**CHAPTER 26x THE WICKSTEED MURDER**

The Inveesible Cheil seems tae hae breenged ooto Kemp's hoose in a state o blin roose. A wee bairn playin near Kemp's yett wis forcie catched up an haived aside, sae that its cwuit wis brukken, an efter fur a when oors the Inveesible Cheil gaed ooto fowks’ kennin. Nae body kens far he gaed nur fit he did. Bit ye can pictur him hashin throwe the hett June foreneen, up the knowe an on tae the open doonlan ahin Port Burdock, ragin an maenin at his untholable weird, an sin a bield at last, hett an trauchelt, mids the wids o Hintondean, tae jyne thegether his brukken ploys agin his species. Thon seems the maist likely bield fur him, fur there it wis he re-asserted himself in a grue-like an dreidfu mainner aboot twa in the afterneen.

Ane winners fit state his harns wir in durin thon time, an fit ploys he thocht up. Nae doot he wis near wudly misfittit bi Kemp's swickery, an tho we micht be able tae unnerstaun the rizzens that led tae that thon swickery, we micht still jelouse an even sympatheeze a bittie wi the roose the ettled at begeck maun hae caused. Mebbe somethin o the unca bumbazement o his Oxford Street happenins micht hae cam back tae him, fur he’d clearly coontit on Kemp's help in his breetish dream o a fleggit warld. Onywey he vanished frae human ken aboot midday, an nae leevin witness can tell fit he did till aboot hauf-bye twa. It wis a guid thing, mebbe, fur humanity, bit fur him it wis a deidly latchiness.

Durin thon time a growin heeze o cheils skittered ower the kintraside wir eident. In the mornin he’d still bin jist a legend, a fleg; in the afterneen, maistly o Kemp's dry wirded annooncement, he wis set oot as a real fae, tae be hurtit, catched, or owercam, an the kintraside stertit organisin itsel wi unheard o speed. Bi twa o'clock even he micht still hae taen himsel ooto thon airt bi catchin a train, bit efter twa thon becam impossible. Ilkie passenger train alang the lines on a muckle parallelogram atween Soothampton, Manchester, Brighton an Horsham, traivelled wi steekit yetts, an the goods traffic wis near aathegither stoppit. An in a muckle cercle o twinty miles roon Port Burdock, cheils airmed wi guns an clubs wir sune settin oot in boorichs o three an fower, wi tykes, tae beat the roads an parks.

Moontit polis cheils rade alang the kintra lanes, devaulin at ilkie hoose an warnin the fowk tae steek up their yetts, an bide inbye unless they wir airmed, an aa the bairns’ schules hid brukken up bi three o'clock, an the bairns, fleggit an keepin thegether in boorichs, wir hashin hame. Kemp's annoncement—signed mairower bi Adye--wis posted ower near the hale airt bi fower or five o'clock in the efterneen. It gaed cuttie bit clear a the maitters o the warssle, the need tae keep the Inveesible Cheil frae maet an sleep, the import fur ongaun watchfuness an fur faist reaction tae ony merk o his meevements. An sae faist an siccar wis the wark o the heid bummers, sae faist an total wis the belief in this fey bein, that afore nichtfaa an airt o a puckle hunner squar miles wis in a ticht state o siege. An afore nichtfaa, as weel, a jeel o fleg gaed throwe the hale watchin worriet kintraside. Gaun frae fusperin moo tae moo, faist an siccar ower the length an braidth o the kintra, telt the tale o the killin o Mr Wicksteed.

Gin oor jelousin that the Inveesible Chiel’s bield wis the Hintondean wids, syne we maun likewyes jelouse that in the early efterneen he gaed oot again set on some projeck that consarned the eese o a weapon. We canna ken fit the projeck wis, bit the pruif that he hid the iron rod in haun afore he met Wicksteed is tae me at least owerpouerin.

Of coorse we can ken naethin o the inns an oots o thon tryst. It happened on the edge o a graivel pit, nae twa hunner yairds frae Lord Burdock's ludge yett. Aathin pynts tae an unca tulzie--the trampit grun, the mony hurts Mr. Wicksteed hid gotten, his brukken waukin-stick; bit foo the attack wis vrocht, save in a murdrous roose, it’s nae possible tae jelouse. Forbye the theory o wudness is near unavoydable. Mr. Wicksteed wis a cheil o forty-five or forty-sax, factor tae Lord Burdock, o mild weys an luiks, the verra hinmaist body in the warld tae steer up sic a terrible fae. Agin him it wid seem the Inveesible Cheil made eese o an iron rod pued frae a brukken daud o palins. He stoppit this quaet cheil, gaun quae hame tae his midday denner, attackit him, dinged doon his dweeble defences, brukk his airm, cowpit him, an blootered his heid tae a jeely.

