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***The Noises That Weren't There* Chapter II: The Voice of the Rat**

Charles Williams

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The Noises That Weren't There Chapter II: The Voice of the Rat

Abstract

Initial chapters of an unfinished novel by Williams.

The NOISES THAT WEREN'T THERE

by Charles Williams

Chapter II: THE VOICE OF THE RAT

Note: I should like to acknowledge the kindness of Alice Mary Hadfield, who worked with Charles Williams at Amen House, Oxford University Press, for providing the typescript of "The Noises that Weren't There." In a recent letter Mrs. Hadfield says that

the novel was, in fact, written "at the end of his (Williams') life. It follows from *All Hallows' Eve*, and has a war-blitz-bomb-city background. I know of no reason why he didn't intend to finish it, and take it that he did." — Dr. Glenn Sadler.

About an hour later, Clarissa was sitting in her brother's flat, looking at his painting. Jonathan himself was leaning against a table, close to his wife Marjorie, who was coiled up in an armchair; they too were looking at it. Jonathan was two or three years younger than his sister, broader and a trifle shorter. The impression he gave, especially when, as now, they were in close neighbourhood, was of solidity contrasted with her more formal fineness. They had a profound and intimate affection for each other, with that emotional sensitiveness which sometimes, but not always, resulted from childhood spent in close companionship and without other friends. Both Clarissa and Jonathan had seemed to the other children of the district a little remote, and they had known it. They had been pleasant and agreeable, but on the whole they had preferred to play long and complicated games of their own. In their youth those games divided them; and now where once their fantasies ran together, now their capacities walked separately. But each of them entertained a respect for the other's apprehension and comments. Of the two, Jonathan preserved the greater silence; he listened to his sister's histories, if she told him of them, and his occasional questions sometimes recalled details which even she had forgotten. But what his private judgment was she did not know. It was not necessary or not yet; it was sufficient that they should live in sympathy.

The painting before them had only just been finished. Jonathan had wished his sister to see it at once, and she had promised to go down that afternoon. 'Though, mind you,' she said when she arrived, 'I can't stop long.'

'Hair, isn't it?' Jonathan asked. 'Well, you must do this properly. I'm no more going to have my pictures scamped than you your hair.'

'You shan't, my dear,' said Clarissa. 'And anyhow it isn't hair. It was going to be, but now I've got to ring up the Colonel.'

'O well, you can do that from here and then we can go back to the picture. Something new?' He asked the question as he might have done of any serious practitioner of his own art.

'Yes,' she said. 'Something the Colonel showed me. I'd like to tell you about it when I know a little more.'

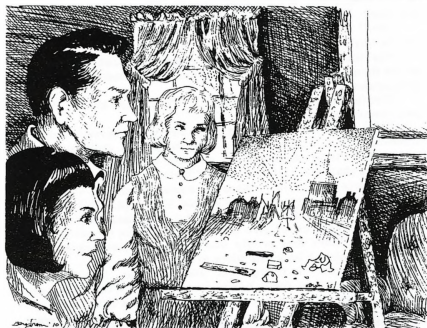
'Any time,' Jonathan said. 'Have you roped the Colonel in? What fun you do have, Clarissa!'

After her talk with Chal, the word struck her with a fuller meaning than the phrase usually held. She said, laughing: 'I suppose I do, though I hadn't quite realized it till to-day. Where's the painting?'

'In here. Sit down... and don't quote Wordsworth.'

'Wordsworth?' Clarissa asked blankly, after exchanging a kiss and a smile with Marjorie, but her brother only waved at her impatiently, so she docilely sat down as she was told. The painting was on an easel at a little distance. She set herself to look at it.

It was part of London — she thought, of the City after a raid. There was a wide stretch of open desolation in front, and a few houses in the background; towards the right a shape which resolved itself as probably St. Paul's, incidental as that might be. The time was early dawn, the sky clear, and the light coming from the yet unrisen sun beyond the group of houses. The light was the most outstanding thing in the painting; indeed, as Clarissa gazed, it seemed that it stood out from the painting and threatened to dominate the room itself. At least it so dominated the painting that all the other elements and details were contained within it, and seemed almost to float in light as does the earth itself. Indeed the colours were so managed that the usual slight consciousness of distinction between colour and representation vanished. Here a beam of wood painted amber was more than that; it was a



beam of amber; the light of that sun had become amber in order to become wood. The colours indeed were so heightened that they were almost at odds; there were critics who said that Jonathan Drayton's colours screamed, but most admired them, so that, young as he was for it, he had been invited to be one of the official war-painters. His *Aeroplanes over Paris by Night* and his *Submarine Submerging* had been two of the most famous artistic successes of the war. He had been for a few months on leave in preparation (it was understood) for the Peace Conference, when he would be expected to produce brilliant records of historic scenes, and no doubt would. He had once said that he was what Haydon was meant to be, and that he was not in the least inclined to be 'over meed in rolling off upfolded thunderings.' Before that thunderings could be upfolded, however, he had spent his time in painting, privately and with great energy, two pictures. The first was of his wife, which now hung in their dining-room, its only picture; this was the second.

Clarissa sat and gazed. Her eyes were led, by those apparent vibrations of light, back towards the sun, hidden behind the houses. But there the style of the painting came fully into its own, for there the spectator became convinced that that sun was not only localized there, as in a diagrammatic sense it certainly was. 'Here lies the east; doth not the day break here?' But also everywhere in the painting it was hidden in the projected shadows and lay in ambush in the shape of St. Paul's. It would have burst through, had it not preferred to change itself into colour and form and restrain its greatness within those other limits. Clarissa said at last: 'This is your best thing, Jonathan.'

'Yes,' said Jonathan. 'I think it is. You like it better than the Marjorie?'

