**Chapter 23x In Drury Lane**

"Bit ye stert noo tae jelouse," quo the Inveesible Chiel, " the full hinner o ma con. I’d nae bield, nae claes,—tae get claethin, wis tae gie up aa ma advantage, tae makk o masel a fey an unca ferlie. I wis fastin; fur tae ett, tae stap masel wi unassimilatit maitter, wid be tae becam ugsomely veesible again."

"I niver thocht o thon," quo Kemp.

"Nur hid I. An the snaa hid warned me o ither risks. I couldnae gae furth in snaa—it wid sattle on me an shaw me up. Rain, as weel, wid makk me a wattery ootlin, a glimmerin shell o a chiel—a bubble. An haar—I should be like a feinter bubble in a haar, a shell, a greasy glimmer o a chiel. Mairower, as I gaed furth—in the Lunnon air—I gaithered stoor aboot ma cwuits, flichterin skirps an stoor upon ma skin. I didnae ken foo lang it wid be afore I should becam veesible from thon as weel. Bit I saw clear it couldnae be fur lang. Nae in Lunnon at ony rate.

"I gaed intae the slums tae Great Portland Street, an fand masel at the eyn o the street far I’d ludged. I didnae gae thon wey, because o the fowk haufwey doon it contrar tae the still rikkin wrack o the hoose I’d kinnlit. Ma sairest wint wis tae get claes. Fit tae dae wi ma face bumbazed me. Syne I saw in ane o thon wee jummlit shoppies—news, sweeties, toys, stationery, latchy Yule flimflummery, an sae furth—a heeze o masks an snoots. I jeloused thon problem wis solved. In a glisk I saw ma coorse. I furled aboot, nae langer aimless, an gaed—indireck in order tae jink the thrang weys, tae the back streets north o the Stran; fur I myndit, tho nae verra distinck, that a wheen theatrical ootfitters hid shoppies in thon airt.

"The day wis cauld, wi a jeelin win doon the northwird rinnin streets. I gaed faist tae jink bein owertaen. Ilkie crossin wis a danger, ilkie passenger a body tae watch gleg. Ae chiel as I wis aboot tae pass him at the tap o Bedford Street, furled upon me faist an cam intae me, caain me intae the road an near aneth the wheel o a passin hansom. The ootcam o the cab-rank wis that he’d hid some kinno stroke. I wis sae unsattled bi thon encoonter that I gaed intae Covent Gairden Mairket an sat doon fur some time in a quaet neuk bi a staa o violets, pechin an trimmlin. I fand I’d catched a new cauld, an hid tae turn oot efter a time fur fear ma snochrin should attrack note.

"At the hinnereyn I reached the objeck o ma sikkin, an orra flee-blawn wee shoppie in a bywey near Drury Lane, wi a windae fu o tinsel claes, makkie-on jewels, wigs, safties, dominoes an theatrical photies. The shoppie wis auld-farrant an laigh an derk, an the hoose raise abune it fur fower storeys, derk an dowie. I keekit throwe the windae an, seein naebody inbye, gaed in. The lowsin o the yett gart a bell ringin. I left it ajee, an wauked roon a bare costume staun, intae a neuk ahin a cheval glass. Fur a meenit or twa naebody cam. Syne I heard wechty feet stridin ben a chaumer, an a chiel appeared doon the shoppie.

"Ma plans wir noo perfectk clear. I wid ettle tae makk ma wey intae the hoose, hide mmasel upstairs, watch ma chaunce, an fin aathin wis quaet, takk oot a wig, mask, glaisses, an rig-oot, an gae intae the warld, mebbe an ugsome bit still a likely body. An bi the wey of coorse I could chore frae the hoose o ony lowse siller.

