**CHAPTER 20: At the Hoose In Great Portland Street**

Fur a meenit Kemp sat in seelence, glowerin at the back o the heidless body at the windae. Syne he stertit, strukk bi a thocht, raise, tuik the Inveesible Chiel's airm, an turned him awa frae the ootluik.

"Ye’re ferfochan," quo he, "an fin I sit, ye wauk about. Hae ma cheer."

He plunkit himsel atween Griffin an the nearest windae.

Fur a meenit Griffin sat seelent, an syne he restertit sherp:

"I hid left the Chesilstowe hoose already," quo he, "fin thon happened. It wis last December. I’d taen a chaumer in Lunnon, a muckle bare chaumer in a muckle ill-managed ludgin-hoose in a slum nearhaun Great Portland Street. The chaumer wis sune fu o the gear I’d bocht wi his siller; the wirk wis gaun on steidy, successfu, drawin near an eyn. I wis like a chiel camin frae a wid, an o a suddenty camin on some unmeanin hairtbrakk. I gaed tae beery him. Ma thochts wir still on thon research, an I didnae heist a finger tae save his guid nemme. I mynd the kistin, the chaip hairse, the scant service, the winny cranreuch cauld brae, an the auld college frien o his fa spakk the service ower him--a threid baer, blaik, booed auld bodach wi a snocherin cauld.

"I mynd waukin back tae the teem hoose, ben the placie that hid aince bin a clachan an wis noo patched an tinkered bi the jerry biggers intae the ugsome likeness o a toun. Ilkie wey the roads ran oot at last intae the connached parks an eyndit in rubble howpies an orra weet weeds. I mynd masel as a baney blaik body, gaun alang the sliddery, sheeny pavement, an the fey feelin o cauldness I felt frae the nesty uprichtness, the nesty commercialism o the placie.

"I didnae feel a smachrie o wae fur ma faither. He seemed tae me tae be the victim o his ain gypit sentimentality. The current humbug nott ma bein at his kistin, bit it wis raelly nane o ma affair.

"Bit gaun alang the High Street, ma auld life cam back tae me fur a bittie, fur I met the quine I’d kent ten years syne. Oor een met. Somethin meeved me tae birl back an spikk tae her. She wis a verra ordnar body.

"It wis aa like a dwaum, that veesit tae the auld airts. I didnae feel syne that I wis lanely, that I’d cam oot frae the warld intae a lanely airt. I kent o ma loss o sorra bit I pit it doon to the general gyteness o things. Re-enterin ma chaumer seemed like the recovery o reality. Thonner wir the ferlies I kent an lued. Thonner stude the gear, the experiments set oot an wytin. An noo there wis scarce a deeficulty left, ayont the plannin o details.

"I’ll tell ye, Kemp, suner or later, aa the complex oots an inns. We neednae gae intae thon noo. Fur the maist pairt, barrin a wheen gaps I chuse tae mynd, they’re screived in cypher in thon buiks thon gangrel his hidden. We maun hunt him doon. We maun hae thon buiks again. Bit the necessar pairt wis tae pit the see throwe objeck fas refractive index wis tae be pit atween twa radiatin centres o a kinno uneirdly vibration, o which I’ll tell ye mair fully efter. Na, nae thon Roentgen vibrations—I dinna ken that thon ithers o mine hae bin pictured. Yet they’re clear eneuch. I nott twa wee dynamos, an thon I wirked wi a chaip gas engine. Ma first test wis wi a bittie o fite oo cloot. It wis the feyest ferlie in the warld tae see it in the flichter o the glisks saft an fite, an syne tae watch it dwine like a wraith o rikk an vanish.

"I could scarce believe I’d dane it. I pit ma haun intae the teemess, an there wis the thing as solid as iver. I felt it awkwird, an haived it on the fleer. I’d a bittie tribble finnin it again.

