

The Whistle

by Montague Rhodes James

(Adapted book. Elementary level)

Mr Parkins wasn't a very good golfer, but he enjoyed the game. It was the middle of winter and he planned a holiday by the sea at Burnstow, in the east of England.

'There's an interesting old church in Burnstow,' one of the other teachers at his school told him. 'It's more than six hundred years old. Of course, it's not there now, but there are some stones from the old walls near the beach.'

'Thank you. I'll look at them,' said Parkins.

'Where are you going to stay?' his friend asked.

'Not many of the hotels are open in the winter,' said Parkins. 'But I got the last room in a small hotel by the beach - the Globe.'

* * *

Mr Parkins went to Burnstow by train from Cambridge, his home city. When he arrived, he took a taxi to the hotel.

The Globe was a nice hotel. There were two beds in his room, and a large table by the biggest of the three windows. From that window he could look east across the beach to the sea. The two smaller windows looked out to the north and the south. South of the hotel was the little village of Burnstow.

There were no curtains at the windows of his room, but Parkins didn't think about that then. He put his books and papers on the table and took his clothes out of his bag. He put his golf bag next to the window.

Most of the visitors at the Globe were in Burnstow for the golf. Nobody was interested in the beach at this time of the year. Parkins met one of the golfers, Wilson, at dinner that evening. They enjoyed their conversation and Parkins played golf with Wilson the next day.

Wilson was not very good at golf, but he hated losing games. He shouted angrily when he hit a ball badly.

'You'll play better tomorrow,' Parkins told him.

'Perhaps,' said Wilson, with a red face.

Parkins didn't walk back to the hotel with Wilson that evening.

'I want to find an old church near here,' he said. 'A friend in Cambridge told me about it before I left home.'

'A church?' said Wilson.

'Yes,' said Parkins. 'It's more than six hundred years old, so the building won't be there now. But he says that there are some interesting stones.'

'Are you interested in old churches?' asked Wilson.

'Yes, I am,' said Parkins. 'I'll walk back to the hotel on the beach. I'll see you later at dinner.'

'Yes, all right,' said Wilson. 'See you then.'

Parkins walked away to the beach. It was getting dark and he couldn't see very well.

'How am I going to find these old walls?' he thought.

Suddenly, his foot hit a stone and he fell. He got up and looked at the ground carefully. He could see a number of large, square stones.

'I think this is it,' he thought. He put his hand under one of the stones. There was something under it.

'I think this stone is from a wall,' Parkins thought.

His fingers found something small and hard, and he pulled it out.

‘What’s this?’ he thought.

It was nearly dark now and he couldn’t see it in his hand. He felt it carefully. It was long and thin.

‘I’ll look at it later,’ he thought, and he put it carefully in his coat.

It was a cold evening, so he began to walk quickly to the hotel. He could see the lights of the village in front of him.

A minute or two later, Parkins looked back and saw something about a hundred metres behind him.

‘What’s that?’ he thought. ‘Is it a man? Yes, and he’s running. But why isn’t he coming nearer now? That’s very strange.’ He looked at his watch. ‘Oh dear, it’s nearly time for dinner!’

He began to run.

* * *

That evening at dinner with Mr Wilson, the two men talked about golf and about India.

‘I lived in India for many years,’ said Wilson. ‘I can tell you a lot of stories about that country and its people.’

It was nearly midnight when Parkins went upstairs to his room. He suddenly remembered about the old church stone and he took the long, thin tiling out of his coat.

He looked at it carefully.

‘It’s a whistle!’ he thought. ‘But it’s very dirty. Where’s my knife?’

But first he went to the window and opened it. He wanted to look at the sea. It was quiet outside and he looked down at the beach in front of the hotel.

There was a man on the beach.

‘Who’s that?’ he thought. ‘What’s he doing out there at this time of night?’

He watched, but the man didn’t move.

Parkins closed the window and found his knife. He cleaned the whistle with it, and after a minute or two he could see something on it.

‘There’s some writing on it,’ he thought. He looked at the letters on the whistle and read them slowly. ‘The words are in Latin.’ He read them again and thought for a minute. ‘I think that it means, “Who is coming?”’ He smiled. ‘Who is coming? Perhaps I’ll blow the whistle for him.’

Parkins put the whistle to his mouth and blew.

‘It’s a good, high sound,’ he thought, ‘but not too loud.’

He blew it again. This time the sound of the whistle brought a picture into Parkins’s head.

For a minute or two he couldn’t really see anything in the picture, but then he saw a wide, dark, open place. It was night, and the moon shone in the sky. There was a strong wind. Very slowly, he began to see other things in the picture. Now there was a person in the middle of the dark place.

‘Is it a man or a woman?’ he thought. He didn’t know.

Suddenly, the wind outside hit the large window in his room - hard. Parkins looked up. A white bird flew past.