"The chiel fa’d cam intae the shoppie wis a short, slicht, humphy, beetle-brooed chiel, wi lang airms an verra cuttie booed shanks. It shawed I’d interruptit a meal. He glowered aboot the shoppie wi an luik o winnerment. Thon gaed wey tae begeck, an syne roose, as he saw the shoppie teem. 'Damn the loon!' he banned. He gaed tae glower up an doon the street. He cam in again in a meenit, kickit the yett tee wi his fit spiteful-like, an gaed mummlin back tae the hoose yett.

"I cam forrit tae follae him, an at the soun o ma meevement he stoppit deid. I did sae as weel, fleggit bi his glegness o lug. He caad tee the hoose yett in ma face. I stude dauchlin . O a suddenty I heard his faist fitsteps camin back, an the yett reopened. He stude luikin aboot the shoppie like ane fa wis still nae satisfeed. Syne, mummlin tae himsel, he owerluikit the back o the coonter an keekit ahin some fittins. Syne he stude dootfu. He’d left the hoose yett ajee an I jinkit intae the inbye chaumer.

"It wis a fey wee chaumer, puirly rigged oot an wi a wheen muckle masks in the neuk. On the brod wis his latchy brakkfaist, an it wis a dashed scunnerin thing fur me, Kemp, tae hae tae snuff his coffee an staun watchin while he cam in an restertit his meal. An his table mainners wir scunnerin. Three yetts lowsed intae the wee chaumer, ane gaun upstairs an ane doon, bit they wir aa steekit. I couldnae get ooto the chaumer while he wis thonner, I could scarce meeve because o his glegness, an there wis a draucht doon ma back. Twice I throttled a sneeze jist in time.

"The ootstaunin quality o ma feelins wir fey an clear, bit fur aa that I wis hairtily trauchelt an angeret lang afore he’d dane his ettin. Bit at last he feenished an pittin his peetifu crockery on the blaik tin tray on which he’d hid his tay pot, an gaitherin aa the crummles up on the mustard merked claith, he tuik the hale heeze o ferlies efter him. His oxterfu stoppit his steekin the yett ahin him,—as he wid hae dane; I niver saw sic a chiel fur steekin yetts,—an I follaed him intae a verra orra unnergrun kitchie an scullery. I’d the pleisur o seein him stert tae wash up, an syne, finnin nae guid in bidin doon thonner, an the brick fleer bein cauld tae ma feet, I gaed back upstairs an sat in his cheer bi the lowe. It was burnin laigh, an scarce thinkin, I pit on a wee coal. The soun o this brocht him up at aince, an he stude glowerin. He keekit aboot the chaumer an wis in a fusker o touchin me. Even efter thon owergaun, he scarce seemed satisfeed. He stoppit in the yett wey an tuik a hinmaist luik afore he gaed doon.

"I wyted in the wee parlour fur lang eneuch, an at last he cam up an lowsed the upstairs yett. I jist managed tae win by him. On the staircase he devalued o a suddenty, sae that I verra near hytered intae him. He stude luikin back richt intae ma face an lippenin. 'I could hae sworn,' quo he. His lang hairy haun pued at his laigher lip. His ee gaed up an doon the staircase. Syne he grumphed an gaed on up again.

"His haun wis on the haunle o a yett, an syne he stoppit again wi the same bumbazed roose on his face. He wis becamin awaur o the feint souns o ma meevements aboot him. The chiel maun hae hid deevilish gleg lugs. He o a suddenty fleered intae roose. 'Gin there 's onybody in this hoose,' quo he wi an aith, an left the threat unfeenished. He pit his haun in his pooch, failed tae finn fit he wintit, an hashin by me gaed hyterin lood an forcie doonstairs. Bit I didnae follae him. I sat on the heid o the staircase til he cam back.

