

# Whistle and I'll Come to You

**M.R. James**



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It was the last staff lunch of the autumn term.

"Are you going away during the holiday, Professor Parkins?"

"Yes," he said; "I'm going to Burnstow on the east coast tomorrow. I will spend a week improving my golf."

"Oh, Parkins," said Rodgers, sitting opposite. "Our archaeological department is planning to do a dig at the site of a medieval chapel there next summer. Perhaps you could have a look first."

"Of course, said Parkin.

"I'm visiting nearby with my family. Perhaps I'll come over for a couple nights."

Professor Parker stared down at his plate.

"There has been severe erosion on that coast." Rodgers continued, between mouthfuls of soup. "I believe the site is now almost part of the beach now."

"Do you have an exact location?"

"It's near the Globe Inn, at the north end of the town. Where are you going to stay?"

"At the Globe Inn, as it happens." said Parkins. He swallowed hard. "I'm afraid you would find it rather dull, Rodgers. You don't play golf, do you?"

"No, thank Heaven!" said rude Mr. Rogers.

"When I'm not writing I shall be out on the golf links, I'm afraid."

Rogers laughed loudly. "It's all right. I won't come if you don't want me," he said. He winked and nudged the person next to him. "I just thought I could help to keep the ghosts away."

Parkins face turned pink.

"Sorry, Parkins," Rogers continued. "I forgot you don't like to joke about these topics."

"Well," Parkins said, "I do not like careless talk about what you call ghosts. A man in my position," he went on, raising his voice a little, "has a responsibility——"

Parkins was a very serious man, perhaps lacking a sense of humour. He was at the same time sincere in his beliefs and a man

deserving of the greatest respect.

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On the following day, Parkins travelled to Burnstow. His room at the Globe Inn was very big, with twin beds. These were spaced far apart.

There was a large table, surrounded on three sides by windows looking out to sea. Those on the left and right offered views along the shore to the north and south respectively.

To the south, there was the village of Burnstow. To the north, there were no houses, only the beach and the low cliff behind it. Immediately in front was a strip of grass, leading to a broad path and then the beach.

There were few guests at the Globe during the winter months but Colonel Wilson was also staying there for the golf. The Colonel a large man, with a loud voice joined Parkins on the links in the afternoon. He cheerfully agreed to help Cambridge man improve his game.

The Colonel's enthusiasm drained away as the game progressed. Parkins played very poorly and much of the afternoon was lost to searching for his ball. He was also extremely slow.

By the close of play, the two golfers were not speaking. Parkins did not accompany Colonel Wilson back to the hotel. He hoped his partner would be in a better mood when they met again at dinner later that evening.

## **The Ruin**



Professor Parkins walked back along the beach alone. In the poor light, he did not see a bigish stone concealed by gorse and tripped over it. He fell into a patch of broken ground, covered with shingle. Soft turf grew around, it cushioning his fall.

Dusting himself down, Parkins realised that he had stumbled across the site of the chapel ruin. He took out his pocket notebook and began to make notes about the site's dimensions. He observed that the patch of broken ground was a rectangular shape. An altar, perhaps?

Kneeling down on the turf, he reached for the penknife he always carried. The earth was loose and easy to scrape away. Underneath was masonry but a small area of this had been deliberately removed, creating a cavity.

Lighting matches, he tried to explore the hole. One match after another blew out. Parkins persevered, tapping and scratching the sides with his knife. Then he used his hand, to push further into the hole.

His fingers touched something smooth and metallic with a tubular shape. He managed to grip the object and he pulled it free.

"It's some sort of short pipe," he thought. He was unable to identify the found object more precisely in the dim light. "I will return tomorrow," he decided, placing the pipe safely in his pocket.

## **groyne**

In the gathering dark, Parkins resumed his journey back to the hotel. To the west, a faint yellow light shone down on the links. A few

figures moving towards the clubhouse were still visible.

The beach was intersected at intervals by black wooden **groynes**. Out in the darkness the murmuring sea rolled against them. The wind was bitter from the north, but was at his back. He made good progress.

Looking back, he was surprised to see a figure on the horizon. This person appeared to be running in his direction. Parkins stopped and waited. Was it someone he knew? It seemed unlikely on that lonely shore.

For some inexplicable reason, the running figure did not gain ground and remained an indistinct figure on the far horizon.

Parkins checked his pocket watch. He was already late for dinner. Turning on his heels, he hurried back to the hotel.