"An syne cam a fey experience. I heard a miaow ahin me, an turnin, saw a baney fite kittlin, verra clarty, on the cistern happin ootbye the windae. A thocht cam intae ma heid. 'Aathin ready fur ye,' quo I, an gaed tae the windae, lowsed it, an fuspered saftly. She cam in, purrin--the puir breet wis stervin—an I gaed her a suppie milk. Aa ma maet wis in a press in the neuk o the chaumer. Efter thon she gaed snuffin roun the chaumer, clearly wi the notion o makkin hersel at hame. The inveesible cloot misfittit her a thochtie; ye should hae seen her pyocher at it! Bit I made her comfy on the bowster o ma truckle-bed. An I gaed her butter tae get her tae wash."

"An ye processed her?"

"I processed her. Bit giein drugs tae a kittlin is nae joke, Kemp! An the process failed."

"Failed!"

"In twa partic’lars. Thon wir the cleuks an the pigment maitter, fit is it?--at the back o the ee in a kittlin. Ye ken?"

"Tapetum."

"Aye, the tapetum. It didnae gae. Efter I'd gien the drugs tae bleach the bluid an dane some ither things tae her, I gaed the breet opium, an pit her an the bowster she wis sleepin on, on the apparatus. An efter aa the lave hid dwined an vanished, there bedd twa wee ghaists o her een."

"Fey!"

"I canna explain it. She wis bandaged an held doon, of coorse—sae I hid her siccar; bit she wauked fin she wis still misty, an miaowed dowie like, an somebody cam chappin. It wis an auld wumman frae doonstairs, fa suspeckit me o vivisectin--a booze-sypin auld craitur, wi anely a fite kittlin tae takk tent o in aa the warld. I wheeched oot a wheen chloroform, applied it, an gaed tae the yett.

'Did I hear a kittlin?' she speired. 'Ma kittlin?' 'Nae here,' quo I, verra polite. She wis a bittie dootfu an ettled tae keek bye me intae the chaumer; fey eneuch tae her nae doot--bare waas, bare windaes, truckle-bed, wi the gas engine dirlin, an the seethe o the radiant pynts, an thon feint ghaistly stingin o chloroform in the air. She’d tae be satisfeed at last an gaed awa again."

"Foo lang did it takk?" speired Kemp.

"Three or fower oors--the kittlin. The banes an sinews an the creash wir the hinmaist tae gae, an the taps o the coloured hairs. An, as I say, the back pairt o the ee, teuch, daizzlin stuff it is, widnae gae at aa.

"It wis nicht ootsbye lang afore the maitter wis ower, an naethin wis tae be seen bit the blae een an the cleuks. I stoppit the gas engine, finnt fur an straikit the breet, which wis still oot cauld,an syne, bein ferfochan, left it sleepin on the inveesible bowster an gaed tae bed. I fand it hard tae sleep. I lay waukened thinkin dweeble eeseless ferlies, gaun ower the test ower an ower again, or dwaumin vrocht up o ferlies growin misty an vanishin aboot me, until aathin, the grun I stude on, vanished, an sae I cam tae thon sickly faain widdendreme a body gets. Aboot twa, the kittlin stertit miaowin aboot the chaumer. I ettled tae wheesh it bi spikkin tae it, an syne I decidit tae birl it oot. I mynd the begeck I hid fin strikkin a licht--there wir jist the roun een sheenin green—an naethin roun them. I wid hae gaen it milk, bit I hidnae ony. It widnae be quaet, it jist dowpit doon an miaowed at the yett. I ettled tae catch it, wi the notion o pittin it ooto the windae, bit it widnae be catched, it vanished. Syne it stertit miaowin in different pairts o the chaumer. At the hinnereyn I lowsed the windae an made a steer. I jelouse it gaed oot at the hinnereyn. I niver saw ony mair o it.

"Syne--Heiven kens foo--I fell thinkin o ma faither's kistin again, an the dowie winny brae, until the day hid cam. I fand sleepin wis eeseless, an, snibbin ma yett efter me, wannered oot intae the mornin streets."

