The Noises That Weren't There Chapter III & IV

Charles Williams

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Abstract
Initial chapters of an unfinished novel by Williams.

Additional Keywords
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When they were in the flat she turned to him. 'Richard,' she said, 'you're in danger. I think I did wrong to ask you to come.'

He stood and looked at her; then he said with a lightness which contrasted with her gravity: 'Well, you can't leave it at that, can you? Tell me, and perhaps we can do something to dodge the danger - or defeat it.'

She said: 'I've been something like a fool... Can you still hear the rat squeaking?'

'A kind of echo in my ears,' he admitted. 'But I thought it was only an auditory hang-over. Ought I to suppose it to be anything more?'

She drew a deep breath, and motioned to him; they sat down. She said: 'I hope you'll be able to believe this, because then we can do something. All that we've been seeing and hearing is quite real.'

'I haven't been seeing anything,' he put in mildly.

'Well, perhaps not,' she said. 'But you've heard the noises, and felt the floor swing. And I saw... never mind.'

A slight shudder took her; she quieted herself and went on: 'What you heard was real, though not in the way you heard it. Something is going on; something useless and futile, however shocking; something behind our senses. But we hear it or feel it through our senses, and what we hear or feel is the kind of thing it's most like of all we've ever known or imagined. Besides, you did see something; you saw the heap of sand. Shall I tell you what it was? I warn you it'll sound silly, but if I were you I wouldn't be too sure that it's so very silly. That was the devil trying to make a body.'

Richard looked at her. She was leaning forward, a little pale, her eyes fixed intently on his. But there was still about her something of the power of light he had seen in her at dinner. Her pallor was not a lack of colour; it was itself a power and hinted a translucency. Her voice was quiet and strong. It would be an exaggeration to say that he did not believe in the devil; never in his whole life had he supposed the word 'devil' to have any serious meaning. Nor did he now, though he saw that to her, so looking and speaking, it had a very serious meaning; and so with the other phrase - 'trying to make a body'. The whole sentence would have been gibberish, if any other than she had spoken it, in any other then and there. It was the single fact of her which held him, for the necessary few seconds, silent, grave, attentive. She had paused, without relaxing, for those few seconds, and before he had stirred she was again speaking.

'I think that may sound nonsense to you. Forget the words, if you like; only think of what they might mean. Think of everything that's happened, and tell me if it mightn't mean something like that, even to you. Think of the heap of sand you saw there, what it was like and how it moved - you said it moved! - and then you saw it was the shape of a body, didn't you? And what happened? You know; you've got it all typed out, all signed and dated. It couldn't bear the steel. No, because it wasn't a body; it wasn't a
girl at all. It was pretended flesh, made of motes of dust and water and blown air, all gathered together and held together, and to be pushed out into the world, but for some reason it wasn't good enough, or perhaps whatever made it lost patience suddenly, and threw it down. That invisible rage exploded like a bomb; it was what you thought was a bomb; there isn't anything else it could so nearly sound like. Why that filthy doll wasn't shattered I don't know; just by chance it wasn't and so it was there to be seen and even lifted and carried about, though at that it wouldn't have lasted long. It wasn't an organism, not even a dead organism; it was only a silly shell. So when it was cut, it dissolved. What else could happen, when there was nothing there to cut up?

As she paused, her vehemence greater for her control, his thought went back to the uncleanness of the thing he had seen in the moonlight. His flesh was faithful and remembered, and was revolted by the memory. His body grew cold, as if the autumn night were changing to winter, or as if the room were touched by a cold beyond the night's. The shrill sound in his ears sang higher in the cold; tearing more fiercely at the ear-drums it was too remote to reach. Her voice had made him forget it, but it had returned. It was still clinging to him, asking him something, worrying like a rat at a rabbit's throat, or his own throat. But it could not reach either ears or throat, for he knew that he was holding himself apart, not answering, letting it happen, almost (in a heart he had not known he had) disdaining it. In that scornful aloofness of his soul, up which, quicker than any rat could, the shrill voice ran and fell, he could believe (however unintelligible the mere words) that the devil was trying to make a human body; it was a code phrase - they used them sometimes in the police - for what was happening. She was right; he assented; and as her voice again took up the tale, found himself assenting to more.

