

Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad

By M R James

Part 7

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson, the students will:

1. recall the main events of the previous instalment;
2. listen for gist;
3. retell the main events;
4. raise their awareness of the relationship between punctuation and pronunciation;
5. read out a short extract from the story;
6. discuss a modern film adaptation of the story.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (full audio) and Track 2 (a short extract) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

Summary: The story is set in Burnstow, a seaside town on the east coast of England. It tells the story of how a university professor makes an interesting discovery with disturbing consequences. It is told in seven parts. In Part 7, the final instalment, Parkins finally comes face to face with the mysterious figure that has been haunting him.

Activity 1

Aims: to recall the main events of the previous instalment; to share predictions of what will happen in this last part of the story

1. Ask the students to work in small groups. Give them each a copy of the worksheet. Direct them towards Activity 1 and ask them to read and order the three short extracts from the previous instalment (Part 6).

Key: 2; 3; 1

2. Now ask them to recall the most significant events from Part 6.

3. Tell the students that, in this instalment, Parkins is finally going to come face to face with the figure that has been haunting him. Write the following questions on the board (or dictate them to the class).

1. Where does he first see the figure?
2. What does it look like?
3. What does it do?
4. What effect does this have on Parkins?

Ask the students to discuss the questions in small groups. Field answers from the groups and write them in note form on the board. Do not give any information away at this point.

Activity 2

Aims: to listen for gist; to read for detail

1. Ask the students to listen to the final instalment of the story and compare their answers in Activity 1 to the facts in the story. Play Track 1.
2. Ask the students to work in pairs and compare their answers to the questions. Encourage them to remember as many details as possible.

Key: 1. *in the other bed; 2. It looks horrible and is made of a crumpled linen sheet.; 3. It gets out of the bed and stands between Parkins and the door, then it searches the bed for Parkins before lunging towards him at the window.; 4. He is terrified.*

3. Give each student a copy of the transcript. Ask them to work in pairs or small groups and answer the questions in Activity 2 on the worksheet. Check the answers with the class.

Key: 1. *the noise made by the screen that Parkins had made to block out the light of the moon when it fell to the floor; 2. because he hears a noise in the other bed; 3. because he sees a figure sat up in the 'empty' bed; 4. to the window because he thinks he might be able to use the stick he had used to build the screen to defend himself against the figure; 5. It leaves the bed and goes to stand between*

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Parkins and the door.; 6. because it feels its way around; 7. Parkins lets out a noise when the figure brushes against him.; 8. He occupies the other bed, presumably because he knows Parkins won't want to be left alone.; 9. He throws the whistle into the sea, perhaps because he believes it is haunted and that the figure came for the whistle.; 10. Parkins would have fallen out of the window or lost his wits.

Activity 3

Aim: to raise awareness of the relationship between punctuation and pronunciation (commas and pauses)

1. Ask the students what they thought was the climax (the most exciting moment) in this final instalment. Allow them a few minutes to identify an extract in the transcript and then ask them to explain their choice to the class.

2. Ask the students to listen to a short extract from the story and see if it is the same as the extract they chose. Play Track 2 and ask the students to comment on how the narrator conveys the drama of the moment. (*At key points, he speaks excitedly and at an increased volume, strongly stressing key words and pausing briefly in order to build suspense.*)

3. Ask the students to look at the extract on the worksheet (Activity 3). Tell them that all the commas are missing. Ask them to listen again and add in commas where the narrator pauses. Play Track 2 again.

4. Ask the students to compare their answers with another student. Then tell them to check against the transcript.

Key: See the extract in the transcript, marked Track 2.

5. Ask the students to listen to the track again and read out the extract in time with the narrator.

Group activity

Aims: to discuss the main characters; to choose actors who could play their roles

1. Ask the students to work in small groups to think of five adjectives each to describe the two main characters in the story, Parkins and the Colonel.

2. When they've finished, write the following questions on the board:

- Why did you choose these adjectives?
- What else do you know about the two characters?
- What do you imagine they look like?