"Sune he cam up again, still mummlin. He lowsed the yett o the chaumer, an afore I could gae in, steeked it in my face. I decidit tae search the hoose, an spent a whylie daein sae as sounlessly as I could. The hoose wis verra auld an bumshayvelt, mochie sae that the paper in the laft ws peelin frae the waas, a fu o rattens. A puckle o the yett haunles wir stiff an I wis feart tae turn them. A fyew chaumers I did inspeck wir teem, an ithers wir a sotter o theatrical gear, bocht secunt-haun, I jeloused, frae its luik. In ae chaumer neist tae his I fand a heeze o auld claes. I stertit ferretin amang thon, an in ma keenness forgot again the unca sherpness o his lugs. I heard a cannie fitstep an, luikin up jist in time, saw him keekin in at the tummlit howpie an haudin an auld farrant revolver in his haun. I stude verra still while he glowered aboot open-mooed an mistrustfu. 'It maun hae bin her,' quo he slaw. 'Damn her!'

"He steekit the yett quaet, an straicht aff I heard the key turn in the snib. Syne his fitsteps gaed awa. I jeloused faist that I wis steeked in. Fur a meenit I didnae ken fit tae dae. I wauked frae yett tae windae an back, an stude dumfounert. An ootburst o roose cam upon me. Bit I decided tae inspeck the claes afore I did onythin farrer, an ma first try brocht doon a howpie frae an upper shelf. Thon brocht him back, mair seenister than iver. Thon time he touched me, lowpit back wi bumbazement an stude stammygastered in the mids o the chaumer.

"Betimes he quaetened a thochtie. 'Rattens,' quo he in a fusper, fingers on lip. He wis clearly a bittie feart. I shoogled quaet ooto the chaumer, bit a brod skreiched. Syne the deevilish wee breet sterted gaun aa ower the hoose, revolver in haun an steekin yett efter yett an poochin the keys. Fin I jeloused fit he wis up tae I’d an ootburst o roose—I could scarce control masel eneuch tae watch ma chaunce. Bi this time I kent he wis alane in the hoose, an sae wioot mair dauchlin, I chappit him on the heid."

"Chapped him on the heid!" quo Kemp.

"Aye—stunned him—as he wis gaun doonstairs. Hit him frae ahin wi a steel that stude on the landin. He gaed doonstairs like a pyoke o auld buits."

"Bit—! Ma Certes! The common weys o humanity—"

"Are aa verra weel fur ordnar fowk. Bit the pynt wis, Kemp, that I’d tae win ooto thon hoose in a disguise wioot his seein me. I couldnae think o ony ither wey o daein it. An syne I gagged him wi a Louis Quatorze sark an rowed him up in a sheet."

"Rowed him up in a sheet!"

"Vrocht a kinno pyoke o it. It wis raither a guid idea tae keep the gype feart an quaet, an a deevilish hard thing tae win oot o—heid awa frae the towe. Ma dear Kemp, it 's nae eese ye sittin an glowerin as tho I wis a murderer. It hid tae be dane. He hid his revolver. If aince he saw me he wid be able tae describe me—"

"Bit still," quo Kemp, "in England—eenoo. An the chiel wis in his ain hoose, an ye wir—weel, chorin."

"Chorin! Drat it! Ye'll caa me a reiver neist! Ma faith, Kemp, ye’re nae glekit eneuch tae daunce on the auld towes. Can ye nae see ma fix?"

"An his as weel," quo Kemp.

The Inveesible Chiel stude up sherply. "Fit dae ye mean tae say?"

Kemp's face grew a thochtie hard. He wis aboot tae spikk an stoppit himsel. "I jelouse, efter aa," quo he wi a faist cheenge o mainner, "the thing hid tae be dane. Ye wir in a fix. Bit still—"

"Of coorse I wis in a fix—a dashed fix. An he made me wud tae—huntin me aboot the hoose, gypin aboot wi his revolver, steekin an unsteekin yetts. He wis jist a scunner. Ye dinna blame me, dae ye? Ye dinna blame me?"

"I niver blame onybody," quo Kemp. "It 's nae my wey. Fit did ye dae neist?