He turned to the whistle again. He liked the sound of it, so he blew it again. It was louder now, but this time no picture came into his head. At the same time, the wind outside the hotel got stronger and stronger.

Suddenly, it blew the big window open and blew out the lights in Parkins’s room.

‘What’s happening?’ he cried. ‘These sea winds are very strong.’

Parkins pushed the window and tried to close it. It was very difficult. Then suddenly the wind stopped and the window closed easily.

Parkins looked round the room.

‘That’s good, it didn’t break anything,’ he thought.

He heard some noises from the room above him.

‘Perhaps the sound of the wind and my window woke up Wilson,’ he thought.

He could hear his new friend’s heavy feet on the floor. He could also hear strange noises.

‘Are those words?’ thought Parkins. ‘What’s he saying? Who is he talking to?’

After a minute or two, he took off his clothes and went to bed.

He could hear the wind outside again. It made a high, ghostly noise. Parkins didn’t like the sound. He tried to sleep, but he couldn’t. Perhaps he was excited about the golf, or the old church stones, or the whistle. He didn’t know.

What could he hear now? Was it somebody in bed in the next room?

‘Other people can’t sleep,’ he thought. ‘It’s not only me.’

He shut his eyes and tried again to sleep. More pictures came into his head. They were different this time.

Now they were pictures of a long, open beach. He could see somebody. Was it a man? Yes, a man. But Parkins couldn’t see his face. The man ran and, every minute or two, looked behind him.

‘What’s he looking at?’ thought Parkins.

The man’s legs were very tired and he ran very slowly. Suddenly, he fell down - and couldn’t get up again.

Now Parkins could see the man’s face. It was white. The man was afraid. Parkins watched him.

‘What’s he afraid of?’ he thought.

Then he saw somebody - or something. It was a long way away, but it moved fast across the open beach. Parkins began to feel afraid, too. There was something strange about this - something strange about the runner. When it ran, its arms went up and down, up and down. And it ran first to the left and then to the right. It ran down to the water, and then back again.

A cold feeling went through Parkins. He was really afraid now. He didn’t want to be near the thing, and he didn’t want it to be near him.

Now it was only one or two metres from the man on the beach...

It stopped.

And then it jumped...

Parkins gave a cry and quickly opened his eyes. He didn’t want to see that picture, or any other pictures, in his head.

‘I’ll try not to sleep,’ he thought. ‘I don’t want any more bad dreams. I’ll read a book.’

He lit the small light by his bed - and heard something in the room. He turned and looked. What was it? But there was nothing here.

‘Perhaps I dreamt that, too,’ he thought.

Later, he fell asleep.

He didn’t put out the light.

* * *

The next morning Parkins had breakfast with Wilson in the dining room of the hotel.

‘Do you want a game of golf this morning, Parkins?’ asked Wilson.

‘Yes, I’d like that,’ answered Parkins. ‘I’ll see you in half an hour.’

After breakfast he went back upstairs to his room. He wanted his golf clubs.

A girl - one of the hotel servants - was in the room.

‘Good morning,’ he said.

‘Good morning,’ she answered.

She put clean sheets on his bed. She worked quickly and easily. Parkins watched her.

‘Do you want some more blankets on the bed?’ she asked him. ‘It’s colder today.’

‘Yes, thank you,’ said Parkins. ‘I didn’t sleep very well last night. Perhaps some more blankets will help.’

‘On which bed?’ she asked. ‘Which of the two beds did you like more last night?’

Parkins looked at her.

‘I only slept in one of the beds,’ he said. ‘I slept in the bed near the window.’

‘But the sheets and blankets from the other bed were on the floor,’ she said.

‘On the floor? Were they? I’m very sorry,’ said Parkins. He didn’t understand it. ‘But put more blankets on the bed near the window, please. I’ll sleep there again tonight.’

After the girl finished, Parkins went downstairs with his golf clubs and found Mr Wilson.

‘Are you ready for our game, Parkins?’ asked Wilson.

‘Yes,’ said Parkins.

He didn’t say anything about the beds in his room.

* * *

Parkins played better golf that day, and Wilson was friendlier. He didn’t get angry, and he smiled more than the day before.

After about an hour, he said, ‘That was a strong and very strange wind last night. Did you hear it, Parkins?’

‘Yes, I did,’ said Parkins. ‘It was very strong.’

‘In my home town in Yorkshire people say, “Did somebody whistle for that wind?”,’ said Wilson.

‘Is that right?’ said Parkins. He smiled.

‘People in Denmark and Norway say it, too,’ said Wilson.

The two men hit some more balls and didn’t speak for some time. Then Parkins gave a little laugh and said, ‘I don’t really think that a whistle will bring the wind.’

‘Don’t laugh, Parkins,’ said Wilson. ‘These old stories are often right. I heard many of them when I was in India. Nobody really knows.’