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Back in his room, Parkins took out his discovery from his pocket. With the light from his candle examined it closely. He now saw it was a brass whistle. Instinctively, he put the whistle to his lips.

There was no sound. Parkins examined the whistle again. It was full of a fine sand or earth. He loosened this with a knife and poured the debris onto a piece of paper. When the whistle was clear, he and took the whistle and the paper over the table.

Opening the window, he tipped the debris out. The night was clear and bright. A man was standing on the shore in front of the inn. Parkins was a little surprised at the late hours people kept at Burnstow,

He shut the window and held the whistle under the light. Now he could see there were two inscriptions. One he did not recognise:

# FUR FLA BIS FLE

The other was is in Latin.

## QUIS EST ISTE QUI UENIT

He tried to translate this from memory. "Who is this who is coming?" he thought.

Lifting the whistle to his lips, Parkin blew gently. He was startled and yet pleased at the soft, smooth yet powerful note he had produced.

He closed his eyes and a picture formed in his mind as the sound faded. A lonely figure was running down the beach in the darkness

A sudden surge of a gust of wind blew against the window. A flash of white, like that of seagull's wing, appeared and then vanished somewhere outside in the darkness.

He blew the whistle again, harder. This time no picture appeared, but a powerful wind now came through the open window. It blew out both candles.

Parkins struggled to close the window. The wind created a tremendous pressure. Then it suddenly slackened, and the window seemed to close itself.

Relighting the candles, he checked for damage. There was nothing broken. In the room above, he could hear the Colonel moving about.

The wind continued after Parkins went to bed. On it went, moaning and rushing past the house. Its desolate cry was unsettling as he lay in the darkness.

Parkins could not sleep. The wind, the golf, and the ruined chapel all raced around his mind. He lay on his bed counting the beats of his heart, fearful that it might stop at any moment.

Wind rattled the windows and he could hear the tossing and rustling of sheets nearby. Was that the Colonel? In the darkness, he could not tell the direction the sound was coming from.

## The dream



Parkins drifted into the world between sleep and consciousness. He was back the long stretch of shore he had walked earlier. Cold rain was falling softly.

At first, there was nobody visible. Then, in the distance, a man appeared. He was running along the shingle, jumping and clambering over the black groynes. Every few seconds he looked back.

Though his facial features were blurred and indistinct, the runner's movements conveyed fear. He was tiring and each successive obstacle seemed to cause him more difficulty than the last.

Then he fell on the sand. There, he remained crouching under the groyne, without the strength to continue.

What was he running away from? At first, there was no indication. Then, far up the shore, a something light-coloured began moving with great swiftness and irregularity. It grew larger, this pale, figure in pale, fluttering fabric.

There was something frightening about its jerky movements across the sand. It ran across the beach to the water-edge and back again. Then, rising upright, it accelerated forward.

It moved terrifyingly fast. In moments, it was almost upon its prey. Now upright, it raised its arms high, before darting forward. Parkins drifted between sleep and consciousness. He dreamt he was back on the long stretch of shore he had walked earlier. Cold rain was falling softly.

A man appeared on the horizon. He was running along the shingle, jumping and clambering over the black groyne. Every few seconds he looked back.

Though his features were blurred and indistinct, the runner's movements conveyed a terrible anxiety. He was tiring. Each successive obstacle seemed to cause him more difficulty than the last until he collapsed on the sand. There, he remained crouching under the groyne, without the strength to continue.

What was he running away from? At first, there was no indication. Then, far up the shore, a pale fluttering figure began moving rapidly along the beach. There was something disturbing about its jerky movements across the sand.

It ran to the water-edge and back again. Then, rising upright, it darted forward, raising its arms when within reach of its prey. .

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Now wide-awake, Parkins stared at the ceiling. His heart was racing and he was breathing heavily.

Fearful of closing his eyes again, he struck a match. The flame went out. A second match burned long enough to light a candle. Picking up his book, Professor Parkins read until he fell asleep. For the first time in his life, he forgot to blow out the candle.

He awoke the next morning at eight. The candle was still alight and a mess of melted wax lay on top of the bedside table.

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After breakfast, Parkins returned to his room. The maid was making his bed when he entered. "Good morning, sir. I hope you weren't cold with that wind last night. Would you like an extra blanket?"

"Yes, thank you."

The maid left the room. She returned soon after

"Which bed should I put it on, sir?" she asked.

"What? Why, that one—the one I slept in last night," he said.

"I thought you slept in both of them, sir. That's why I've made them both this morning."



