



(ILLUSTRATED)

# THE GOLEM

GUSTAV MEYRINK

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**THE GOLEM**

**Illustrated**

*The Golem is a haunting Gothic tale of stolen identity and persecution, set in a strange underworld peopled by fantastical characters.*

*The novel centers on the life of Athanasius Pernath, a jeweler and art restorer who lives in the ghetto of Prague.*

*The reality of the narrator's experiences is often called into question, as some of them may simply be dreams or hallucinations, and others may be metaphysical or transcendent events that are taking place outside the "real" world.*

*The Golem, though rarely seen, is central to the novel as a representative of the ghetto's own spirit and consciousness, brought to life by the suffering and misery that its inhabitants have endured over the centuries.*

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Translated by Madge Pemberton

# SLEEP

The moonlight is falling on to the foot of my bed. It lies there like a tremendous stone, flat and gleaming.

As the shape of the full moon begins to dwindle, and its right side starts to wane-as age will treat a human face, leaving his trace of wrinkles first upon one hollowing cheek-my soul becomes a prey to vague unrest. It torments me.

At such times of night I cannot sleep; I cannot wake; in its half dreaming state my mind forms a curious compound of things it has seen, things it has read, things it has heard-streams, each with its own degree of clarity and colour, that intermingle, and penetrate my thought.

Before I went to bed, I had been reading from the life of Buddha; one particular passage now seeks me out and haunts me, drumming its phrases into my ears over and over and over again from the beginning, in every possible permutation and combination:

“A crow flew down to a stone that looked, as it lay, like a lump of fat. Thought the crow, ‘Here is a toothsome morsel for my dining’; but finding it to be nothing of the kind, away it flew again. So do we crows, having drawn near to the stone, even so do we, would-be seekers after truth, abandon Gautama the Ascetic so soon as in him we cease to find our pleasure.”

This image of the stone that resembled a lump of fat assumes ever larger and larger proportions within my brain.

I am striding along the dried-up bed of a river, picking up weathered, worn flints.

Now they are greyish-blue, coated in a fine, sparkling dust; persistently I grub them up in handfuls, without in the least knowing what use I shall make of them; now they are black, with sulphury spots, like the petrified attempts by a child to create squat, spotty monsters.

I strive with all my might and main to throw these stone shapes far away from me, but always they drop out of my hand, and, do what I will, are there, for ever there, within my sight.

Whereupon every stone that has ever played a role in my life rises into existence and compasses me around.

Numbers of them labour painfully to raise themselves out of the sand towards the light-like monstrous, slaty-hued crayfish when the tide is at the full-as if venturing their lives to compel me to see them, so that they can give me tidings of infinite importance.

Others, exhausted, fall back spent into their holes, once for all abandoning their vain attempt to speak.

Time and again do I start up from this dim twilight of half dream, and for the space of a moment experience once more the moonlight on the end of my billowing counterpane, like a large, flat, bright stone, only to sink blindly back into the realms of semi-consciousness, there to grope and grope in my painful quest for that eternal stone that in some mysterious fashion lurks in the dim recesses of my memory and looks like a lump of fat.

At one time, as I envision it, a rain pipe must have emptied near it, but now the pipe is broken off, its edge eaten by rust; with all my might and main do I endeavour to fix this image in my thoughts, that their troublings may be conjured into rest, and sleep prevail at last.

But always it eludes me.

Again and again, with the persistence of idiocy, a voice keeps repeating in my innermost being-undefatigable as the wind-blown shutter beating at regular recurring intervals against the wall- "That is not the way of it; that is not the stone like a lump of fat"

Nothing can rid me of that voice.

When, for the hundredth time, I have reiterated that, anyway, all this is not of the slightest consequence, it stops for one brief moment, only to be bom again, and start once

more with all its old persistence: "Very well...very well...very well...but that is not the stone...like a lump of fat..." Slowly an unbearable feeling of frustration begins to overpower me.

What happens next I cannot say.

Whether, of my own free will, I abandon all resistance; whether they overpower and stifle me, those thoughts of mine...

