively

"No," she cried triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bedclothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "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 unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman *feverishly*; "why not the second?"

**Feverishly:** showing great emotion

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door.

The old man turned and regarded her, and his voice shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he—I would not tell you else, but—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?"

**Ere:** before

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlor, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him *ere* he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way around the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the *unwholesome* thing in his hand.

**Unwholesome:** morally harmful

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37. What does Mrs. White want to use the paw to wish for?
  38. Mrs. White asks for the wish in the middle of the night. How does the change in the time of day affect the mood of the story?
  39. Does Mr. White really believe that the wish for 200 pounds caused Herbert to be killed?
  40. Why is Mr. White afraid to see his son again?

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.

*Expectant: waiting*

"Wish!" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"Wish!" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it shudderingly. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

*Shudderingly: shaking with fear*

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle end, which had burned below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing *pulsating* shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

*Pulsating: beating*

Neither spoke, but both lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse *scurried* noisily through the wall. The darkness was *oppressive*, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

*Oppressive: cruel, harsh and heavy*

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another, and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"What's that?" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man, in shaking tones, "a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

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41. What is the second wish?
  42. What happened immediately after Mr. White made the second wish?
  43. Why did Mr. White leave the bedroom?
  44. What sound do the White's hear?
  45. What does Mr. White say the sound is?

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

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

“What are you going to do?” he whispered hoarsely.

“It’s my boy; it’s Herbert!” she cried, struggling mechanically. “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, trembling.

“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 *wrench* broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her *appealingly* as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman’s voice, strained and panting.

**Wrench:** to move with a violent twist

**Appealingly:** begging

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

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. A perfect *fusillade* of knocks *reverberated* through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back, and at the same moment, he found the monkey’s paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

**Fusillade:** many shots fired repeatedly  
**Reverberated:** echoed

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back and the door opened. 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, and then to the gate beyond. The streetlamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

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46. Why does Mrs. White think it took so long for Herbert to return to the house?

47. Why does Mr. White say, “don’t let *it* in” rather than don’t let *him* in”?

48. Why can’t Mrs. White open the door?

49. What was there when Mrs. White opened the door?

50. What do you think was the third wish?

51. Could it be possible that Herbert came back to life whole and healthy, and that with his third and last wish Mr. White wished him dead again without knowing it? Why or why not?