‘But you and I are intelligent men,’ Parkins said. ‘We know that ghosts aren’t the answer. People see a stranger on the beach night after night, and each time that stranger whistles. And each night a strong wind blows. So they think that the whistle brings the wind. But it’s only the weather. Last night I blew a whistle. I blew it two or three times, but—’

‘Did you?’ said Wilson. He was suddenly interested. ‘Have you got the whistle with you?’

‘No, it’s in my room,’ said Parkins. ‘I’ll show it to you later. I found it yesterday. It was under one of the stones from the old church. I told you about the six-hundred-year-old church yesterday. Do you remember?’

‘Yes, I remember,’ said Wilson. ‘What happened?’

‘I fell over a wall,’ said Parkins. ‘Then I found the whistle under a stone. It was very dirty, but I cleaned it.’

‘Be careful when you use it,’ said Wilson. ‘Or don’t use it - perhaps that’s best. Some strange things happened in some of those old churches and graveyards in the past. You don’t want to wake up any ghosts.’

Parkins smiled, but he said nothing. He wasn’t afraid of an old whistle, or of ghosts and graveyards.

The two men finished their game of golf. They had lunch, then played a second game in the afternoon.

They played well and forgot about whistles and old churches and strange winds.

* * *

It was early in the evening when they walked back to the Globe. They were near the hotel when a boy ran into them. He threw his arms round Wilson's legs and nearly pushed the older man down to the ground.

'I - I'm sorry!' he said.

Wilson began to shout at him angrily. 'You stupid child! What were you-?'

He stopped. The boy was afraid of something. His face was white.

'What's wrong?' Wilson asked. He spoke a little more kindly now.

The boy didn't answer.

'What is it?' Parkins asked him. 'Tell us. What are you running away from?'

'It - it was in the window!' cried the boy.

'Which window?' asked Wilson. 'Don't cry, boy.'

'One of the hotel windows, upstairs at the front,' said the boy. 'I - I didn't like it.'

'What was it?' asked Wilson. 'Stop crying, boy, and listen to me. Start your story at the beginning. Were you outside the hotel?'

'Yes, with some of my friends,' said the boy. 'We often play there, in front of the Globe. The other boys went home for their tea before me. Five minutes later, I began to walk home. And then I saw it...' He started to cry again.

'Don't be afraid,' Wilson said. 'Tell me.'

'I looked up and I saw something at one of the hotel windows,' said the boy. 'It - it was... I don't know... something ghostly, something white. I couldn't see its face, but it saw me. Its hand went up when it saw me.'

'It saw you?' said Parkins.

'Was there light in the room?' asked Wilson.

'I don't remember,' said the boy.

'Which room was it?' asked Parkins.

'Was it the top window?' said Wilson. 'Or was it the window below it?'

'It was the window below it,' said the boy. 'The big window with the two little windows next to it.'

'My room,' said Parkins, quietly.

'All right, boy,' said Wilson. 'Run home now and don't be afraid. It wasn't a ghost. It was only a game. Next time, go into the hotel and tell somebody. Here's some money. Now go home and forget all about it.'

The boy thanked him and walked quickly away. The two men stood there.

'That's very strange,' said Wilson.

'Yes, it is,' said Parkins. 'I don't like it. Will you come up to my room with me for a minute, Wilson?'

The two men went into the hotel and upstairs to Parkins's room.

'Look at your bed!' said Wilson.

The sheets and blankets were on the floor.

'That's not my bed,' said Parkins. 'That's my bed, near the window. But you're right, Wilson. Somebody or something was in that other bed today.'

'Was everything all right when you left the room this morning?' asked Wilson.

'Yes,' said Parkins. 'I don't understand...'

'Perhaps the girl started to put clean sheets on the bed, and then somebody called her away,' said Parkins. 'Perhaps the boy saw her through the window.'

'Call for the girl and ask her,' said Wilson.

'I will,' said Parkins. 'I'll do it now.'

After a minute or two, the girl arrived in Parkins's room. Parkins asked her about the bed.

'I put clean sheets and blankets on the bed this morning, Mr Parkins,' she said. 'You were here. Don't you remember? It was all right when I left it.'

'Of course - I remember,' said Parkins. 'But did you come into the room again this afternoon?'

'No, I didn't,' said the girl. 'Nobody came in here this afternoon, Mr Parkins.'

'All right, thank you,' said Parkins.

The girl put the sheets and blankets on the bed again and went away. Parkins walked round the room and looked carefully at his books and his clothes. Everything was there.

'I don't understand it,' he said.

The two men were quiet for a minute, then Wilson said, 'I'll see you later, at dinner.'

'Yes, all right,' said Parkins.

* * *

Parkins was very quiet at dinner that evening. Later, when he and Wilson went upstairs, Wilson said, 'Will you be all right? You can call me in the night.'

