**CHAPTER 21x In Oxford Street**

"In gaun doonstairs the first time I fand an unexpeckit deefficulty because I couldnae see ma feet; mairower I hytered twice, an there wis an byordnar glekitness in grippin the snib. Bi nae luikin doon, hoosaeiver, I ettled tae wauk on the flat rael weel.

"Ma mood, ye ken, wis ane o blytheness. I felt as a seein chiel micht dae, wi paddit feet an sounless claes, in a toun o the blin. I felt a wud urge tae joke, tae sgie fowk a begeck, tae dunt chiels on the back, haive fowk's bunnets awa, an aathegither enjoy ma byordnar pouer.

"Bit I’d jist cam oot tae Great Portland Street, hoosaeiver (ma ludgin wis nearhaun tae the muckle draper's shoppie thonner), fin I heard a clashin knell an was struck forcie frae ahin, an birlin roon saw a chiel cairryin a pyoke o soda-watter syphons, an luikin in bumbazement at his wechty load. Altho the coor hid really hurtit me, I fand somethin sae byordnar in his dumfounerment that I leuch lood. 'The deil's in the pyoke,' quo I, an o a suddenty warssled it oot o his haun. He lat gae richt aff, an I swung the hale wecht intae the air.

"Bit a gype o a cab chiel, staunin ootside a howff, vrocht o a suddenty a breenge fur thon, an his raxxin fingers tuik me wi pouerfu virr aneth the lug. I lat the hale doon wi a knell on the cab chiel, an syne, wi skirls an the dunt o feet aboot me, fowk camin ooto shoppies, cars puin up, I jeloused fit I’d dane fur masel, an bannin ma gypitness, backed agin a shoppie windae an set masel tae jink ooto the melee. In a meenit I’d be stukken in the melee an wad be dand oot o a certainty. I shoved by a butcher loon, fa lucky didnae turn tae see the naethinness that shoved him aside, an jinkit ahin the cab-chiels fower-wheeler. I dinna ken foo they sattled the maitter. I hashed straicht ower the road, that wis bi guid chaunce clear, an scarce watchin the wey I gaed, in the fricht o detection the happenin hid gien me, breenged intae the efterneen boorich o Oxford Street.

"I ettled tae get intae the heeze o fowk, bit they wir ower thick fur me, an in a meenit ma heels wir bein trodden on. I tuik tae the sheugh, the rochness o which I fand painfu tae ma feet, an eftir the shaft o a latchy hansom powked me forcie unner the shouder blade, myndin me that I wis already skaithed hard. I hytered ooto the wey o the cab, avoyded a pram bi a yarkin meevement, an fand masel ahin the hansom. A blythe thocht saved me, an as this drave slawly alang I follaed in its direck wake, trimmlin an bumbazed at the turn o ma plisky. An nae anely trimmlin, bit chitterin. It wis a bricht day in Januar an I wis sterk nyaakit an the thin slivver o dubs that happit the road wis jeelin. Gypit as it seems tae me noo, I hidnae thocht that, inveesible or nae, I wis still open tae the weather an aa its effecks.

"Syne o a suddenty a bricht idea cam intae ma heid. I ran roon an got intae the cab. An sae, chitterin, feart, an snocherin wi the first hints o a cauld, an wi the hurts in the smaa o ma back growin on ma thochts, I drave slawly alang Oxford Street an by Tottenham Coort Road. Ma mood wis as different frae that far I’d gaed furth ten meenits syne as it’s possible tae pictur. This inveesibility forbye! The ae thocht that grippit me wis--foo wis I tae get ooto the mishanter I wis in.

"We creepit by Mudie's, an thonner a heich wumman wi five or sax yalla-labelled buiks flagged doon ma cab, an I lowped oot jist in time tae jink her, skytin aside a railwey van nerra in ma flicht. I ran aff up the roadwey tae Bloomsbury Squar, meanin tae strikk north by the Museum an sae get inno the quaet airt. I wis noo coorsely jeeled, an the feyness o ma state sae unsattled me that I sabbed as I ran. At the northwird neuk o the Squar a wee fite dug ran oot o the Pharmaceutical Society's offices, an fur some rizzen set efter me, snoot doon.

"I hid niver jeloused it afore, bit the snoot is tae the harns o a tyke fit the ee is tae the harns o a seein chiel. Tykes takk in the guff o a chiel meevin as chiels see his makk. This breet stertit bowfin an lowpin, shawin, as it seemed tae me, anely ower plain that he wis awaur o me. I gaed ower Great Russell Street, teetin ower ma shouder as I did sae, an gaed some wey alang Montague

Street afore I jeloused fit I wis rinnin tae.

"Syne I becam awaur o a skirl o music, an luikin alang the street saw a when fowk camin oot o Russell Squar, reid sarks, an the flag o the Salvation Airmy tae the fore. Sic a clamjamfrey, chantin in the roadwey an lauchin agin them on the pavement, I couldnae hope tae win throwe, an dreidin tae gae back an farrer frae hame again, an decidin on a whim, I ran up the fite steps o a hoose facin the museum palins, an stude there until the boorich should hae gaen by. Bi guid luck the tyke stoppit at the soun o the ban as weel, dauchled, an furled aboot, rinnin back tae Bloomsbury Squar again.