"I wis hungeret. Doonstairs I fand breid an a wheen orra cheese—mair than eneuch tae satisfee ma hunger. I tuik some brandy an watter, an syne gaed up by ma unplanned pyoke—he wis lyin rael quaet—tae the chaumer haudin the auld

claes. This luikit oot on the street, twa lace hingins broon wi stoor guairdin the windae. I gaed an luikit oot throwe their gaps. Ootside the day wis bricht—bi contrast wi the broon shadaes o the dowie hoose in which I fand masel, skinklin bricht. A faist traffic wis gaun by, fruit cairts, a hansom, a fower-wheeler wi a howpie o kists, a fishmonger's cairt I birled wi skirps o colour sweemin afore ma een tae the derk fixtures ahind me. Ma virr wis giein wey tae a clear kennin o ma state again. The chaumer wis fu o a feint guff o benzoline, made eese o, I jelouse, in cleanin the claes.

"I stertit a orderly search o the place. I should jelouse the humfy backit chiel hid bin alane in the hoose fur a guid whylie. He wis a fey body. Aathin that could possibly be o eese tae me I colleckit in the claes store-chaumer, an syne I made a cannie wylin. I fand a haun bag I thocht an eesefu ferlie, an some pooder, rouge, an steekin-plaister.

"I’d thocht o peintin an pooderin ma face an aa that there wis tae shaw o me, in order tae makk masel veesible, bit the drawback o thon lay in the fack that I’d nott turpentine an ither gee-gaws an a fair amoont o time afore I could vanish again. In the eyn I chose a mask o the better kind, slichtly ugsome bit nae mair sae than mony fowk, derk glaisses, greyish fuskers, an a wig. I could find nae unnerclaes, bit that I could buy syne, an fur the time I riggit masel in calico dominoes an some fite cashmere scarfs. I could finn nae hose, bit the humfy backit chiels's buits wir raither a lowse fit an wir eneuch. In a desk in the shoppie wir three sovereigns an aboot thirty shillins' wirth o siller, an in a steekit press I brukk in the inbye chaumer wir eicht puns in gowd. I could gae furth intae the warld again, weel set up.

"Syne cam a fey dauchlin. Wis ma luik really—believable? I tried masel wi a wee bed chaumer keekin-glaiss, owerluikin masel frae ilkie pynt o view tae shaw ony forgotten gap, bit it aa seemed soun. I wis ugsome tae the theatrical luik, a stage miser, bit I wisnae a pheesical impossibility. Gaithering smeddum, I tuik ma keekin-glaiss doon intae the shoppie, pued doon the shoppie blinds, an owerluikit masel frae ilkie pynt o view wi the help o the cheval glaiss in the neuk.

"I spent wheen meenits screwin up ma virr an syne unsteekit the shoppie yett an merched oot intae the street, leavin the wee mannie tae win ooto his sheet again fin he likit. In five meenits a dizzen birlins brukk in atween me an the costumier's shoppie. Naebody appeared tae takk tent o me. Ma hinmaist deeficulty seemed owercam." He stoppit again.

"An ye tribbled nae mair aboot the humfy-backit chiel?" speired Kemp.

"Na," quo the Inveesible Chiel. "Nur hae I heard fit becam o him. I jelouse he lowsed himself or kickit himsel oot. The knots wir gey ticht."

He becam seelent an gaed tae the windae an glowered oot.

"Fit happened fin ye gaed oot intae the Stran?"

"Och!—lat doon again. I thocht ma tribbles wir ower. I thocht I’d a free haun tae dae fitiver I wintit, aathin—save tae gie awa ma secret. Sae I thocht. Fitiver I did, fitiver the consequences micht be, wis naethin tae me. I’d jist tae haive aside ma claes an vanish. Naebody could haud me. I could takk ma siller far I fand it. I decided tae treat masel tae a braw feed, an syne pit up at a guid hotel, an gaither a new ootfit. I felt unca fu o smeddum,—it's nae particular pleisunt recaain that I wis a gytpe. I gaed intae a placie an wis orderin denner, fin it cam tae me that I couldnae ett unless I shawed ma inveesible face. I feenished orderin the denner, telt the chiel I’d be back in ten meenits, an gaed oot scunnered. I dinna ken gin ye’ve iver bin disappyntit in yer appetite."