Of coorse, he maun hae rugged this rod ooto the palin afore he met his victim--he maun hae bin cairying it ready in his haun. Anely twa details ayont fit his already been statit seem tae wey on the maitter. Ane is the truith that the graivel pit wisnae in Mr. Wicksteed's direck pathie hame, bit near a twa hunner yairds ooto his wey. The ither is the tellin o a wee quine that, gaun tae her efterneen schule, she saw the murdered chiel "treetlin" in a fey mainner ower a park tae the graivel pit. Her mime o his meevement suggests a chiel chasin a ferlie on the grun afore him an strikkin at it ower an ower wi his waukin-stick. She wis the hinmaist body tae see him leevin. He gaed ooto her sicht tae his daith, the tulzie bein hid frae her anely bi a booich o beech trees an a slicht drap in the grun.

Noo thon, tae the present screiver's harns at least, heists the murder ooto the airt o the aathegither coorse. We micht jelouse that Griffin hid taen the rod as a weapon, bit wioot ony ootricht intent o makkin eese o it in murder. Wicksteed micht syne hae cam by an taen tent that this rod in an eildritch wey meevin ben the air. Wioot ony thocht o the Inveesible Chiel--fur Port Burdock is ten miles awa--he micht hae chased it. It is rael likely that he michtnae even hae heard o the Inveesible Chiel. Ane can syne pictur the Inveesible Chiel makkin aff--quaet in order tae jink discoverin his bein in the neeborhood, an Wicksteed, vrocht up an fey, chasin this unaccoontable locomotive objeck—at laist strikkin at it.

Nae doot the Inveesible Chiel could easy hae left ahin his middle-aged chaser unner ordnar weys, bit the position that Wicksteed's corp wis fand suggests that he’d the ill luck tae drive his victim intae a neuk atween a waucht o stingin nettles an the graivel pit. Tae fowk fa ken the nyordnar ill natur o the Inveesible Chiel, the lave o the encoonter will be easy tae pictur.

Bit this is jist supposin. The anely kent facks--fur tales bi bairns are aften unchancy--are the finnin o Wicksteed's corp, killt, an o the bluid-stained iron rod haived amang the nettles. The leavin o the rod bi Griffin, suggests that in the steer an pouer o the maitter, the eese fur which he tuik it--gin he hid an eese--wis set aside. He wis o a certainty a unca self-centered an unfeelin chiel, bit the sicht o his victim, his first victim, bluidy an peetifu at his feet, micht hae lowsed some lang snibbit in feelin o sorra that micht hae connached fitever kinnoo plisky he’d thocht up.

Efter the murder o Mr. Wicksteed, he wid seem tae hae struck oot ower the kintra tae the doonlan. There’s a tale o a voyce heard aboot sunset bi twa chiels in a park near Fern Bottom. It wis girnin an lauchin, sabbin an maenin, an ower an ower it skirled. It maun hae bin fey tae lippen till. It drave up ben the mids o a clover park an deed awa tae the knowes.

Thon efterneen the Inveesible Cheil maun hae larnt somethin o the faist eese Kemp hid made o his secrets. He maun hae fand hooses steekit an snibbed; he micht hae dauchled aboot railwey stations an creepit aboot howfs, an nae doot he read the annooncements an jeloused somethin o the natur o the meevements again him. An as the gloamin cam on, the parks becam skirpit here an thonner wi boorichs o three or fower cheils, an lood wi the bowfin o tykes. Thon cheil-hunters hid partic’lar orders in the case o an encoonter as tae the wey they should help ane anither. Bit he jinkit them aa. We micht unnerstaun somethin o his scunner, an it could hae bin nane the less because he himsel hid gaen up the tidins that wir bein made eese o sae peetiless agin him. Fur thon day at least he felt owercam wi dool; fur near twinty-fower oors, excep fin he turned tae Wicksteed, he wis a hunted cheil. In the nicht, he maun hae etten an sleepit; fur in the mornin he wis himsel again, fu o virr, pouerfu, roosed, an nesty, set fur his hinmaist muckle tyauve agin the warld.