As if conscious of his partial surrender, she modified her vehemence; she spoke now not to compel agreement, but to display facts. 'When I was there this morning,' she said, 'I heard it. It was still snarling and raging because it was pure rage - in the stillness when the sounds that are the image of spirits come. Once I saw a remote glimpse of something like it - fac me salvum, Domine - and I felt it to-night in that room, the room that seemed to you to be swinging.'

She shrugged a shoulder. 'As near as anything' she said. 'What you felt was that ceaseless moment of something struggling with matter. I know they will tell you it is all energy nowadays; so it may be. But it is still energy doing one kind of thing and not another, or there'd be simply no distinction at all; and what you felt was two kinds of energy meeting. Even to make such a fabric, such a kind of pseudo-organism, as they tried here, they must have a link, and that link must be given them by man. In the old days it was generally a living being - a rat or a dog or a monkey or even a flea. They like that best. But it can be a room or a house or a human being imprisoned in the house. I've known an imbecile used like that, and an old daft woman. If it can get at someone rational who will have dealings with it, it likes that best of all.'

He said, and now in spite of himself his breath came more thickly, and the cold in the room was sharper: 'You mean that there was something there and it's trying to get hold of us?'

'Oh not like that,' she said. 'It'd be a long way for us to the covens and the sabbaths. But it does want you to attend to it, only to attend to it, I said you were in danger, you'd read, you'd know; you find the same kind of story everywhere. There are spirits among all the spirits who want above everything what is called incarnation, and the thing that was in that house to-night is one of them. The lowest and most vicious woman who ever walked this earth is a saint compared to that.'

'Well, but, even if it's true, what's so wrong about it?' Challis asked. She stood up and he also. She said: 'I doubt if I could make you see it. I know you would if you could, but how can you? One can't get used to such ideas all at once. It looks as if, until to-night, I'd hardly taken it quite seriously; but not seriously; not if you keep your head and are good. It's tiresome and you must be careful.' A faint smile came upon her face. 'Richard, you must be good.'

'I thought,' he said, 'that the devil was there - if there is a devil - to prevent us being good.'

'No doubt he wishes it,' she answered, 'but he wishes his own satisfaction first. He wishes to get into flesh. If you'd read, you'd know; you find the same kind of story everywhere. There are spirits among all the spirits who want above everything what is called incarnation, and the thing that was in that house to-night is one of them. The lowest and most vicious woman who ever walked this earth is a saint compared to that.'

He turned his eyes from her as she paused, and stood looking down at the carpet. She saw him preoccupied and she too was silent. Under the influence of her words, however little his rational intelligence might approve, the happenings of the last night and day grew into a kind of union. A night and a day ago he had first felt that soundless shock, and then (still shaken by it) he had seen in the moonlight that shape which, while he looked, had been a shape and a body but certainly no real body, for he himself had seen the dusty discolored fluid into which, at the first probe of human intelligence, it had changed; and then that very night, in the same house, he had become aware of that swaying in the void; he or the room? Say, he and the room, for the swinging and swaying was but an image of vibration beyond thought, a knowledge of something otherwise inconceivable, the beating through him of all that had given that house its dark reputation. And then, beyond that, the voice. That, however inarticulate, was still with him. He disdained it still. But now he knew how he held it off, how he remained deliberately silent, how (since the woman beside him had flung a warning at him in a gesture
which was more actual to him still than even her present
closeness) he had refused to regard the cry. Was he mad?
Was he imagining? Was he caught in some reverberating echo
down the range of his own body? Or was it real? And there-
fore was all real, of whatever unforeseen nature the reality
might be?

He looked suddenly up at her, and found her eyes fixed
on him, full of loving concern. If at that moment she had
been to preoccupy anything other, he might still
have doubted. He did not doubt. He met her look and relaxed
in it; the frank affection which in those eyes certified his own
experience eased the impact of experience. He began to speak,
and then found himself yawning; then his eyes began to
close and his head to nod. He made an effort to pull himself
upright; he had, he knew, something of the greatest import-
ance to do or say - or else she had; it was impossible that he
should yield to sleep on the very edge of activity. But even
while he tried to recover himself and recollect his duty, he
swayed upon his feet. 'I...I'm sorry,' he almost grunted. 'I
meant...tal' to you...you...'