'They're different,' she said slowly. 'There - I don't know if you meant it - but there the clothes covered the light. It was startling enough; no woman was ever painted like it before; the body itself was simply made up of light, but the clothes covered it. Here the light's in everything.'

'I'll try another of Marjorie before the conference begins and I have to start on Churchill,' said Jonathan. 'Like Blake drawing God and his wife turn - about. You're right, Clarissa. I wondered if you'd catch the difference. Yes; I've come on in four months.'

'Two, darling,' said Marjorie, 'if you mean since you finished with me.'

'Four - no, six, since I finished the submarine,' her husband said. 'That wasn't bad, but I do better on land.'

'No,' Clarissa interrupted, 'it isn't so much that you do better, Jon, but you unconsciously expect the light effects in the sea and air and not so much in the earth. So it's more surprising, especially as it's not just translucent. It's - I don't know what it is.'

'The Je ne sais quoi,' said Jonathan. 'No, Clarissa. We had all that out in the last century but one. The French adored the Je ne sais quoi, and Hogarth laughed at them. He said it had become "the fashionable term for grace."'

'He was quite right,' Clarissa answered.

Jonathan shook his head at her. 'No, no, my girl,' he said severely, 'he didn't mean what you're trying to make him mean; he was talking art, not religion. Learn from another great man, who said: "I never travel to heaven to gather new ideas."'

'No?' said Clarissa; 'where did he get them then? and who was he anyhow?'

'Sir Joshua himself,' Jonathan answered, 'and as for where he got them, he preferred mere common observation and a plain understanding.' So do I.'

Clarissa nodded at the painting. 'That?' she asked. 'Common observation?'

'Well, the more you paint the more you observe,' Jonathan allowed. 'I didn't once. That's why Marjorie's clothes haven't got it. But I'll do another of her and then we'll see.'

'What shall you call this one?' Clarissa asked.

Marjorie struck in. 'What he wanted to call it, Clarissa,' she said, 'was Marriage, quite simply Marriage. Till I pointed out that a wild stretch of rubble and a few shadows under the name of Marriage might give quite a lot of people the wrong idea. Jon always thinks that people who look at his pictures will first of all see whatever he wants them to see.'

'So they will - in fifty years,' Jonathan said. 'All the same, once it has got into their heads, it would be the best thing said about marriage in our generation. But perhaps a little literary?'

BALLADE OF A STREET DOOR by Charles Williams

As I came up into the town
Wherein my father's house abide,
I met a man in tattered gown,
In ragged garment blowing wide,
With terror fleet and open-eyed;
'Ho, whither now so fast, I pray?'
Fearfully looked he back and cried:
'I pulled the bell and ran away!'

'Good sir, if thou hast held renown
Among this people, be my guide!
I from their welcome, not their frown,
In shelter would obscurely hide.
For when, being tired, a latch I tried,
Whence came a sound of revels gay,
Fear rose within me like a tide, -
I pulled the bell and ran away.'

'A voice called "Bring the festival crown!"
And running footsteps gateway hied,
Wherethrough I heard, as they came down,
Great names that challenged and replied,
And torchlight through the chinks I spied:
My soul became a wild dismay,
And as the doors began to slide
I pulled the bell and ran away!'

L'Envoi

Prince, was it you and I whose pride
So turned, so fled, upon our Day?
Was it our voices then which sighed
'I pulled the bell and ran away?'

'By the way,' said Clarissa, 'what mustn't I quote of Wordsworth?'

'Oh Clarissa,' exclaimed Marjorie, 'even I guessed that. "The Light that never was..." I want him to call it "The light that always is..." Then no-one will make a mistake.'

'Literature again!' Jonathan grunted.

'My dear, I don't quite see why you're so down on literature,' Clarissa protested. 'I mean, both you and Wordsworth were talking of something that was either there or not there, weren't you? Don't you approve of me, say, learning to see?'

'Without stopping to point out,' Jonathan said gloomily, 'that in this case Wordsworth said it wasn't there, I may say that I do. It's very easy to borrow an impression, think it's yours, and plain understanding; that's the only way. From which I conclude that it's time for you to ring up the Colonel. There's the other phone, you know, if you want to be private.'

'No; this'll do, thank you,' Clarissa said. She lingered for a last glance at the painting, and then went across to the telephone, which was in a corner of the studio, and dialed Scotland Yard. Jonathan sat down by his wife and began to talk to her softly. Clarissa said presently: 'Scotland Yard... Colonel Benton, please... Miss Drayton... Colonel? Any news of the P.M.?''

The Colonel said: 'I don't understand this at all. The most unbelievable thing has happened.'

Clarissa said in a voice so clear and strong that it attracted the attention of her brother and his wife: 'Stop, Colonel... Shall I tell you? shall I? Very well then. The body has disappeared.'

The others heard the Colonel's exclamation. 'Am I right?' Clarissa went on. 'I am.' She drew a deep breath and seemed to rest on the words. 'It's true then,' she murmured, almost to herself, 'it's true... No; I doubt if you could call it a guess; the whole thing was too suggestive. Tell me - just briefly: Inspector Challis is coming to the house with me to-night, and he might bring a copy of the report, if you'll be so kind. But meanwhile, what actually happened?'

'Dr. Grinley did the P.M.,' the Colonel said. 'He made a superficial examination with no results except (he says) an extraordinary appearance of flabbiness. After that, he made a medial incision, which means he began to cut open the body longways - Oh, I forgot you were a doctor! The moment the knife entered, before he had begun to cut, the body completely dissolved. There was a gush of air or gas or something, and all he had before him was a pool of some sort of fluid held together by a dusty scum. Of course, he collected what he could of it - I've seen it; it's unhealthy looking stuff - and it'll be analyzed. The poor girl must have had some extraordinary disease or other. Tropical perhaps.'