"Nae jist sae bad," quo Kemp, "bit I can pictur it."

"I could hae blootered the daft deils. At last, feint wi the wint fur tasty maet, I gaed intae anither placie an demandit a private chaumer. 'I’m skaithed,' quo I. 'Sairly.' They luikit at me sidie-wyes, bit of coorse it wisnae their affair—an sae at last I got ma denner. It wisnae byordnar weel served, bit it wis eneuch; an fin I hid etten it, I sat ower a cigar, ettlin tae plan ma wey forrit. An ootside a snaa storm wis stertin.

"The mair I thocht it ower, Kemp, the mair I kent fit an eeseless gyteness an Inveesible Chiel wis,—in a cauld an fooshty climate an a thrang ceevilised toun. Afore I made thon wud experiment I’d dreamt o a thoosan rewards. Thon efterneen it seemed aa disappyntment. I gaed ower the heids o the ferlies a chiel reckons winted. Nae doot inveesibility made it possible tae win them, bit it made it eeseless tae enjoy them fin they’re gotten. Ambition—fit’s the guid o bein cock o the midden fin ye canna appear thonner? Fit’s the guid o the luve o a wumman fin her nemme maun be Delilah? I hae nae hankerin fur politics, fur the blackguairdisms o fame, fur guid wirks, fur sport. Fit wis I tae dae? An fur thon I’d becam a rowed-up winner, a happit an bandaged travesty o a chiel!"

He dauchled, an his ootluik suggestit a fleein glisk at the windae.

"Bit foo did ye get tae Iping? " quo Kemp, fretfu, ettlin tae keep his guest thrang spikkin.

"I gaed thonner tae wirk. I’d ae hope. It wis a hauf notion! I hae it still. It’s a full blawn idea noo. A wey o gettin back! O restorin fit I hae dane. Fin I wint. Fin I hae dane aa I mean tae dae inveesibly. An thon’s fit I maistly wint tae spikk tae ye aboot noo."

"Ye gaed straicht tae Iping?"

"Aye. I’d jist tae get ma three buiks o jottins an ma cheque-buik, ma gear an unnerclaes, order a puckle chemicals tae wirk oot this idea o mine,—I’ll shaw ye the wirkins as sune as I get ma buiks,—an syne I stertit. Ma Certes! I mynd the snaa storm noo, an the scunnersome tyauve it wis tae haud the snaa frae weetin ma caird boord snoot."

"At the eyn," quo Kemp, "the day afore yestreen, fin they fand ye oot, ye raither—tae judge bi the papers—"

"I did. Raither. Did I kill thon gype o a polis chiel?"

"Na," quo Kemp. "He 's expeckit tae get better."

"Thon's his luck, syne. I clean tint the heid, the gypes! Foo couldn’y they leave me alane? An thon grocer chiel?"

"There are nae daiths expeckit," quo Kemp.

"I dinna ken aboot thon gangrel o mine," quo the Inveesible Chiel, wi a nesty lauch.

"Ma Certes, Kemp, ye dinna ken fit roose *is!* Tae hae vrocht fur years, tae hae planned an plottit, an syne tae get some ficherin hauf blin gype sotterin ben your wey! Ikie mainner o daft cratur that’s iver bin vrocht his bin sent tae quanter me.

"Gin I hae muckle mair o it, I’ll gae wud,—I’ll stert scythin them doon. As it is, they 've made maitters a thoosan times mair deeficult."

"Nae doot it 's a vratch," quo Kemp, wershly.