'He was her due to the divine Omnipotence, but also to
the divine Incarnation. But in that place of spirit where the
fundament on incarnation lay, there existed something other
than the divine movement towards earth. The records on
earth held strange rumours of beings at odds with their own
nature and bitterly covetous of another. The great religions
- and not the Christian alone - held a tale of superintel-
lectuals existing in that great ocean which is called angelic,
which desired to thrust into that other manner which is called
human. That world of spirit in which angelic movement lives
was no mere fantasy to Clarissa; she was conscious of it not
only by her beliefs, but by something of her experience. Cer-
tainly her experience was of a tiny kind; she had not seen
those lines of fiery pattern in which the angelicals subsist.
She had not, like the Bearer of the Incarnacy, talked face
to face with the glory which is Gabriel; she had not, like
the Jewish prophet, seized the face of God and beheld the
hexatropic creatures who adore the exhibited Presidency of
all creation; nor even glimpsed those lesser virilities which, so
radiating light that they seem to mortal eyes to be actually
clothed in white, hover from time to time within the measures
of this world. Once indeed, watching on some occasion of
her own, she had seen at a remote distance, a flash of molten
brightness; once, by the death-bed of her father, she had
smelt what seemed the fragrance of beatitude. But she did
not dare well on these moments, and the angelicals had not
otherwise disclosed themselves. They remained in their
proverbial places, aloof in all but love.

It was not so with those others. In the sacred books of
religion, in the records of magic and witchcraft, in the
writings of learned doctors, the same idea recurred. In the Jew-
ish scriptures it was said that 'the sons of God saw the daugh-
ters of men that they were fair'- 'videntes filii Del filias
hominum quod essent pulchrae, acceperunt sibi uxores' -
'they took them wives of all whch they chose'. Certain of
the angelic watchers of the Uncreated Glory turned their eyes
with overmuch desire to the created glory. Clarissa knew
very well that this might mean much more than it literally
said, 'Sons of God', 'daughters of men', were esoteric phra-
eses; and the state of man when such things were said was
different from his state to-day. It was held by some writers
that the desire of those spiritual Watchers was for earth
rather than for the women of earth; that they desired to
inhabit material creation. It was certainly true that those di-
vine existences could not love, even erotically, as men loved.
They loved, in the beginning, intellectually; they loved the
principle and the individualizing of the principle; they loved
with perhaps an angelic fury, but still angelically. Sin there-
fore for them must also be angelical, a breach of rational
order, an intellectual determination to thrust pattern into
pattern, and make of two natures a monstrous and forbidden
union. It was this which lay at the back of one tale after
another. The apparitions of incubi and succubi meant the cease-
less effort to impregnate or to be impregnated in order that
literally inconceivable children should at last be conceived.
the orgies of the Sabbaths were the frenzy of the same effort;
the attempt to gather young children into covens of witch-
craft was in the continual hope of producing some favouring
organism; necromancy and the raising of dead bodies was
never quite sure. But they would destroy. For whatever
anisms. Perhaps, after all, that Other had not done it; they
others would be as much. They would be as anomalous as
whence the dark records spoke as the Anomalous Wo-