Clarissa said: 'You needn't be sympathetic, Colonel; there wasn't a poor girl. And if there was a disease, it won't be found by analysis. Dust and water is all you'll find, I think; the air's gone. There was very little fire. But I won't keep you now. You'll take care that the Inspector has the report? I'll come and see you to-morrow.'

'It's all most extraordinary,' the Colonel grumbled. 'I don't see how the case can go on. If there isn't a body here, and if there isn't any evidence in the house, we couldn't possibly prove murder.'

'I don't think there was a murder,' Clarissa said. 'But we'll talk of it to-morrow. Goodbye and thank you.' She put the receiver down and paused; then her eyes went to the painting and she stood looking at that. The others waited. Presently she sighed a little, as if from a full heart, and came across to them.

'Well...' she said. 'To me, at least. I make no comment.' 'Common observation and plain understanding,' he answered, almost as if pledging himself. 'I can't say less, though I don't like you to say more.'

Marjorie broke the pause that followed. She stood up. 'Tea, children,' she said. 'No, Jon, not in here. Come into the drawing-room.'

As they went, Clarissa said to her sister-in-law: 'Tell me, Marjorie, what do you think of them?'

'Of Jon's paintings?' Marjorie asked, making the tea. She was smaller than the Draytons, fairer, and more supple, and now as she considered the question, she seemed to set herself to translate something into a medium to which she was not very used. 'I think they're extremely beautiful,' she went on. 'He hasn't got my ear very well, but he admits that. And sometimes he can be tiresome about putting bits in.'

'Yes,' said Clarissa, 'but the painting -- this light of his?'

Marjorie drew her brows earnestly together. 'O that!' she said. 'Well, I think that's very good. I mean... that's what it is like, isn't it?' She began to laugh, and went on: 'I never have quite known what all the fuss was about. Of course, Jon is a very good painter, and I don't know why everyone doesn't see it. But he's not particularly unusual, is he?'

Jonathan struck in. 'You have to remember, Clarissa,' he said, 'that Marjorie does a good deal of work on my stuff.'

Marjorie began to blush. She said: 'Nonsense, darling.'

'Painting,' Jonathan went on, 'is apt to tire me out, and then I don't get to sleep, or shouldn't, if Marjorie didn't manage to be awake -- when it's necessary -- instead of me. It's taken us a good while to get into the way of doing it, and I was very obstinate about it at first -- very haughty and independent and unselfish. But I learned.'

'And you tell me, Marjorie,' Clarissa asked, '--no, I know you don't, but you tell me: I like to hear -- you don't ever feel stale and disagreeable the next day or several days and -- let loose?'

This time Marjorie did actually blush. 'Really, Clarissa,' she said, almost sharply, 'that would be a lot of use to Jon, wouldn't it? What would be the good of his sleeping at night if he had to spend his time soothing me down by day? Jon and I manage things better than that, I hope.' She relaxed into smiles, and added: 'Have some sense!'

'So I have, I hope,' Clarissa said, laughing outright. 'Forgive me, Marjorie. I told you I only wanted to hear you say so. You've no idea how charming you are when you're indignant. "Virtue in her own shape/How lovely,"' she added, throwing a mischievous glance at her brother. 'I don't wonder Jon paints as he does, but I begin to see how the light comes to him.'

Jonathan looked at his wife. 'Yes,' he said. 'Still you should hear her if I leave a tube of paint in the drawing-room.'

'O well!' Clarissa said. 'You wouldn't approve if she put a streak of green over your best crimson. I think you're both remarkable people.'

'Normal, normal,' said Jonathan. 'Common observation and a plain understanding.... Are you going?'

'My dear, I must,' Clarissa said. 'I've got to be ready to go out at half past six with my inspector. You must meet him. You'd agree about common observation.' She went to kiss her sister-in-law, breathed 'Pray for me!' in her ear, whirled Jonathan with another kiss, and was gone. The other two looked at each other.

'Clarissa's worried,' Marjorie said.

'Hardly worried -- did you ever see Clarissa worried? But she's got something on her mind.'

'What was all that about a body?'

Jonathan shrugged. 'She'll tell us when she chooses. I only hope she doesn't want you to do something for her. You ought to sign the pictures along with me. Or I will for you. "By M. & J.D." Why haven't I thought of it before?'

'You certainly will not,' Marjorie said with energy. 'I should be very angry indeed. Why, it's no more than buying a brush for you at the Stores. Anyone could do it, only... it's happier for me. And anyhow you don't leave tubes of paint in the drawing-room. I can't think why you said you did.'

'I precisely didn't,' Jonathan pointed out. 'I said she ought to hear you if I did. So she ought. When will you sit for me again?'

'Any time, now the children have gone back,' Marjorie answered. She paused in putting the china together, and a greater gravity came into her voice. 'But, Jon, if you're going to do me again...' She paused. Her husband stared at her. 'Well, angel?' he said.

'Well,' said Marjorie, '--I know it was my fault, in a way, and of course we've no business to do it again so soon, but it was a dark day and both the girl and I were tired.... Still, I don't think I'd think of it if you weren't a great man, and it's no use pretending I shan't feel better.... Would you mind if...'

He took her by the arms. 'As Clarissa almost said to the Colonel, "Stop, Madam. Shall I tell you?" A new frock. And you had one for the last painting.'

'I know,' said Marjorie, 'and the worst of it is I've no money at all. But, Jon, I couldn't be painted again in that one.'

'And yet,' he said, 'you'd go without sleep and food and shelter and peace -- yes, and even clothes too -- to get one of my colour-schemes right, if I were bothered. And would I put the wrong colour in to give you a tooth-ache? I don't know. Ought I to? I don't know, and at least no one else does either, which is a consolation. Besides I like the other frock.'

