**Chapter 9x**

**Mr Tam Mervel**

Ye maun pictur Mr. Tam Mervel as a body wi a muckle, streetchy face, a snoot cockin oot like a cylinder, a braid, blae, flabby moo, an a beard o hudderie stobs. He wis creashie an his wee shanks made thon easy tae see. He wis riggit oot in a furry silk hat, an the antrin eese o towe an pynts fur buttons, shawn at antrin pairts o his claes, merked him oot as a bachelor.

Mr. Tam Mervel wis dowpit doon wi his feet in a sheugh bi the roadside ower the lea tae Adderdean, aboot a mile an a hauf ooto Iping. His feet, apairt frae hose o irreg’lar open-wirk, wir nyaakit, his big taes wir braid, an cockit up like the lugs o a watchfu tyke. In a cannie mainner--he did aathin in a cannie mainner--- he wis thinkin on tryin on a pair o buits.They wir the braaest buits he’d cam on fur a lang time, bit ower muckle for him; forbye the anes he had wir, in dry weather, a verra comfy fit, bit ower thin-soled fur weet. Mr. Tam Mervel hated muckle sheen, bit syne he hated weet. He’d niver richt thocht oot fit he hated maist, an it wis a pleisunt day, an there wis naethin better tae dae. Sae he pit the fower sheen in a gracefu boorich on the girse an luikit at them. An seein them thinner amang the girse an brierin agrimony, it o a suddenty cam tae him that baith pairs wir unca ugsome tae see. He wisnae at aa dumfounert bi a voyce ahin him.

"They're buits, onywey," quo the Voyce.

"They’re--puirtith buits," reponed Mr. Tam Mervel, wi his heid on ae side regairdin them wi a grue; "an fit is the mair ugsome pair in the hale warld, I'm dashed gin I ken!"

"Mmp'm," quo the Voyce.

"I've worn waur--in fack, I've worn nane. Bit nane sae unca--if ye'll alloue the expression. I've bin priggin fur buits—in partic’lar--fur days. Because I wis scunnert o them. They're soun eneuch, of coorse. Bit a cheil that’s a gangrel sees sic a terrible scarceity o buits. An gin ye’ll believe me, I've gotten naethin in the hale dashed kintra, tyaave as I wid, bit syne... Luik at 'em! An a guid kintra fur buits, tae, in the ordnar wey. Bit it's jist ma ill luck. I've gotten ma buits in this kintra ten years or mair. An syne they treat ye like this."

"It's a vratch o a kintra," quo the Voyce. "An a scunner fur fowk."

"Ay, that it is," adds Mr. Tam Mervel. "Loshtie! Bit thon buits! It beats aa."

He furled his heid ower his shouder tae the richt, tae luik at the buits o the spikker wi a view tae comparin, an michty! Far the buits o the spikker should hae bin wir neither shanks nur buits. He wis stappit bi the dawn o a muckle bumbazement.

"Far are ye?" speired Mr. Tam Mervel ower his shouder an camin on aa fowers. He saw a streetch o teem leas wi the win sweyin the hyne aff green-pynted whin busses.

"Am I bleezin?" winneret Mr. Mervel. "Hae I hid veesions? Wis I spikkin

tae masel? Fit the--"

"Dinna be dumfounert," quo a Voyce.

"Nane o yer ventriloquisin me," reponed Mr. Tam Mervel, risin sherply tae his feet. "Far are ye? Dumfounert, bi God!"

"Dinna be dumfounert," repeatit the Voyce.

“Ye’ll be dumfounert in a meenit, ye daft gype," quo Mr. Tam Mervel. "Far are\_ye? Lat me see ye...

"Are ye beeriet?" speired Mr. Tam Mervel, efter a whylie.

There wis nae repon. Mr. Tam Mervel stude buitless an dumfounert, his jaiket near haived aff.

"Peesie," cried a peesie, verra hyne aff.

