

Short Stories with Peter: The Monkey's Paw by W. W. Jacobs (Abridged B1–B2 Level)

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

109 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Welcome to Short Stories with Peter from Your English Toolbox.

I am Peter.

Tonight, we are entering a warm house on a cold and stormy night.

Inside that house, a family will be offered three wishes.

Most people would call that a gift.

This family will learn to call it something else.

This is The Monkey's Paw by W. W. Jacobs, first published in 1902.

It has been abridged and adapted for B1–B2 English learners by Your English Toolbox.

Outside Laburnam Villa, the rain struck the windows and the wind shook the trees.

Inside, Mr and Mrs White sat beside a bright fire with their grown-up son, Herbert.

They were waiting for an old friend, Sergeant-Major Morris, who had spent many years in India.

At last, the garden gate banged and heavy footsteps approached the house.

Morris entered, wet from the storm, and warmed his hands by the fire.

For a while, he told them stories of distant places.

What was that strange object you once mentioned?

The monkey's paw?

Morris became quiet.

It is nothing worth hearing about.

But the family leaned towards him, so he reached into his pocket.

He placed a small, dry monkey's paw on the table.

An old holy man put a spell on it.

He wanted to prove that people should not interfere with fate.

Three different people can each make three wishes.

And have your wishes come true?



Yes.

His face had lost its colour.

The man who owned it before me used his third wish to ask for death.

Nobody laughed after that.

Without warning, Morris threw the paw into the fire.

Mr White quickly pulled it out.

Let it burn.

If you keep it, do not blame me for what happens.

How do I make a wish?

Hold it in your right hand and speak aloud.

But I warn you: do not tempt fate.

After Morris left, Herbert smiled at his parents' nervous faces.

Wish for two hundred pounds to finish paying for the house.

Mr White held up the paw.

I wish for two hundred pounds.

The paw twisted in his hand like a living thing.

He dropped it with a cry.

I cannot see any money.

Perhaps it is waiting for you upstairs.

Herbert laughed, but his father stared at the paw until the fire became low.

The next morning, Herbert left for work at the local factory.

Around midday, a serious-looking man stopped outside the house.

He walked to the gate, turned away, and then came back.

Mrs White opened the door.

I come from the factory where your son works.

Has something happened to Herbert?

There has been an accident.

Your son was badly hurt, but he is no longer in pain.

Mrs White understood first.

Herbert was dead.



The company accepts no responsibility.

However, it wishes to offer you some money in recognition of your son's service.

How much?

Two hundred pounds.

A week passed after Herbert's funeral.

The house that had once felt warm now seemed empty and cold.

One night, Mrs White suddenly sat up in bed.

The paw.

We have two wishes left.

Wish Herbert alive again.

No.

You do not know what might come back.

He is our son.

Bring him back at any cost.

Mr White went downstairs and found the paw in the darkness.

His hands shook as he raised it.

I wish my son alive again.

Nothing happened.

The candle went out, and the old couple listened to the clock.

Then came a quiet knock at the front door.

Mr White stopped breathing.

The knock came again, louder this time.

It is Herbert.

She ran downstairs and pulled back the chain.

The final bolt was too high for her to reach.

The knocking became hard and desperate.

Help me open the door.

But Mr White was on his knees, searching for the paw.

His wife dragged a chair towards the door.

Her hand reached for the final bolt.



At that moment, Mr White found the paw and made his third wish.

The knocking stopped.

Mrs White opened the door.

Cold wind entered the house.

Outside, the road was silent and empty.

The story never tells us exactly what Mr White wished for at the end.

It trusts us to understand from the sudden silence and the empty road.

Now notice four expressions that carry the story's warning.

First, to grant a wish means to make somebody's wish come true.

The paw grants wishes, but never in the way the family expects.

Second, to tempt fate means to take a foolish risk when things are already going well.

Morris warns Mr White not to tempt fate, but curiosity wins.

Third, at any cost means that you want a result regardless of the danger or sacrifice.

Mrs White wants her son back at any cost because grief controls her judgment.

Finally, be careful what you wish for is a warning that getting what you want may create a worse problem.

We also use wish for things that are unreal, impossible or different from reality.

Mr White says, "I wish my son alive again."

After wish, the story expresses a desire to change a reality that cannot safely be changed.

If you had owned the paw, would you have made the first wish?

Or would you have let it burn?

You can find the complete transcript, translations in several languages, and a vocabulary guide on our website, yourenglishtoolbox.com.

There is a direct link to the episode page and all its resources in this episode description.

This was The Monkey's Paw by W. W. Jacobs, abridged for B1–B2 English learners by Your English Toolbox.

I am Peter.

Thank you for listening.