'O darling, you can't,' Marjorie protested. 'But it would be



LILITH, OUT OF HEAVEN

Lilith rises, Lilith runs

Runs to the hole in Adam's side

And, trowel-like hands exploring before her,

Enters the rare adventure of man-womb.

Adam's asleep - God has done sleep to him -

But Lilith's awake, Lilith watches, Lilith waits

Watches for the Tempter whose belly is full now

(Later to be scraped away by miles of crawling)

Waits for his failure

Sucking breath from the failures of Satan and man

Never forgetting the deep mystic heaven-hole womb

in Adam's side

A round shaft without top or end, unenterable to her.

Lilith cries rejection, weeps isolation,

Closes in revenge.

--Galen Peoples, November 28, 1970

sweet of you.'

'Make me immortal in a dress,' he said and kissed her; then he held her off and looked at her. 'Could I paint you at the point of a kiss?' he said. 'No; not yet. It's a spiral in light. Well, we'll go and buy it together. Immortality has its obligations, and the nation will be, very properly, paying.'

'You're a dear,' Marjorie said.

In the upper flat Clarissa's thoughts were taken up with similar subjects, but while Marjorie was brooding on immortality she was considering the immediate present. She did not wish to look grubby for her dinner with Chailis, but neither did she wish to wear anything that could be spoilt by the inevitable grubbiness of an empty house. Certainly, if she could, if money had been limitless or sufficient costumes obtainable, she would have put on her most admirable clothes; it seemed to her becoming that she should go to any such investigation bathed, handsomely clothed, and discreetly adorned. Modern wars might impose a uniformity of colour upon the battle-dress of armies; but these spiritual reconnaissances ought to be more like medieval conflicts, conducted on her side in colours and coats of arms. Discreet and effective dress was a minor glory, a badge of mankind, a display of intelligence, the term (in its own kind) of heavenly grace itself. 'A fashionable term for grace,' she thought, remembering her brother's protest against the confusion of artistic with religious meanings. She knew that he was right; one permitted oneself the ambiguity of such words, even in the lightest way, only by leave and a certain

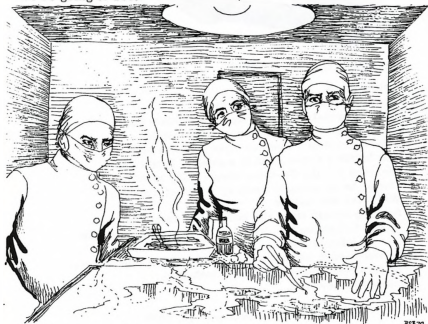
risk. Too many falsities had been nourished in such illudities; too many follies thrived in such confusions. Still, there was no good reason why one meaning should not lucidly propose another; if 'grace' might mean 'elegance' and might mean 'aid from heaven,' and if elegance might mean a certain kind of aid from heaven, she did well to be pleased with the thought of exact and fortunate clothing as a prolongation of spiritual grace. Since however money was not limitless, she must limit her bravery. She put on a suitable gown and coat for the dinner, but she packed a more serviceable uniform in a case, with sandwiches and a thermos. Delicately correct in all the degrees, she polished her nails and used her lipstick, rejecting in every movement that insipidity which distinguished (she suspected) that poor power responsible for the flaccid imitation of womanhood that had polluted earth that very day. She smiled at herself in the glass and heard the door-bell ring.

Challis had put on a dinner-jacket. With the growth of the consciousness of peace, there had been a gradual resurgence of such things. He half-apologized: 'but I must be one or the other. I can't sit on the hedge.'

'Whereas this,' said Clarissa, 'is the hedge. One side of it, however - the side of the high-road - is packed in the case. May we put it in the car?'

As they came past the door of Jonathan's flat, it opened, and he and Marjorie came out. Jonathan raised his eyebrows at the case. 'Flitting by moonlight, Titania?' he asked.

Clarissa stopped and made introductions. 'And does this grandeur mean a special show?' Jonathan said. Clarissa looked sideways at her companion. 'We don't quite know yet,' she said. 'We're going to see.'



'We,' said Jonathan, 'are merely going to the local flicks. The gods, you may remember, approve the depth but not the tumult.' As Clarissa passed him he laid a hand on her shoulder. 'And take care of yourself,' he added in a low voice. She glanced quickly at him, saw in his eyes the serious recognition of love, and was deeply contented. The alien of her heart was sensitive and strong. His absurd quotation rang in her centre, enlarging the depth it praised. She answered lightly: 'O I will,' and heard herself adding, as she had to Challis that afternoon, 'And God preserve the right!'

When they had started, Challis, driving slowly, said: 'I've got a report for you. Would you like it now?'

'No,' she said. 'I'll look at it after dinner. You've read it?'

'Yes. The Colonel showed it to me when I went for the car. He also showed me the container; they'd brought it there before sending it to the analyst. The Colonel told me Dr. Grinsley was quite shaken up. I was a little startled myself, especially when I'd looked at the - remains. Not that there was anything remarkable about them.'

Clarissa said: 'What did they look like?'

'Water,' said Challis, 'water mostly, just faintly discoloured, with a kind of scum of dust on top and a black sediment at the bottom. There wasn't anything disgusting about it except for knowing that it had been a girl's body not long ago.'

Clarissa said: 'Had it? I told you not to forget the sand.'

He was silent for a while, driving quietly on; then he said: 'Yes. I wonder whether that had something to do with it. Miss

Drayton, I wish you'd tell me what you think of it all. I know you think I shouldn't understand or shouldn't believe you. But I honestly think I might. At least I'd try. You think it's something - supernatural, don't you?'

Clarissa said: 'I - yes, I do. But the point is, Mr. Challis - look, we can't go on Mr. Challising and Miss Draytoning one another if we're in a thing like this together. What's your Christian name?'