"Ye dinna mean tae say there's an inveesible kittlin gaun aboot!" quo Kemp.

"If it hisnae bin killt," reponed the Inveesible Chiel. "Foo nae?"

"Foo nae?" spakk Kemp. "It didnae mean tae brakk in."

"It's verra likely bin killt," spakk the Inveesible Chiel. "It wis leevin fower days efter, I ken, an doon a gratin in Great Titchfield Street; because I saw a boorich roun the placie, ettlin tae see far the miaowin cam frae."

He wis seelent fur the best pairt o a meenit. Syne he restertit sherp:

"I mynd thon mornin afore the cheenge verra clear. I maun hae gaen up Great Portland Street. I mynd the quarters in Albany Street, an the shelt sodjers camin oot, an at last I fand the tap o Primrose Knowe. It wis a sunny day in Januar--ane o thon sunny, cranreuch days that cam afore the snaa this year. Ma trauchelt harns ettled tae see clear the wey o ferlies, tae plot oot a plan o action.

"I wis bumbazed tae fin, noo that ma prize wis inbye ma cleuks, foo unsettled its winnin seemed. As a maitter o fack I wis wirked oot; the unca stress o near fower years' ongaun wirk left me pouerless wi ony force o feeling. I wis scunnert, an I ettled in vain to win back the virr o ma first speirins, the urge fur discovery that hid lat me compass even the doonfaa o ma faither's grey hairs. Naethin seemed tae maitter. I saw unca clear this wis a passin mood, doon tae owerwirk an wint o sleep, an that either bi drugs or rest it wid be possible tae win back ma virr.

"Aa I could think clear wis that the maitter hid tae be cairried throwe; the fixed thocht still commandeered me. An sune, fur the siller I hid wis near feenished. I luiked aboot me at the brae, wi bairns playin an quines watchin them, an ettled tae think o aa the fey advauntages an inveesible chiel wid hae in the warld. Efter a time I creepit hame, tuik some maet an a strang dose o strychnine, an gaed tae sleep in ma claes on ma unmade bed. Strychnine is a gran tonic, Kemp, tae takk the saftness ooto a chiel."

"It's the deil," quo Kemp. "It's the palaeolithic in a bottle."

"I waukened vastly fortifeed an raither ill-naturet. Ye ken?"

"I ken the stuff."

"An there wis somebody chappin at the yett. It wis ma lanlord wi threats an speirins, an auld Polish Jew in a lang grey jaikit an minky bauchles. I’d bin tormentin a kittlin in the nicht, he wis siccar--the auld wumman's tongue hid bin eident. He insistit on kennin aa aboot it. The laws in this kintra agin vivisection weir unca sair--he micht be liable. I denied the kittlin. Syne the dirlin o the wee gas engine could be finned aa ower the hoose, quo he. Thon wis true, o a certainty. He jinkit roun me intae the chaumer, keekin aboot ower his German-siller glaisses, an a sudden dreid cam intae ma mind that he micht cairry awa somethin o ma secret. I ettled tae keep atween him an the concentratin gear I’d set up, an thon anely made him mair ill faschent. Fit wis I daein? Foo wis I aywis alane an secretive? Wis it legal? Wis it dangerous? I pyed naethin bit the ordnar rent. His hid aywis bin a maist respeckable hoose--in a puir neeborhood. O a suddenty ma temper gaed wey. I telt him tae get oot. He stertit tae girn, tae yatter o his richt o incam. In a meenit I hid him bi the collar; somethin rived, an he gaed birlin oot intae his ain lobby. I slammed an snibbit the yett an sat doon chitterin.

"He made a stooshie ootbye, which I disregairded, an efter a time he gaed awa.

"Bit this brocht maitters tae a heid. I didnae ken fit he wid dae, nur even fit he hid the pouer tae dae. Tae meeve tae fresh apairtments wid hae meant dauchlin; aathegither I’d bare twinty puns left in the warld, fur the maist pairt in a bank--an I couldnae afford thon. Vanish! It wis affa temptin. Syne there’d be an inquiry, the teemin o ma chaumer.

