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*Lines on the Reverend's Black Beard / To Michal Williams*

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Simone Wilson

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ter that, I realized I was being silly and everything else was routine.

They were both silent for some time. Then Clarissa said: "And what do you think about it now?"

He turned to her, and shrugged. "What am I to think?" he said. "There it is; that was what happened. I suppose I could persuade myself easily enough that it didn't, for I'd almost forgotten that it had till you dragged it up. But I don't want to."

"Why not, Mr. Challis?" Clarissa asked.

"Because it would be paralyzing myself," he answered. "I would do it willingly enough if I thought it was right, if I was being morbid or... or delirious or anything. But this now seems all so plain and certain. You don't think I'm being morbid, do you?"

She said: "Now, I don't. But will you let me, before we go on, put you through a medical examination? I'm a doctor, you know, and I promise I'll tell you exactly what I think afterwards. It would be a check for both of us. If there's anything physically wrong, we shall know; if not, I may ask you to do something for me."

"There's my lung, you know," he said. "But just as you like. Now?"

"Why not?" she said. "Come into the other room, will you?"

Three-quarters of an hour afterwards, Challis was settling his tie, and Clarissa was standing by the table glancing over her notes. When he turned to her, she took up a box of cigarettes, offered them to him, took one, and as he threw away the match said: "Let's sit down. Now, Mr. Challis. First of all, you're entirely sound, so far as I can find. The lung is nothing. You're as near normal, physically, as any ordinary man can hope to be. Does that satisfy you?... Very well. Second, I've listened to everything you could say, and I believe implicitly everything you say. I believe that something happened, and you knew of it; that there was a shock which, as near as you could hear it, sounded like a bomb, and that what you saw in that room was much like sand as a body, though at present it keeps the shape of a body. I believe you saw it move, and I quite certainly believe that it was something no child had better come near — nor anyone else if it can be helped. Does that satisfy you?... Very well. And thirdly I want to know if you will come again to that house to-night with me."

"Of course I will," Challis answered. "Why not? I don't quite see why you want to go; our people ransacked it pretty completely. But if you'd like to look over it again, I'll certainly come."


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TO MICHAL WILLIAMS

(on the news of her passing)

The old substantial glory fades:
Gone is the blank between
The imagiric stuff of which we're made
And the long-suspected dream
From which, in likeness there portrayed,
The Empire took its theme.

Done is the vigil of memory
For years by death enforced.
The Love exchanged through each to each
Reflected a larger course
As in the Emperor's House of Unity
She joins him at Its source.

—Simone Wilson
February 19, 1970

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LINES ON THE REVEREND'S BLACK BEARD, BEGUN 20 JUNE ANNO DOMINI 1965 AT THE REQUEST OF HIS LADY-LOVE

The aesthete in her wanted it
For symmetry it gave;
Farbeit from her to admit
Nostalgia for the cave.

And though in church it may distract
Her from a prayer or two,
How strangely things opaque can act
To slant the Glory through!

—A Charles Williams Character