'Richard,' he said. 'And thank you kindly, Clarissa.'

'O! you know me,' she said, a little taken aback. 'I suppose the Colonel told you.'

'No,' he said. 'I looked it up in the telephone directory. Feeling, like you, that the social correctness of Miss Drayton was hardly enough to start-to-night on. I also looked you up in the *Medical Dictionary, the Publishers' Reference Catalogue* - not that I found you there - and anywhere else I could.'

'That was very nice of you,' she said, 'though I'm afraid you didn't find much. . . Well, but, Richard, the point is that I want to tell you everything, but I also don't want to tell you till to-morrow or at least till after to-night. Could you bear that?'

'Certainly,' he said, 'if you think that's best.'

'What I want, if you will,' she went on, 'is that you should notice anything that happens, if anything does, without arguing with yourself about it. I'd like you to be clear. Afterwards, to-night or to-morrow, we'll talk.'

'Clear is the last thing I feel,' he said. 'But I suppose I can attend to whatever seems to be going on. You rather sound as if you expected something to be going on.'

'I suppose I do,' she answered, 'but I can't say. Something certainly is going on; the only question is whether we shall know about it. Or whether it will know about us.'

'O!' said Challis blankly. 'Yes. . . I hadn't thought of that. Is it - was the sand and that girl's body a part of it?'

'I think it was,' Clarissa said, 'but I don't think it's likely to try and damage us unless we attack it. As they say animals don't. And we're not going to be active to-night; I shouldn't dream of being active without a priest. But my uncle the Bishop is in Wales, and -'

Challis, in the midst of his preoccupation, grinned suddenly. 'My uncle the Bishop!' he repeated. 'How magnificently right you are, Clarissa! You ought to have an uncle a Bishop!'

'So I have,' she said. 'The Bishop of Caerleon. He's coming to London in a day or two, and I shall talk to him. Only you and I may as well get all the information we can first.'

'Very well,' he said. 'There's the river. We'll be there in a few minutes.'

The house, when they went over it, offered nothing out of the common. It held no sinister atmosphere, and the dim sense of decay was no more than would have been expected. It was of two stories, with four smallish rooms in each, a basement below containing a kitchen, a scullery, and a cellar, and a large attic above. There was a small strip of neglected garden behind, in which were a mass of nettles, a stunted evergreen bush, and a few dead plants. A fairly high wall separated it from the yard of the warehouse beyond.

As they climbed stairs and opened doors, Clarissa listened for any renewal of the noises she had heard earlier in the day. But she heard nothing, except every now and then the very faintest hint of hidden movement. The silence indeed now rather astonished her; empty houses next door to warehouses were usually much more infested by actual mice or rats than this showed any signs of being. In the end, unlighted, they returned to their car and went off to dinner.

During dinner, Clarissa refused to talk about the house or almost anything else connected with what is called the supernatural - including her uncle the Bishop. It was true, as she soon realized, that only by a great effort could Challis relate bishops to the operations of the supernatural; he found it much easier to believe in ghosts than in priests. The one (whom he had not seen) impressed him, at least, fabulously, with a sense of awe; the other (whom he had impressed him only with a sense of repulsion. It was certainly a different repulsion from that exercised on him by the sight of the apparent sand. He thought them foolish and therefore disagreeable; he felt the other somehow fatal and disgusting. But there was, all the same, a slight resemblance; the faint horror that so often flickers over the lower reaches of that farther world affected him in both. Clarissa for a moment doubted her wisdom in bringing him; he was intelligent and sincere, but hardly adult; his agnosticism - if it could be called that - was adolescent. She almost wished she had asked Jonathan to come instead. If Jonathan

than were agnostic - and she did not quite know - his agnosticism went the whole way. However she had not asked her brother, and she had asked Richard.

Much of the conversation, however, concerned Jonathan, for Challis had a pretty taste in pictures and entertained a reverence for Drayton's work. Even Clarissa, highly though she approved, frequently thought she had met such a regard, always felt that faint astonishment which people do feel when their relations are praised. This is partly because most people move in quite other circles than their relations; so that to meet their names in conversation is like meeting them personally in a strange street - not unpleasant but quite unexpected. One is a little taken aback by the general identity of interests well as by the particular admiration. Challis knew the war-paintings, but only in reproductions; he had not seen the originals, so that it was the earlier work he chiefly knew.

'Reproduction,' he said, 'must ruin his effects more than most. I very much want to see the colour of the sea in the submarine painting.'

'You must come up and see his latest things,' Clarissa told him. 'There's one of his wife and one of the City - most extraordinary. A kind of solidity of fresh light. Who was it said that "Matter is the house of light"? That's what his point is.'

'He always had that clearness,' said Challis. 'Don't you remember the moonlight in *Doves on a Roof*?'

'Yes - but that was the moon,' Clarissa answered. 'There was all that cold unliving business; now it's as if he'd come into the sun, or the sun into him. In a way, it's terrifying. I mean that with the doves or the submarine or even the air in the aeroplanes over Paris, one feels that the thing itself is always there to be seen if one could. Like something of Lepine. The thing is like that. But this -' She paused.

'This?' Challis asked.

'I almost feel that to see it is to be in it,' she answered, and looked towards the door. 'It's there, waiting for us to go into it. No; it must be here too, as if Jon's right. Richard, is the coffee a compound of light?'

She smiled at him, and as he felt again how quick, how fresh, how joyous her smile was, he answered sincerely: 'I could easily think you were.'

She looked at him as if she only half-heard, and as if the half she heard were impersonal, and not personal. She said: 'If one was like that?'