Time was not now for any inmost felicity; her prayer, so
swiftly established as long habit enabled it to be, must be
for more active affairs. She had still in mind her own rash-
ness, as it seemed to her, and she had her apologies for that
to offer, since rashness as well as taudiness was a solemnity
in heaven. It was true she needed no more than a blush to
be free of what on earth might need something more formal
than a blush - recognition, rebuke, correction. She had in-
volved her companion in more difficulty than she had meant;
she must now renew her own effort on his behalf. But she
felt first the necessity to spread her knowledge of what was
taking place head and head; quite sure she would be.
For whatever of delights in the perversely-willed union they had at first
proposed to themselves, at the beginning of this spiritual
time, had by now almost disappeared. They were not capa-
ble, whatever they believed, of sensual satisfaction; they could only lust for the cold intellectual glut of satisfied malice, the oppression of men and women by what remained to them of intelligence. Almost every sin known to man is an exaggeration or depreciation of some natural instinct; this was, in its very essence, unnatural. It was exactly the wish of these beings to denaturalize themselves, to break into a different order, to be wholly other than what they were. It was therefore, of all sins, the most blasphemous and the most repugnant to thought, though in itself the most dreadfully simple of all. It was also impossible. These others could not do what their dupes in the covens and the diabolic schools could do. They saw this and it maddened them. They monotonously persevered; all temptation of man was an accident of this primal desire. If they could not be one with matter they would destroy matter; if they could not be human, they would destroy humanity. And in all the long history, there was never a record of success; the fabulous tale of Merlin was the nearest, and that was invented. In all the tumults of all the Sabbaths, when the witch shrieked under the pain of the cold intercourse, there was no true intercourse. In all the pseudo-bodies made of dust and air and water and false fire, there was no body that moved of it’s own volition or had rational thoughts or uttered with it’s own mouth a single individual word. But they could not cease, and it would not be permitted to them for their hour.

All this Clarissa had read and studied, but she had not properly known it till now. Now she did. Both the experiences of the night and her occupation at that moment accentuated the knowledge. In that house - why that house? Why not? The whole effort demanded locality and temporality; it was towards a material here and now. The life of her own spirit, reposing in its peace, saw in the depth of spirit this labour of profane spirit. It saw the pseudo-organism come into being; it saw it flung down. The sense of the swinging room might have been a result of that rage, or it might have been more. Clarissa did not so much see it as know it as the sign of that disunion of what in man was union, the point where spirit and matter met and were not made one, as they were in man. Man was not two things; he was one; he was made in the image and likeness of an energy which could operate as matter or as spirit. It saw the pseudo-organism come into being; it saw it condensed. Her face grimaced! her body shook. She was twisted with a bitterness into which her knowledge seemed to be still, and every now and then by what seemed a great effort it succeeded, and then it obviously muttered in Richards ear. As that happened, the shape before her solidified. As if her more calm contemplation of it grew pressed on it, it could not endure the steady gaze of certain knowledge, presently the double body began to change. A darkness, almost a small cloud, rose from it, and floated sideways, and was gathered into itself and dwindled. Richards own nature showed again, defined and human in his repose. Beside him stood at last the other shape. She saw it as what it wanted to be, or at least the nearest it could become to what it wanted to be, a form standing by the sleeping man. It was not much higher than his head as he sat, and its apparent mouth was set by his ear. It was clumsy and ill-proportioned; its head was too large, and its hands and feet. She knew - or rather the Protection that held her knew, and she only be derived knowledge; her knowledge came to being and only lived in that continuous action of blessing back the Protection which she felt - she knew that this shape was not even of the consistency of the body in the house. It was not, in any strict sense, yet properly concocted at all. The motion with which its head turned from side to side was not an action; it wobbled incapably on its side to side was not an action; it wobbled incapably on its side to side was not an action; it wobbled incapably on its head as it sat, and its apparent mouth was set by its ear. It was clumsy and ill-proportioned; its head was too large, and its hands and feet. 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The detail that brought it most to her mind was that the lips, though they certainly moved, opened and shut steadily and automatically; they did not correspond to the words. It seemed to be aware of this, and seemed they had much more closely to its enunciation when it spoke again. It said: 'Don't be tiresome. Why did you get into my house?'

Clarissa said: 'Perhaps to find you out.' Her voice echoed oddly in the room. In spite of its familiarity, there was a large emptiness in it. She spoke into a void, and she knew what she was saying was useless, if not silly and wrong. She added: 'And in the Name of God'.

At that the figure shivered slightly, as may a man in a sudden draught, but no more, and then as if it were unpleasantly amused it grinned. It said, and by now it had apparently gained complete control of its pseudo-organic body, for the sound of the false voice was much more confident: 'You'll have to do better than that.'

The words came with a clang of something shutting in the void. The cacodemon began to walk towards the door. At first it shuffled a little; then it lifted its feet too high; it nearly lost its balance and wrenched itself back in such a spasm of rage that Clarissa almost expected to see the body lifted and flung down as that other body had been.

--- END OF MANUSCRIPT ---

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