"Peesie, bi God!" quo Mr. Tam Mervel. "This is nae time fur daft pliskies." The lea wis dowie, east an wast, north an sooth; the road wi its wee sheughs an fite borderin stakes, ran smeeth an teem north an sooth, an, forbyes fur thon peesie, the blae lift wis teem as weel. "Sae help me," quo Mr. Tam Mervel, puin his jaiket ontae his shouders again. "It's the drams! I micht hae kent."

"It's nae the drams," spakk the Voyce. "Ye keep your harns steidy."

"Oocha!" quo Mr. Mervel, an his face grew fite amid its swatches."It's the drams!" his lips repeatit sounlessly. He bedd glowerin aboot him, birlin slaw backwirds. "I could hae swore I heard a voyce," he fuspered.

"Of coorse ye did."

"It's thonner again," quo Mr. Mervel, steekin his een an clappin his haun on his broo wi a dowie fleerish. He wis o a suddenty taen bi the collar an shukken rochly, an left mair dumfooert than iver.

"Dinna be a gype," quo the Voyce.

"I'm--aff--ma--dashed--heid," reponed Mr. Mervel. "It's nae guid. It's worritin aboot them dashed buits. I'm aff ma dashed heid aathither. Or it's the drams"

"Neither ae thing nur the tither," quo the Voyce. "Lippen!"

"Heid," reponed Mr. Mervel.

"Ae meenit," quo the Voyce, sherply, trimmlin wi will pouer.

"Weel?" speired Mr. Tam Mervel, wi a fey feelin o haein bin powked in the breist bi a finger.

"Ye think I'm jist makkie-on? Jist makkie-on?"

"Fit the sorra else can ye be?” speired Mr. Tam Mervel, rubbin the back o his nape.

"Verra weel," quo the Voyce, in a tone o relief. "Syne I'm gaun tae haive stanes at ye till ye think different."

"Bit far are ye?"

The Voyce made nae repon. Fingg… cam a stane, seemin ooto naewye, an missed Mr. Mervel's shouder bi a thochtie. Mr. Mervel, birlin, saw a stane yark up intae the air, follae a furly path, hing fur a meenit, an syne haive at his feet wi near inveesible speed. He wis ower stammygastered tae jink it. Fingg it cam, an stottit frae a nyaakit tae intae the sheuch. Mr. Tam Mervel lowpit up a fit an skirled alood. Syne he stertit tae rin, cowped ower an unseen hinner, an cam tapsalteerie dowpit doon.

"Noo," quo the Voyce, as a third stane booed up an hung in the air abune the gangrel. "Am I makkie-on?"

Mr. Mervel bi wey o repon warssled tae his feet, an wis straicht aff rowed ower again. He lay quate fur a meenit. "Gin ye warssle ony mair," quo the Voyce, "I’ll haive the stane at yer heid."

"It's a fey affair," quo Mr. Tam Mervel, sittin up, takin his hurtit tae in haun an steekin his ee on the thirdstane. "I dinna unnerstaun it. Stanes haivin thirsels. Stanes spikkin. Pit yersel doon. Dwine awa. I'm feenished."

The third stane drappit.

"It's verra simple," quo the Voyce. "I'm an inveesible cheil."

"Tell me somethin I dinna ken," reponed Mr. Mervel, pechin wi skaith. "Far are ye hid--foo dae ye dae it--I dinna ken. I'm dane."

"Thon's aa," quo the Voyce. "I'm inveesible. Thon's fit I wint ye tae unnerstan."

"Onybody could see thon. There’s nae need fur ye tae be sae dashed touchy, min. Noo… Gie me a hint. Foo are ye hid?"

"I'm inveesible. Thon’s the hale pynt. An fit I wint ye tae unnerstaun is this--"

"Bit faraboots?" brukk in Mr. Mervel.

"Here! Sax yairds afore o ye."

"Och, cam! I’m nae blin. Ye'll be tellin me neist yer jist thin air. I'm nae ane o yer gypit gangrels--"

"Aye, I am--thin air. Yer luikin throwe me."