There was a silence. Challis felt that he understood exactly what Jonathan Drayton's portrait of his wife was like; only he doubted if even Jonathan Drayton could get on to canvas any likeness of the absolute wealth of power-in-light which sat opposite him. He wished to see the whole of her body radiating glory; only he might not dare - and then he knew that now at least, if never again, he could certainly dare. That courage was now natural to him; it would not even be courage, and yet it was something which, anywhere else, with anyone else, would have been courage. But not now, and with her.

She stretched out her hand; he looked at it with such a rising sense of intelligence, that he felt almost idiotic not to understand what he was being intelligent about. That shining hand expressed a centre of intellect, but what it was he had no idea. He heard her voice. 'The report, Richard perhaps I'd better look at now.' He took it from her pocket and gave it to her. As he did so the thought of its content flashed across him and seemed at that particular moment more monstrous than before - the thought of the dead body which, at one small cut, had dissolved into fluid and scum and sediment. Then, as she spread out the paper and, her chin propped on that hand, began to read, the monstrosity lost its horror and became something small and trifling compared with the dark head, the steady eyes, the shining depth of light that was the flesh of the woman opposite. It was not even incongruous; nothing could be incongruous with that, so central was it - not the dead girl, nor the obscene sand, nor the other dead girl in his own life (and the memory of her rose more sharply in his mind), nor aeroplanes over Paris or London, nor anything of the war, the crashing and the rending, the torture and the blood. He leant back, at peace for the first time in many months, and waited for what she would say.

What she did say was: 'Yes, I see.' It was not perhaps quite the exact revelation for which he had been waiting, but he had a conviction that the revelation was somewhere about; probably it was his own slowness that did not make clear immediately what her fingers, as they folded the paper, were undoubtedly saying. He ought to have had a course of instruction in this, lectures of interpretation; he had had courses enough in one thing and another, and it

seemed a pity to have missed this. 'Matter was the house of light' was the first maxim, and if he had known Jonathan Drayton or Sir Joshua Reynolds, he would have added that this was undoubtedly a matter of 'common observation and plain understanding.' Well, perhaps some other time.... While he had been feeling all this he had also been listening. She had gone on: 'We ought perhaps to be getting back now.'

He stood up. Clarissa looked up at him, in her eyes a lingering shadow of doubt. She was almost on the point of sending him away; she was not at all afraid to go alone, and he seemed to her very young. She was not quite enough experienced in personal relations to have realized that this sense of childlikeness in him was partly that felt whenever a relationship grows intimate. It is, to their friends, in the greatest prophet and the noblest woman; it can, at times, be maddening beyond words but also it can be beyond words lovely. It can, in a flash, change into its precise opposite, as it did at this moment, for while Clarissa thought she was looking at his child's simplicity, she found suddenly that she was in fact gazing at his power. He stood over her; he said: 'Let's go.' As she too rose, she found herself wondering which of them was taking the other. Their hierarchy, as she had felt it, was in a flash reversed, and she realized that in one particular voice which she would at once recognize, he had said: 'You had better not go to-night,' she would at once accede, though she would probably dispute it for some time. But he did not, and when they were back at the house it was she who once more took charge.

She settled that the watch should be kept in the room where the body had been found; there, while Challis brought their small paraphernalia into the hall, she changed into her older clothes. Then they carried the things into the room and settled themselves in the corner at the end of the right hand wall. They brought in one of the car lamps, in case it should be useful; they set their sand-wiches and the tinnos at hand, torches, a pad of paper. There they settled themselves. Clarissa said: 'And now let's begin. Say anything you want to, but we'd better not talk too much; it's distracting. But if you notice, or think you notice anything, say so.'

They put out their torches; then he felt her hand in his. The two hands exchanged pressure and withdrew. A distant clock struck eleven; the vigil began.

As they waited, there came through the open holes in the walls the sound of the City. It was faint enough, compared with what had once been; the life of the nights before the war had not yet returned, and was not yet likely to return. There were now few troops in London; petrol was still scarce and food not much more plentiful. Restaurants did not yet keep open late, and few theatres had returned to their earlier hours of opening. But the great darkness had been lifted; many windows were now, from mere delight, uncurtained; there were many more pedestrians, more voices, more laughter. A throbbing of resurrection held the night; the City stirred from its preoccupation and began again to think of joy. Poor and perverse, to many, that joy might be, hardly worthy to be called by that august word. The re-action from the war would soon be, in some, towards excitement; in some, towards sheer bad-temper. The pains and problems of Europe and the hour were very great; and far away, in the East, the armies and navies and air-fleets moved to their duty still. But the change in the City could not be content, for however brief a time, with any word but joy. The mere survival of its life held that promise, and the joy it had again triumphed, and where humanity triumphed a promise of joy lives. The great City began again to be, it was London, and it was more than London; it was Moscow and New York and Paris and Pekin and all the smaller towns; it was even Rome and Berlin and Tokio, for those cities too were to be held within the heart of that compassion for which the war had been fought. It had, certainly, been begun first for self-preservation; nations had not entered on it until, directly or indirectly, they had been compelled by the Enemy. But, as things had turned out, by the evil and foolish choice of the Enemy, compassion had been forced on the grand allies. Like it or like it not, they precisely suffered for and with each other; they lived and died and fought and triumphed for and in each other; they were exactly compassionate. And still, all that while, by word and act, by declarations and fusillades, in camps and prisons, the Enemy rejected compassion. He asserted continually his unique privilege, his supreme prerogative; he and he alone was to be fed, nourished, served by others; he and he alone had no need to be compassionate. With each step and word of supremacy he became more dependent, till presently the single voice of any remote peasant became more and more a matter of great moment to him, and the overlords of Berlin strained at a

whisper in the mountains of Norway or Greece. Compassion, once rejected, returned with ironic power.