"At the thocht o the possibility o my wirk bein shawn or interruptit at its verra heicht, I becam verra roose an steered up. I hashed oot wi ma three buiks o jottins, ma cheque-buik--the gangrel his them noo--an direckit them frae the nearest Post Office tae a hoose o caa fur letters an pyokes in Great Portland Street. I ettled tae gae oot sounlessly. Camin in, I fand ma lan lord gaun

quaet upstairs; he’d heard the yett nearhaun, I jelouse. Ye wid hae leuch tae see him lowp aside on the lobby as I cam breengin efter him. He glowered at me as I gaed by him, an I made the hoose chitter wi the slammin o ma yett. I heard him cam shauchlin up tae ma fleer, dauchle, an gae doon. I set tae wirk upon ma meisurs straicht aff.

"It wis aa dane thon evenin an nicht. Fin I wis still sittin unner the sickly, dwaumy pouer o the drugs that decolourise bluid, there cam a repeatit chappit at the yett. It stoppit, fitsteps gaed awa an gaed back, an the chappin wis restertit. There wis a warssle tae push somethin unner the yett--a blae paper. Syne in a fit o roose I raise an gaed an pued the yett wide ajee. 'Weel noo?' quo I.

"It wis ma lanlord, wi a notice tae quit or somethin. He raxxed it oot tae me, saw somethin fey aboot ma hauns, I expeck, an heistit his een tae ma face.

"Fur a meenit he gaped. Syne he gaed a kinno mummlit skreich, drappit caunle an screivin thegether, an gaed hyterin doon the derk lobby tae the stairs. I steeked the yett, snibbit it, an gaed tae the keekin-glaiss. Syne I unnerstude his fleg.... Ma face wis fite--like fite stane.

"Bit it wis aa ugsome. I hidnae expeckit the skaith. A nicht o wrackin wae, seekness an feintin. I set ma teeth, throwe ma skin wis sune in a lowe, aa ma corp wis in a lowe; bit I lay thonner like grim daith. I unnerstude noo foo it wis the kittlin hid skreiched till I chloroformed it. Bi guid chaunce I bedd alane wi nae maidie in ma chaumer. There wir times fin I sabbed an maened an blethered. Bit I stukk tae it.... I becam senseless an waukened dweeble in the derkness.

"The hurt hid passed. I thocht I wis killin masel an I didnae care. I’ll niver forget thon daybrakk, an the fey horror o seein that ma hauns hid becam like cloudy glaiss, an luikin at them growe clearer an thinner as the day gaed bye, until at last I could see the orra sottar o ma chaumer throwe them, tho I steekit ma see throwe eelids. Ma limbs becam glaissy, the banes an arteries dwined, vanished, an the wee fite harns gaed last. I grittit ma teeth an bedd thonner tae the eyn. At the hinnereyn anely the deid taps o the fingernails bedd, dweeble an fite, an the broon merk o some acid upon ma fingers.

"I warssled up. At first I wis as pouerless as a wippit bairn--steppin wi limbs I couldnae see. I wis dweeble an verra hungry. I gaed an glowered at naethin in ma shavin-glaiss, at naethin save far an attenuated pigment still bedd ahin the retina o ma een, feinter than haar. I’d tae hing ontae the brod an press ma broo agin the glaiss.

"It wis anely bi a forcie warssle o will that I pued masel back tae the apparatus an feenished the process.