"On cam the band, skreichin wi unmeanin irony some hymn aboot 'Fan shall we see His face?' an it seemed an unca lang time tae me afore the maist o the fowk wheeched alang the pavement bi me. Dunt, dunt, dunt, cam the drum wi a dirlin soun, an fur the meenit I didnae see twa bairns dauchlin at the railings by me. 'See 'em,' said one. 'See what?' said the other. 'Why—them footmarks--bare. Like what you makes in mud.'

"I luikit doon an saw the bairns hid stoppit an wir gapin at the dubby fitmerks I’d left ahin me up the new fitened steps. The passin fowk elbucked an shoogled them, bit their dumfounert harns wis jeeled. 'Dunt, dunt, dunt, fin, dunt, will we see, dunt, his face, dunt, dunt.' 'There's a barfit chiel gaen up thon steps, or I dinna ken onythin,' quo ane. 'An he’s niver cam doon again. An his fit wis bluidin.'

"The mids o the boorich hid already gaen by. 'Luik thonner, Ted,' quo the younger o the detectives, wi the sherpness o begeck in his voyce, an pyntit straicht tae ma feet. I luikit doon an saw at aince the feint hint o their ootline sketched in skirps o dubs. Fur a meenit I wis jeeled.

"'Ma certes, thon’s unca,' quo the elder. 'Verra unca! It's jist like the ghaist o a fit, is it nae?' He dauchled an gaed forrit wi oot raxxed haun. A chiel rugged up short tae see fit he wis catchin, an syne a quine. In anither meenit he wid hae touched me. Syne I saw fit tae dae. I made a step, the loon stertit back wi a grue, an wi a faist meevement I heistit masel ower intae the yett front o the neist hoose. Bit the wee-er loon wis gleg eneuch tae follae the meevement, an afore I wis weel doon the steps an on the pavement, he’d gotten ower his meenit’s begeck an wis skreichin oot that the feet hid gane ower the waa.

"They birled roon an saw ma new fitmerks skinkle intae bein on the laigher step an on the pavement. 'Fit's up?' speired some body.'Feet! Luik! Feet rinnin!'

"Aabody in the road, barrin ma three hunters, wis poorin alang efter the Salvation Airmy, an this cloor nae anely hinnered me bit them. There wis a wheech o begeck an back-speirin. At the cost o caain ower ae young chiel I won throwe, an in anither meenit I wis breengin heidlang roon the cercle o Russell Squar, wi sax or seeven bumbazed fowk follaein ma fitmerks. There wis nae time fur tellin, or else the hale heeze wid hae bin efter me.

"Twice I birled roon neuks, thrice I crossed the road an cam back on ma tracks, an syne, as ma feet grew hett an dry, the weet merks stertit tae dwine. At last I’d a braithin space an rubbit ma feet clean wi ma hauns, an sae won awa aathegither. The last I saw o the chase wis a wee boorich o a dizzen fowk mebbe, owerluikin wi unca bumbazements a slaw dryin fitprent that hid cam frae a puddle in Tavistock Squar, a fitprent as lanely an fey tae them as Crusoe's lane discovery.

"This rinnin warmed me a bittie, an I gaed on wi mair smeddum ben the wab o less kent roads that rin here aboot. Ma back hid noo becam verra stiff an sair,

ma tonsils wir painfu frae the cab chiel's fingers, an the skin o ma thrapple hid bin scrattit bi his nails; ma feet hurtit sair an I wis cripple frae a wee cut on ae fit. I saw in time a blin chiel cam up tae me, an flew cripplin, fur I feared his

speecial instincts. Aince or twice unplanned impacks happened an I left fowk bumbazed, wi unaccoontable banns ringin in their lugs. Syne cam somethin seelent an quaet agin ma face, an ower the Squar drappit a thin veil o slaw faain shmoodricks o snaa. I’d catched a cauld, an dae as I wid I couldnae avoyd an antrin sneeze. An ilkie dug that cam in sicht, wi its pyntin snoot an fey snocherin, wis a fleg tae me.

"Syne cam chiels an loons rinnin, first ane an syne ithers, an skirlin as they ran. It wis a lowe. They ran in the airt o ma ludgin, an luikin back doon a street I saw a heeze o blaik rikk furlin up abune the reefs an phone wires. It wis ma ludgin burnin; ma claes, ma gear, aa ma siller forbye, barrin ma cheque-buik an the three warks o memoranda that awytit me in Great Portland Street, wir there. Burnin! I’d brunt ma boats--gin iver a chiel did! The ludgin wis bleezin."

The Inveesible Chiel dauchled an thocht. Kemp luikit nervous ooto the windae. "Aye?" quo he. "Gae on."