'Thank you,' said Parkins. 'But everything will be fine now. Do you want to see that old whistle?'

'Yes, please,' said Wilson.

'Here it is,' said Parkins. He took it from his coat.

Wilson looked at the whistle carefully. He turned it over in his hands, then said, 'What are you going to do with it?'

'I'll show it to one of my friends at Cambridge University,' said Parkins. 'He's very interested in old things. He'll know more about it.'

'I don't like it, Parkins,' said Wilson. 'Throw the whistle away. Throw it into the sea. You won't do that, I know. But I think the whistle is dangerous.'

Parkins laughed. 'No, I don't think I'll throw it away,' he said. 'It's too interesting.'

'I'm going to bed,' said Wilson. 'I'll see you in the morning, Parkins. Goodnight.'

'Goodnight,' said Parkins.

After Wilson left, Parkins went into his room. He looked at the windows and remembered. There were no curtains.

'I can't ask for some now. It's too late at night,' he thought. 'It wasn't a problem last night because you couldn't see the moon. But the moon is there tonight. I can't sleep with the moonlight on my face. What can I do?' He thought for a minute. 'I know! I'll put a blanket across the windows!'

He took one of the blankets from his bed and put it up. The room was suddenly darker.

'That's better,' he thought.

Parkins took off his clothes and got into bed. He took a book from his bag and began to read. But he was tired. He only read for a short time before he fell asleep.

He was asleep for an hour or more, but then moonlight shone across his bed and onto his face. He woke up and looked across at the windows. The blanket was on the floor and he could see the big, round moon in the sky.

'The blanket fell down,' thought Parkins. 'Why didn't I ask the hotel girl for some curtains? It's too late now.' He was angry. 'What can I do? Do I try to sleep with the moonlight on my face? Or do I get up and put the blanket across the windows again? And will it stay there or fall down again?'

He was tired, and the questions went round and round in his head.

Suddenly, he heard a noise. Parkins listened. Was the noise from the other bed?

‘No,’ thought Parkins. ‘It’s nothing.’

The room was quiet again and Parkins closed his eyes.

The noise started again. It was louder now.

Parkins opened his eyes.

He slowly turned his head and looked across the room at the other bed...

... And something sat up in the bed.

‘Aaagh!’ cried Parkins.

He jumped out of his bed and ran to the window. He pulled a golf club from his bag and turned. But the thing moved off the bed and stood between him and the door of his room.

Parkins couldn’t see the thing’s face. There was something - a long, dark sheet - over its face, and over its arms and legs. Was it a sheet? Parkins didn’t know. He didn’t want to think about it. He didn’t want to know.

The thing moved across to Parkins’s bed and put its hands down onto the bed. It began to move them round and round, over and under the blankets.

‘Oh, no! It - it’s looking for me!’ thought Parkins. It’s trying to find me!’

He wanted to run past the thing and out of the door, but he couldn’t move his feet. He pushed the window open behind him and quickly looked down. But it was a long way down to the ground. He couldn’t jump.

The thing left the bed and began to move slowly and carefully across to the windows. Its arms were in front of its head. They moved up and down, and from left to right.

‘It can’t see!’ thought Parkins.

But then the moonlight shone on it and the wind blew. The dark sheet opened for a minute. He could see the thing’s face.

It was an old face, a dead face. Parkins felt ill when he looked at it.

‘No! No!’ he cried.

And that was a mistake because the thing heard him. It jumped across to the window and put its hands round Parkins’s arms.

Parkins cried again, ‘No! Stop! Get away from me!’

The thing pushed him half out of the window.

‘Help!’ shouted Parkins.

The old, ghostly dead face was next to Parkins’s face now.

‘Help me! Help me!’ he shouted.

Somebody opened the door of his room - and suddenly two hands took Parkins’s arms. They pulled him away from the window.

‘It’s all right!’ he heard. ‘I’m here!’

It was Wilson.

Parkins fell weakly on to the floor. He looked round the room. Where was the thing? He could only see Wilson.

Wilson didn’t ask any questions. He helped Parkins into his bed, then stayed with him all night.

* * *

The next morning, Wilson and Parkins talked for some time in Parkins’s room.

‘Strange things happen, Parkins,’ Wilson said. ‘I remember when I lived in India...’ He stopped. ‘But that’s all in the past. Now, give me the whistle.’

Parkins gave him the whistle and Wilson walked out of the room. A minute or two later, Parkins looked out of his window and saw Wilson down on the beach. He watched. Wilson threw the whistle out into the sea.

More books on <http://adapted-english-books.site>

Parkins is a different man today. He jumps at strange noises and doesn't like the moonlight. He doesn't laugh at ghost stories. And he doesn't like whistles.

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

Come back to <http://adapted-english-books.site> to find more fascinating and exciting stories!