"I sleepit durin the foreneen, puin the sheet ower ma een tae snib oot the licht, an aboot midday I wis waukened again bi a chappin. Ma virr hid cam back. I sat up an lippened an heard a fuspering. I lowped tae ma feet an as sounlessly as possible stertit tae pu oot the connections o ma gear, an tae skitter it aboot the chaumer, sae as tae connach the suggestions o its set up. Sune the chappin wis restertit an vyces caaed, first ma lan lord's, an syne twa ithers. Tae win time I reponed. The inveesible cloot an bowster cam tae haun an I lowsed the windae an haived them oot on tae the cistern hap. As the windae lowsed, a wechty knell cam at the yett. Some body hid chairged it wi the notion o brakkin the snib. Bit the stoot snibs I’d screwed in some days afore stoppit him. Thon stertled me, roosed me. I stertit tae trimmle an tae hash on.

"I haived thegether a wheen lowse paper, strae, packin paper an sae furth, in the mids o the chaumer, an turned on the gas. Wechty cloors stertit tae rain on the yett. I couldnae find the spunks. I duntit ma hauns on the waa wi roose. I furled doon the gas again, steppit ooto the windae on the cistern hap, verra saftly lat doon the sash, an dowpit doon, siccar an inveesible, bit chitterin wi roose, tae owerluik maitters. They chappit a panel, I saw, an in anither meenit they’d brukken awa the staples o the snibs an stude in the lowsed yett wey. It wis the lan lord an his twa step-laddies, hefty young chiels o three or fower an twinty. Ahin them flappit the auld cailleach frae doonstairs.

"Ye micht pictur their bumbazement tae finn the chaumer teem. Ane o the younger chiels breenged tae the windae at aince, flang it up an glowered oot. His glowerin een an thick-lipped beardie face cam a fit frae ma face. I wis hauf thochtit tae cloor his daft face, bit I stoppit ma grippit neive. He glowered richt throwe me. Sae did the ithers as they jyned him. The auld bodach gaed an keekit unner the bed, an syne they aa made a breenge fur the press. They’d tae argy aboot it a lang time in Yiddish an Cockney English. They jeloused I hidnae reponed, that their thochts hid swickit them. A feelin o byodnar blytheness tuik the place o ma roose as I sat ootside the windae an owerluikit thon fower fowk--fur the auld wumman cam in, keekin suspicious aboot her like a kittlin, ettlin tae unnerstaun the riddle o ma weys o daein.

"The auld chiel, sae far as I could makk oot his patois, agreed wi the auld cailleach that I wai a vivisectionist. The loons argied in mixter maxter English that I wis an electrician, an pyntit oot tae the dynamos an radiators. They wir aa jittery aboot ma incam, tho I fand syne that they’d snibbit the front yett. The auld wumman keeked intae the press an unner the bed, an ane o the young chiels haived up the register an glowered up the lum. Ane o the ither ludgers, a coster-monger fa shared the facin chaumer wi a butcher, shawed on the lobby, an he wis caaed in an telt unca ferlies.

"It cam tae me that the radiators, gin they drappit intae the hauns o some gleg weel-educatit body, wid gie me awa ower muckle, an watchin ma chaunce, I cam intae the chaumer an cowped ane o the wee dynamos aff its fier on which it wis staunin, an brukk baith apparatus. Syne, fin they wir ettlin tae explain the smash, I junked ooto the chaumer an gaed saftly doonstairs.

"I gaed intae ane o the sittin-chaumers an wyted till they cam doon, still jelousin an argyin, aa a bittie disappyntit at finnin nae 'horrors,' an aa a thochtie dumfounert foo they stude legally aboot me. Syne I slippit up again wi a kistie o spunks, kinnlit ma howp o paper an soss, pit the cheers an beddin thonner, tuik the gas tae the affair, bi eese o an india-rubber tube, an wyvin a fareweel tae the chaumer left it fur the hinmaist time."

"Ye fired the hoose!" cried Kemp.

"Fired the house. It wis the anely wey tae hap ma trail--an nae doot it wis insured. I slippit the snibs o the front yett quaet an gaed oot intae the street. I wis inveesible, an I wis anely jist stertin tae jelouse the byordnar advauntage ma inveesibility gaed me. Ma heid wis already reamin wi plans o aa the wud an winnerfu ferlies I could freely dae noo."