I only know that my body lies sleeping in its bed, while my mind, no longer part of it, goes forth on its wanderings.

"Who is this T?" That is the question I am suddenly beset with a desire to ask; but at the same instant do I become conscious of the fact that I no longer possess any organ to whom this query might be addressed; added to which, I am in mortal terror lest that idiotic voice should re-awaken and begin all over again that never-ending business of the stone and the lump of fat.

I turn away.



# DAY

All of a sudden, there I stood in a gloomy court, looking through a reddish archway on the hither side of the narrow, grubby street, at a Jewish junkdealer, leaning against the doorway of a shop, whose walls were cluttered around with old ironware, broken tools, rusty stirrups, skates, and an endless variety of derelict objects and general hamper.

And, to me, this image was steeped in that painful monotonous element, the distinguishing mark of all those impressions familiar on the threshold of our consciousness as daily visitants. It aroused within me neither curiosity nor surprise.

I knew beyond all doubt that I had been living for a long time near here.

Neither did this conviction make any deep impression on my mind, despite the startling fact of my presence there, and its utter contrast to all my previous perceptions.

“I must,” the idea suddenly came into my head, as I trod the well-worn stone steps that led to my room, and received fleeting impressions of its greasy portal, “somewhere or another I must have come across some curious comparison between a stone and a lump of fat.”

I now heard footsteps running down from the staircase above, and as I came to my door, saw that it was Aaron Wassertrum’s fourteen-year-old Rosina of the red hair.

I was forced to squeeze past her, and she leant back alluringly against the staircase, laying her dirty hands on the iron rail and I saw the whiteness of her underarm stark against the gloom of shadow.

I did not meet her look.

I detested that insistent smile of hers and her waxy, rocking-horse face.

Her flesh must be white, surely, like that of the axolotl that I saw the other day at the birdshop in the salamander's cage.

As for the eyelashes of the red-haired, I'd as soon contemplate those of a young rabbit.

I unlocked my door and slammed it quickly behind me.

From my window I could see Aaron Wassertrum the junkdealer still standing in front of his shop.

He was leaning against the doorway of his dark shop, clipping his fingernails.

Was Rosina of the red hair his daughter or his niece? There was no shadow of resemblance betwixt them.

I find it easy to pick out the divers breeds of Jew among all those faces that crowd the Hahnpassgasse every day. But they have as little to do with near relationship as oil has to do with water; you can never say, There go a pair of brothers, or a father and son. One belongs to one tribe and one to another. That is all that their faces betray. It would prove but little if Rosina did bear a likeness to old Wassertrum.

These varied types loathe one another with an antagonism not even blood relationship can break through; but they know how to preserve this hatred from the eyes of the outer world, like the conservation of a deadly mystery. It is a secret not one human soul is allowed to penetrate; they are united in the keeping of it like a group of blind men with hatred in their hearts who cling to the same greasy rope; one holds tight with his two fists, another reluctantly with one finger only, but all are possessed with the same superstitious fear lest disaster overtake them should they relinquish their hold and go apart from one another.

Rosina belongs to the tribe of which the red-haired members are even more repulsive than the rest. The men thereof are narrow-chested, with long, bird-like necks and aggressively prominent Adam's apples. They are for the most part freckled, and suffer all their lives from the

torment of suppressed passions, against which they wage a perpetual, ever-losing war, racked incessantly by apprehensions for their own bodily health.

I was incapable of resolving the problem of Rosina's blood relationship to Wassertrum the junkdealer. I had never seen her in the old fellow's company, or at any time heard them calling across to one another. Nearly always she was on this side of the courtyard, lurking around the dark corners and passages of my particular block. In any case all my neighbours took her for a close relation of Wassertrum's, or at least his ward; and yet I am sure that no one could have given a particle of proof for it.

I had had enough of thinking about Rosina, and now I looked through the open window of my room towards the Hahnpassgasse. Promptly Aaron Wassertrum glanced up, as though he had felt the force of my gaze in his direction. His same staring, greasy countenance with the goggle fish eyes and the sagging hare-lip. He looked like a human spider, registering, for all its assumed inertia, the slightest contact with its web. On what does he live? What does he think of? What possess?