"Fit! Is there nae ony stuffin tae ye. Aa spikk an\_--fit is it?--yatter.Is thon it?"

"I’m jist a human cheil--solid, wintin maet an drink, needin claes as weel--Bit I'm inveesible. Ye see? Inveesible. Simple notion. Inveesible."

"Fit, really?"

"Aye, real."

"Let's hae a feel o ye," quo Mervel, "gin ye are real. It winna be sae dashed byordnar like..” Syne—“Lord!" quo he, "foo ye gart me lowp!--grippin me like thon!"

He felt the haun that hid grippit roon his wrist wi his fingers, an his fingers gaed trimmlin up the airm, pattit a strang breist, an explored a beardie face. Mervel's face wi sane o bumbazement.

"I'm dashed!" quo he. "If this disnae beat cock-fechtin! Maist remairkable!--An thonner I can see a mappie clean throwe ye, hauf a mile awa! Nae a pick o ye veesible--barrin--"

He luikit at the seemin teem space cannily. "Ye hinna bin ettin breid an cheese?" he speired, haudin the inveesible airm.

"Yer richt, an it's nae aathegither gaen intae the system."

"Ah!" quo Mr. Mervel. “Kinno ghaistly, tho."

"Of coorse, aa this isnae hauf sae winnerfu as ye think."

"It's winnerfu eneuch fur ma hummil wints," quo Mr. Tam Mervel. "Foo d’ye dae it! Foo the deil is it dane?"

"It's ower lang a tale. An mairower--"

"I tell ye, the hale maitter fair beats me," quo Mr. Marvel.

"Fit I wint tae say eenoo is this: I need help. I hae cam tae thon--I cam upon ye o a suddenty. I wis wannerin, gyte wi roose, nyaakit, fooshiunless. I could hae murdered. An I saw ye--"

"Loshtie\_!" cried Mr. Mervel.

"I cam up ahin ye--dauchled--gaed on--" Mr. Mervel's luik wis eloquent."--syne stoppit. 'Here,' quo I, 'is an ootcast like masel. This is the cheil fur me.' Sae I turned back an cam tae ye--ye. An--"

"Loshtie!" reponed Mr. Mervel. "Bit I'm aa kerfuffled. Micht I speir—Foo is it? An fit ye micht be needin in the wey o help?--Inveesible!"

"I wint ye tae help me get claes—an a bield--an syne, ither ferlies. I've left them lang eneuch. Gin ye winna--weel! Bit ye will—maun."

"Luik here," quo Mr. Mervel. "I'm ower dumfounert. Dinna dunt me aboot ony mair. An lat me gae. I maun get steidy a bittie. An ye've gey near brukken ma tae. It's aa sae unrizzonable. Teem leas, teem lift. Nathin veesible fur miles barrin the breist o Natur. An syne cams a voyce. A voyce ooto heiven! An stanes! An a neive—Loshtie!"

"Pu yersel thegether," quo the Voyce, "fur ye hae tae dae the darg I've chusen fur ye."

Mr. Mervel blew oot his chikks, an his een wir roun.

"I've chusen ye," quo the Voyce. "Ye are the anely cheil barrin a wheen o thon gypes doon thonner, fa ken there’s sic a thing as an inveesible man. Ye hae tae be ma helper. Help me--an I’ll dae great things fur ye. An inveesible cheil is a cheil o pouer." He devauled fur a meenit tae pyocher strang.

"Bit gin ye betray me," he gaed on, "gin ye dinna dae as I direck ye--" He devauled an chappit Mr. Mervel's shouder smertly. Mr. Mervel gaed a skelloch o fleg at the touch.

"I dinna wint tae betray ye," quo Mr. Mervel, schauchlin awa frae the airt o the fingers. "Dinna ye gae a-thinin thon, fitiver ye dae. Aa I wint tae dae is tae help ye--jist tell me fit I’ve tae dae. (Loshtie!) Fitiver ye wint dane, thon I'm maist willin tae dae."