Ask the students to discuss the questions in their groups.

3. Ask the groups to report back on their discussion. Tell them that they are going to be casting a modern version of the story. They must discuss the following things:

- How will the story, and its main characters, be different now that the story is set in modern times?
- Which actors should play the two lead roles?
- How will the ghost be depicted?

4. When they have decided, ask the groups to design a poster for their film with:

- a new title;
- a tag line (usually one sentence, summing up the contents of the film);
- a single image.

You may first want to look at other examples of posters for horror movies or ghost stories and discuss the use of tag lines and images.

Alternatively, instead of each group working on their own poster, you could ask the students to present and explain the choices they made in task 3, then vote for the best film idea. Students could then design the poster as a whole class.

Follow-up tasks

1. Ask the students to write a simplified version of the story, one that would be suitable for intermediate-level learners.

2. Ask the students to write a review of the story, including a personal response.

3. Ask the students to look for online film versions of the story and compare them to the version they listened to. Ask them to think about the following questions:

- What changes, if any, have been made?
- Are they an improvement? Why? Why not?

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Activity 1

Put the extracts in the order they appeared in Part 6.

1. When he had read a somewhat solid work long enough to produce a decided wish for sleep, he cast a drowsy glance round the room, blew out the candle, and fell back upon the pillow.
2. As they turned the corner of the house, the Colonel was almost knocked down by a boy who rushed into him at the very top of his speed, and then, instead of running away, remained hanging on to him and panting.
3. It certainly did: the clothes were bundled up and twisted together in a most tortuous confusion. Parkins pondered.

Activity 2

Read the transcript and answer the questions.

1. What wakes Parkins up?
2. Why does he turn over in bed?
3. Why does he jump out of his bed?
4. Where does he run to? Why?
5. What does the figure do?
6. How does Parkins understand it is blind?
7. How does the figure find Parkins?
8. What does the Colonel do for the rest of the night? Why?
9. What does the Colonel do when he leaves the room in the morning? Why?
10. What would have happened if the Colonel hadn't appeared?

Activity 3

Listen to the extract. Add in commas where the narrator pauses.

It leapt towards him upon the instant and the next moment he was half-way through the window backwards uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice and the linen face was thrust close into his own. At this almost the last possible second deliverance came as you will have guessed: the Colonel burst the door open and was just in time to see the dreadful group at the window. When he reached the figures only one was left. Parkins sank forward into the room in a faint and before him on the floor lay a tumbled heap of bed-clothes.

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Transcript

Track 1

He must have slept soundly for an hour or more, when a sudden **clatter** shook him up in a most unwelcome manner. In a moment he realized what had happened: his carefully-constructed screen had given way, and a very bright frosty moon was shining directly on his face. This was highly annoying. Could he possibly get up and reconstruct the screen? or could he manage to sleep if he did not?

For some minutes he lay and pondered over the possibilities; then he turned over sharply, and with all his eyes open lay breathlessly listening. There had been a movement, he was sure, in the empty bed on the opposite side of the room. Tomorrow he would have it moved, for there must be rats or something playing about in it. It was quiet now. No! the commotion began again. There was a rustling and shaking: surely more than any rat could cause.

I can figure to myself something of the Professor's bewilderment and horror, for I have in a dream thirty years back seen the same thing happen; but the reader will hardly, perhaps, imagine how dreadful it was to him to see a figure suddenly sit up in what he had known was an empty bed. He was out of his own bed in one **bound**, and made a dash towards the window, where lay his only weapon, the stick with which he had propped his screen. This was, as it turned out, the worst thing he could have done, because the personage in the empty bed, with a sudden motion, slipped from the bed and took up a position, with outspread arms, between the two beds, and in front of the door. Parkins watched it in a horrid **perplexity**. Somehow, the idea of getting past it and escaping through the door was intolerable to him; he could not have borne – he didn't know why – to touch it; and as for its touching him, he would sooner dash himself through the window than have that happen. It stood for the moment in a band of dark shadow, and he had not seen what its face was like. Now it began to move, in a **stooping** posture, and all at once the spectator realized, with some horror and some relief, that it must be blind, for it seemed to feel about it with its **muffled** arms in a **groping** and random **fashion**. Turning half away from him, it became suddenly conscious of the bed he had just left, and **darted** towards it, and bent over and felt the pillows in a way which made Parkins **shudder** as he had never in his life thought it possible. In a very few moments it seemed to know that the bed was empty, and then, moving forward into the area of light and facing the window, it showed for the first time what manner of thing it was.