That I did not know.

All round the walls of his shop are ranged, day after day, year in, year out, the same old worthless things. I could have identified them with my eyes shut: the battered metal cornet without keys, a picture of a group of soldiers, painted on a yellow paper; and, in front of the shop, blocking the entrance, a range of iron stove lids.

These things were constant, never any more of them, never any less, and should some passer-by actually stop and make an enquiry with regard to prices, the junkdealer would fall into a positive frenzy. With his hare-lip protruding at its fullest and most horrifying, he would splutter forth in his rage in a gurgling, stuttering bass something utterly incomprehensible to the intending purchaser, whose desire

for information would instantaneously evaporate as he hurried away in a state of terrified dismay.

What was he looking at down there? The house stands with its back towards the Hahnpassgasse, and its windows facing the court. Only one of them looked out towards the street.

The rooms near mine on the same floor-some sort of a corner studio affair from the look of it-would appear to be occupied for the moment, for I can hear through the walls, all of a sudden, a male and a female voice in conversation.

But it's impossible that old Wassertrum, right down below there, can have noticed that!

Someone is moving, the other side of my door. I conjecture: it is Rosina, still waiting greedily in the shadows, lest I should be tempted to call her in to me. Below me, half a story again, Loisa is standing on the staircase, pock-marked and stunted, breathlessly listening to hear if I open. I can positively feel the breath of his hatred and all his frothing jealousy stealing up the steps towards me. He is afraid to come nearer and be seen by Rosina. He knows he is dependent on her as a hungry wolf upon its keeper...yet what would he not give to spring up there and then, giving full vent to his fury, blindly...madly I sit down to my work-table and search for my pincers and graving tools. But this was to be one of my off days. My hand was not steady enough to work on the restoring of that delicate Japanese print.

The dismal gloomy pall of life that hung over this warren of lodgings obsessed the whole soul of me. Picture after picture rose up into my mind.

Loisa and his twin brother Jaromir are hardly a year older than Rosina. Of their father, a baker of consecrated wafers for the Church, I scarcely seem to have any recollection; some old woman, I believe, now sees after the two youths. That is to say, she provides them with a roof to sleep under, for which they must pay her with whatever they can beg or

steal. Does she give them their meals? I should imagine not, considering the late hour of the old crone's regular home-coming. She is a layer-out of corpses by profession, so they say.

I had often watched Loisa, Jaromir, and Rosina playing together in the courtyard as children. But that is long ago.

Day in, day out, does Loisa persist in shadowing that red-haired Jewish girl. Sometimes he will not be able to find her for hours together, and then it is he creeps in front of my door and waits for her, with wry distorted face, lest she creep by secretly. I can see him in the spirit, as I sit at my work, lurking there in the passage corner, his head, with its nervous twitch, stuck out, listening.

At times the stillness is broken by a sudden wild cry. It is Jaromir, the deaf mute, whose whole existence is bounded by a dominating lust after Rosina; he roams the building like a wild beast, half crazed with jealousy and suspicion, and his inarticulate howling cry is enough to freeze up the blood in one's veins. Always he is visualising in his mind Loisa and Rosina together, and he seeks and seeks, first in one smutty corner and then in another, in utter blind madness, impelled for ever by the one great thought-that he must perpetually be on his brother's heels, that nothing shall take place between him and Rosina without his knowledge.

And, so I surmise, it is precisely this perpetual agony on the part of the cripple that provides the incentive to Rosina's carryings-on with Loisa. The latter, should Rosina show signs of falling off ever so little, manufactures fresh atrocities to stimulate her flagging spirits. They let themselves be surprised by the deaf-mute and lure the poor mad creature treacherously into dark passage-ways, where they have erected artful contrivances of old rusty barrel hoops and iron rakes with teeth upwards into which traps the miserable man falls and emerges bleeding. Occasionally, that the pain may be provoked to the point of

torment, Rosina will devise, by her own unaided genius, a plan little short of demoniac.