It was not to be denied that others might have been as evil; it was certain that, by the mere stress of danger, they had not been. London, in its darkness, expecting doom, had been forced on compassion; that inexorable law, the first of human necessities, had watched with it and survived with it during the year of fire and death. Its children had died in it or lived with it through its terrible justification; or, if by necessity they had been removed, had remembered it and almost with trembling rejoiced in it. 'London, thou art of cities a per se.' A per se indeed, since that September Saturday when first, for many years, in full day it blazed again to the skies. Challis now, remembering, felt as Clarissa had done, that that which had happened could not have happened. It could not be but that the Infamy had succeeded, and that London and all England had fallen. The almost undefeated City had perished, and now, forgetful of its past doom, knew itself again in a new earth. The dream (as so often) seemed likelier than the truth; the impossible itself was less strange than the improbable.

But the dream was destroyed for him, as it was not for Clarissa, by his awareness of an intimate death. He was dead? No, his wife was truly dead. He could not confuse the two; the separation had been too sudden and too intense. It had made him wise, with a wisdom that conditioned all later knowledge. Nothing could be without it; its nature entered into all. The fantasy of London



dead and living - mighty in its own kind - was impoverished and dwindled by the recollection of that one dead girl; her remembered heart against his beat down the lesser imagination with an image more bitter and more lasting. This was Death. The sight of Clarissa at dinner did not undo that loss; it accentuated it and lived within it. Without that loss he could not have seen so well; and (though this thought was hardly present to him) the recent handclasp might have had in it another kind of warmth which now his mere physical fidelity forbade.

To-night, as they waited and the City sounded, he felt even more. She was dead - yes; but ever since he had used the word 'supernatural' some other thorn of consciousness had pricked his brain. He had used it without any precise thought, but the use had imposed on him a kind of sensation of thought. She was dead, but her very deathheightened that word 'supernatural'; it was what she, not being, was. But being that, had she not still being? The illogical ambiguity teased him in the backways of his mind; in this house, among hinted and suppressed meanings, with disturbing phenomena he could not trust, the one phenomenon he had trusted stood out more clearly. His knowledge of her had had about it little of the great romantic vision, and he was not therefore tempted to dispute its truth. It had been a warm, healthy, earthly, loving she whom he had known and who had died.

Here - not here; there - not there; neither here nor there; being for ever, yet not being at all; opposite balanced opposite till

his brain swung. And still, through the vast holes, the sound of the City drifted, something to which he was entirely used and yet something fresh and new, as the noise of it might come on a fortunate morning to a man waking from delirium - *tam antiqua, tam nova*. But though it pleased, it did not appease him. It could not - not yet - unite his more profound dichotomy; here... not here; there... not there. There were two sides to everything, to everything that was, or perhaps to everything that wasn't; and they swung backwards and forwards in his brain. He strongly suspected that he was going to sleep; he felt the exquisite indulgence; only there was a kind of creaking which prevented him. It was as if his own thoughts, swinging in the stir of that wind which drove the clouds through the sky so that a continual change of moonlight and shadow fell through the holes on the floor of the room - his own thoughts, so swinging, creaked like a sign or a shutter in the City. He could almost see the double-sided thing, but he could not now make out what was painted on either side, design or legend. The half-vision grew in him, and he forced himself awake, but though the fantasy of shutter or sign vanished, the noise remained. He could hear - and now he knew he was awake - the creaking, harsher and more grinding than when he thought it was a dream; almost a groaning, but it was not human; a house itself, hung by iron fastenings, and tossed, might sound so.

A hand touched his; a companionship returned. He was steadied; the noise was no more than a noise. He said, in a low voice: 'Can you hear it?'

'It's upstairs, I think,' she answered, and added, after a minute: 'Yes. Come on up; bring your torch.'

Out in the hall the Darkness was dense, Challis looked at the front door which stood open on the shadow-swept moonlight, but even that did not seem friendly; it was almost like a moat about a prison, and they in the prison, with only that heavy creaking present to his consciousness; all else cut off. He had, at times in his career, been in physical danger, and he did not feel in danger now. But he did feel as if he was near some danger that did not directly affect him; something was going on in which he had no part, but in which the woman beside him had a part. He felt that he ought to know more; somewhere in his past he had neglected some piece of information which, now and here, he ought to know. In that sense, but in that sense only, he was her inferior; but he was level with her on the stairs and when they reached the landing their torches shone steadily side by side.

Clarissa said: 'In here, I think,' and moved towards the room directly above that they had occupied below. She opened the door, and as they entered the sound of that heavy creaking which had been with them all the time that they had mounted the stairs, seemed first to be left behind them and then to fade away. Challis had hardly time to be aware of this, for he had hardly taken two steps into the room when he found himself suddenly thrown sideways with such force that he lurched violently against Clarissa, and had he not instinctively clutched her arm would have fallen. For a moment he thought that he had overthrown both of them, but she was steady under the shock, and (as it seemed) prepared for it. Her smile flashed sideways at him with a brightness sharper than the light of their torches; had he then remembered her brother's paintings he might have thought that the edge of the light in them cut out the dark for an instant and was gone. He tried to recover his balance, and that he now found was what he had to do. The floor beneath them was swaying from side to side like the deck of a ship in a breeze. As soon as he realized this, he adapted himself. He had not time to consider that the upper floors of houses do not sway from side to side as if they rode the ocean; he had enough to do to poise himself on that riding floor. The opposition in his mind had become a fact under his feet. Yet there was no wind in the room; he looked out through the porthole and saw sky and moon and driven cloud, but within all was still. He thought he heard Clarissa's voice - but it was so soft that he could not be certain - say: 'The Prince of the Power of the Air,' but the phrase meant nothing to him, and as, ashamed of his unintentional clunt, he let go her arm, he became less and less certain that it was she who had spoken. It had been a breath in his ear, if it were not only a thought in his mind, though where such a thought came from he could not tell. Balancing himself on that swaying floor, he turned his head toward Clarissa. He saw she was watching him, but before he could speak her eyes changed. A sudden earnestness filled them; one hand flew to her lips as if in warning and the other made a gesture of silence. At the same moment a completely new voice said sharply: 'Is anyone there?'