"No, I only slept in this one!" said Parkins, pointing to it. "I only used the other one to unpack my things yesterday afternoon."

The maid seemed confused.

"Enjoy you golf this morning, sir," she said, as she hurried from the room.

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"Extraordinary wind we had last night," said Colonel Wilson, his voice booming across the links.

"Indeed, Colonel."

"Someone must have whistled for it, as we say in my part of the country."

"Really? Do they still believe that old superstition?"

"You call it superstition," said the Colonel. "But they believe in it all over Denmark and Norway, as well as on the Yorkshire coast. There's generally something at the bottom of what these country-folk have believed for generations"

Parkins said quietly, "I don't believe in what people call the 'supernatural'."

"What!" said the Colonel, "You don't believe in ghosts, or anything of that kind?"

"In nothing whatever of that kind," returned Parkins firmly. "Those who believe in whistling for the wind confuse what we call in science correlation and causation. Simple fishing folk see someone whistling. Later there is a storm—"

"You think these events are unrelated?"

"Completely unrelated," said Parkins with conviction. "Now, take last night's wind. As it happens, I myself was whistling. I blew a whistle twice, and the wind seemed to come absolutely in answer to my call. If anyone had seen me—"

The Colonel raised his hand to stop the lecture. "Whistling, were you?" he said. "And what sort of whistle did you use?"

"It's rather a curious one I found yesterday," said Parkins, reaching for his pocket. "I have it in my—No; I've left it in my room. I'll show it to you when we go back to the hotel this evening."

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After lunch, the two men played all afternoon until the light began to fail. Only then did Parkins remember about returning to the ruin. "It doesn't matter," he thought. "I can come another day."

The two men returned to the hotel together. They were deep in a conversation about golf when they turned the corner that lead to the Globe. As they did so, a boy came charging along the path from the other direction. He collided with the Colonel.

"What on earth are doing, boy?"

Instead of running away, the boy remained hanging on to the Colonel until he got his breath. Then he began to howl with fright, while still clinging to the Colonel's legs.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" said the two men.

"He waved at me!" howled the boy, "Out of the window."

"Who waved? Out of what window?" said the Colonel.

"The front window of the hotel," said the boy. "I was playing on the grass in front when I saw him in the window. A man but not a man... made from the sheets on a bed!"

The men gradually calmed the boy down. "You go home now," said the Colonel, giving him a coin. "We will investigate. It was probably your friends playing a joke."

The Colonel and Parkins then went to the front of the hotel. They stood on the grass and looked up. Only one window was open.

"It's my room the lad was talking about," said Parkins. "Will you come up for a moment, Colonel Wilson?"

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Entering the room, Parkins lit the candles. "Nothing has been disturbed," he said.

"Except your bed," said the Colonel.

"That isn't my bed," said Parkins, moving towards it. The bedclothes were twisted together in an unnatural way. "Though it looks as if someone has slept in it."

They rang for the maid.

“Has anyone been into my room while I was out?”

“No, sir. Not since I saw you this morning,” she said.

“It’s a mystery,” said Parkins. “But I’m sure there is a rational explanation. By the way,” he added, “here is that old whistle I spoke of”

The Colonel turned it over in the light of the candle.

“Can you make anything of the inscription?” asked Parkins, as he took it back.

“No, not in this light. What do you mean to do with it?”

“When I get back to Cambridge I shall show it to the archaeologists. If it is significant, I will donate it to one of the museums.”

“Well, you may be right,” said the Colonel doubtfully. “But if it were mine, I should chuck it straight into the sea. I wish you a good night.”

The door closed behind him, leaving Parkins alone in his bedroom.

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Parkins read until he felt sleepy. Then he blew out the candle, and fell back upon the pillow.

He slept for an hour or more, before a noise woke him. For a few moments, he stared at the ceiling, eyes open, breathlessly listening to the sound of movement. He was sure it was coming from the empty bed.



Turning over sharply, Parker looked across. To his horror, a figure was sitting up in the other bed. In an instant, Parkins threw off his bedclothes and raced across the floor to the window.

The figure arose with a sudden smooth motion, spreading out its arms and forcing Parkins back. The professor screamed as the linen-face pressed closer to his.



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Colonel Wilson heard a terrible, unearthly noise. He raced downstairs and forced the door open.

“I distinctly saw *two* figures wrestling by the window,” he said later. “But when I reached them there was only one! The poor professor fainted back into the room. In his arms were the twisted sheets from the second bed.”