Parkins, who very much dislikes being questioned about it, did once describe something of it in my hearing, and I gathered that what he chiefly remembers about it is a horrible, an intensely horrible, face of crumpled linen. What expression he read upon it he could not or would not tell, but that the fear of it went **nigh** to maddening him is certain.

But he was not at leisure to watch it for long. With formidable quickness it moved into the middle of the room, and, as it groped and waved, one corner of its draperies swept across Parkins's face. He could not – though he knew how

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perilous a sound was – he could not keep back a cry of disgust, and this gave the searcher an instant clue. It leapt towards him upon the instant, and the next moment he was half-way through the window backwards, uttering cry upon cry at the utmost pitch of his voice, and the linen face was thrust close into his own. At this, almost the last possible second, **deliverance** came, as you will have guessed: the Colonel burst the door open, and was just in time to see the dreadful group at the window. When he reached the figures, only one was left. Parkins sank forward into the room in a faint, and before him, on the floor, lay a tumbled heap of bed-clothes.

Colonel Wilson asked no questions, but busied himself in keeping everyone else out of the room and in getting Parkins back to his bed; and himself, wrapped in a rug, occupied the other bed for the rest of the night. Early on the next day Rogers arrived, more welcome than he would have been a day before, and the three of them held a very long consultation in the Professor's room. At the end of it the Colonel left the hotel door carrying a small object between his finger and thumb, which he cast as far into the sea as a very **brawny** arm could send it. Later on the smoke of a burning ascended from the back premises of the Globe.

Exactly what explanation was **patched up** for the staff and visitors at the hotel I must confess I do not recollect. The Professor was somehow cleared of the ready suspicion of **delirium tremens**, and the hotel of the reputation of a troubled house.

There is not much question as to what would have happened to Parkins if the Colonel had not intervened when he did. He would either have fallen out of the window or else **lost his wits**. But it is not so evident what more the creature that came in answer to the whistle could have done than frighten. There seemed to be absolutely nothing material about it save the bed-clothes of which it had made itself a body. The Colonel, who remembered a not very dissimilar occurrence in India, was of opinion that if Parkins had **closed** with it, it could really have done very little, and that its one power was that of frightening. The whole thing, he said, served to confirm his opinion of the Church of Rome.

There is really nothing more to tell, but, as you may imagine, the Professor's views on certain points are less clear cut than they used to be. His nerves, too, have suffered: he cannot even now see a **surplice** hanging on a door quite unmoved, and the spectacle of a scarecrow in a field late on a winter afternoon has cost him more than one sleepless night.

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Glossary

Glossary

clatter a series of loud short noises made when a hard object hits against another hard object or surface

bound (mainly literary) a long or high jump

perplexity a confused feeling that you have because you cannot understand something

stooping bending the top half of your body downwards

muffled wrapped in thick clothing or cloth

groping trying to get to a place by feeling the way with your hands

fashion (old-fashioned) way

dart to make a sudden quick movement somewhere

shudder to shake because you suddenly feel frightened

nigh (old-fashioned) near

perilous (mainly literary) very dangerous

deliverance (literary) the process of being saved from danger or harm

cast (literary) to throw

brawny physically strong, with big muscles

patch up to put together quickly

delirium tremens a serious medical condition caused by drinking too much alcohol

lose your wits to go mad

closed (rare) fought

surplice a loose white piece of clothing, worn over other clothes by priests