It rang in him as when a man in the second of waking hears himself called, or at least hears a call and believes it to be for him, and at once from the mere shock cries out in answer. But Challis' eyes were so on Clarissa that at first this new voice did not penetrate; he was held, within and without, by the vigour of her concentration. The voice again rang through him; it became a repetition; it said, with a kind of shrillness in it, but not at all hysterical, rather with a plaintive challenge: 'Is anyone there?'

He knew, even at that moment, that Clarissa was trying to hold him back from any answer, and for his part he was perfectly willing that she should. He shut his mouth firmly; he had had to have his voice under control on many occasions, and so now; but he could not altogether prevent himself thinking; and somewhere in him, even under Clarissa's eyes, there sprang an emotion which, translated into speech, would have been: 'I shan't tell you.'

The shrill noise - it was rather a noise than a voice; a kind of humanized squeal, but articulate and even imperious - said: 'Who? who?' That at least was what it seemed to say, and now he began to pull himself together. For one thing, the floor had stopped swaying; for another, through the hole beyond Clarissa there was only the moon in a clear sky and no drifting cloud; for another, Clarissa herself was no longer making gestures, but only looking at him seriously and full. He felt himself, somewhere within him, saying: 'no'; and then he was smiling at Clarissa, and finding himself a little surprised that she did not smile back. He did not, after her warning, quite like to speak first, but he did not know why she was looking so serious; unless -

The rat - it must be a rat - squealed again, but he took no notice of it, for a much more important thought had struck him;

she couldn't be thinking - or could she? - that he was ill or drunk? They had only had a little wine, hours before; still, he had been reeling about and grunting... she might wonder... He said: 'What have I been doing? It did not seem as if...'

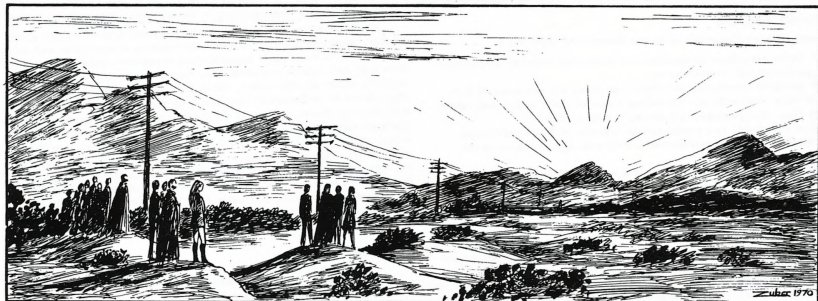
She cut through his words. She said: 'We'd better go,' and began to move towards the door. He started on another half-apology, changed his mind, and said: 'But we haven't found out anything, have we?'

Her hand pressed his arm, but she said nothing. They came down the stairs and into the room below. They collected their things, and still in silence carried them to the car. While they did so, he was aware of the same rat's squeal, recurring from time to time. It was, he thought, a little odd that he should hear no other sound, no scurry or rush in the walls, but the thought was unimportant and faded. Presently as they got into the car he ventured to say again: 'Did you find out anything?'

Clarissa moved her head; he was not sure if she shook it or nodded. The calm of her apparent competence was shaken, and he did not well know how to respond. But presently, as he drove, he said: 'Something's happened to worry you; something new. Tell me,' and when she did not answer, he said again, and she felt once more, as she had after dinner, that now he had taken charge: 'Clarissa, tell me.'

She answered: 'I've gone further than I meant; we've gone further. I've found out all I thought, and I'm afraid it may have found us out. When we get home come in and we'll talk. You'd better know everything now.'

LAST: Chapter III - untitled



REMEMBRANCE OF DAWN FANDOM by Bernie Zuber

Mythcon Reports

Glen GoodKnight

Since Mythcon has caused a multitude of experiences for so many people, we've decided to offer several short impressions of the convention, rather than one long "official" one.

To me, Mythcon was a long-held dream come true. But then realized dreams are always unexpectedly different from those one carries in his mind. I needn't go into the long planning by many others besides myself to make Mythcon come true. At the con itself, I got very little sleep. Three hours the first two nights, and five refreshing hours the third night. I could have gotten more sleep if I had wanted to, but there was so much happening that I didn't want to miss any of it. As a result I was really tired out by the second day. I must be more prudent next time... (so they say).

There were so many highlights, I feel I would be practicing favoritism just to mention a few, but I will. The slide show with its surprise (see World of Fanzines); the opening session where I got to spout off some ideas I felt very relevant that had been

gestating in my mind for a long time; the musical program; the masquerade (where I nearly passed out from wearing that horrible Tash costume for three hours, suffering from exhaustion, heat, little air, and less eyesight); our Guest of Honor, C.S. Kilby, speaking on the Inklings (that was a real dream come true. What a man! The person to be Goff at the first Mythcon, and how well received he was by all); Dawn Fandom - a truly "numinous" experience (when the sun finally came up I shouted a few lines from Lewis: "It comes! It comes! Sleepers awake! It comes! The Stone Table is broken! Asian is alive!" This sounds corny now, but it seemed very appropriate at that moment). And the people. There was a special atmosphere that I find impossible to put into words.

The con is now several months past, and it has passed out of immediate consciousness into the "mythic time" of memory, but there it becomes something alike to what Hyoi said to Ransom: "A pleasure is full grown only when it is remembered."