She will change, in a flash, her whole demeanour towards Jaromir, and pretend he has found favour in her sight. With that perpetual smile of hers, she makes the cripple a recipient of hasty confidences, which transport him to a state of wild excitement, and for this end she has evolved a mysterious language of signs, only half intelligible, that weave an inexorable web around the unfortunate deaf-mute, of babbling uncertainty and devastating hope. I saw her once, standing before him in the courtyard, and, such were her gestures and emphatic working of her lips, I thought for sheer mental torment he must needs break into little pieces. His face was sweating at every pore, in his almost superhuman efforts to understand the sense of her lightning movements, so deliberately misleading. The whole of the following day he waited, feverish with expectation, within the dirty doorway of an old derelict house a little farther down the narrow, grimy Hahn- passgasse. There did he wait and linger, wasting time enough to have begged for himself the sum of a couple of kreuzer. Late at night, when he returned, half dead with hunger and spleen, the old woman had locked him out.

The gay sound of a woman's laughter from the adjacent studio came to me through the wall.

Laughter? In a place such as this a real happy laugh? In the whole Ghetto there is no one who can laugh happily.

Then I remembered what Zwakh, the old puppeteer, had confided to me a few days ago-that a distinguished young gentleman had taken the studio over from him at a high rental, obviously for the express purpose of meetings undisturbed with the lady of his choice. Bit by bit, in the watches of the night, so as to escape the notice of the other inmates, handsome pieces of furniture had been arriving. The old boy had rubbed his hands with glee in the telling of it, childishly delighted at his own clever part in the

transaction; not one of the other tenants could have the slightest suspicion of the presence of this pair of lovers in their midst.

And yet from no less than three of the houses was it possible to obtain access to this studio. There was even a trap-door that led into it! To say nothing of the fact that, if one unlatched the iron door to the basement-quite easy from above-it was possible, through my room, to reach the staircase of our house and make an exit that way.

I heard peals of laughter-and vague memories arise-a great mansion, a noble family, where I often called to make small restorations on priceless antiquities.

Suddenly from the same quarter I hear a piercing cry. I listen, appalled.

The iron door grinds open, and the next moment a woman has rushed into my room. Hair dishevelled, white as the wall, a piece of gold brocade flung over her naked shoulders: "Master Pernath, hide me-for the love of Christ! Don't ask questions; hide me-here!"

Before I could reply, my door was suddenly opened, and as quickly shut again.

For the space of a second the face of Aaron Wassertrum had grinned like an obscene mask through the aperture.

A round luminous spot swims into my vision, and by the light of the moon I become aware once more of the foot of my bed.

Sleep lies still upon me like a thick woolly mantle, and the name of Pernath is woven into my consciousness in letters of gold.

Where have I read it before, this name-Athanasius Pernath?

Once, long, long ago, it is in my mind that somehow or other I took the wrong hat by mistake; at the time I was surprised how well it fitted me, for the shape of my head I always thought peculiar to myself. I had glanced at that

time, down at the lining of the hat, and there had observed, in letters of gold in the white silk:

### ***ATHANASIUS PERNATH***

And, for some reason I did not understand, the hat had filled me with fear and dislike.

All of a sudden, like an arrow from the bow, comes the sound of the voice, the voice I had forgotten, and which still persists in asking me where the stone is that looks like a lump of fat.

In a trice I conjure up in my mind the image of Rosina, with her lascivious, grinning profile. That seems to settle the voice, for the arrow is lost in the darkness.

Ah-that face of Rosina! That has ten times the strength of this babbling voice of inanity; now can I rest in peace even though I be buried again in my room in the Hahnpassgasse.





Unless my impression was wrong that someone followed me up the staircase, always the same distance behind, with the object of paying me a visit, he must have arrived at the last flight by now. He is, I surmise, making his way round the corner where Schemajah Hillel the registrar has his lodging, along the upper story passage with the red tiles. He is fumbling his way now along the wall; at the moment he must be laboriously spelling out the letters of my name in the darkness, upon my door.

There stood I in the midst of my room, gazing towards the passage. The door opened, and he came in.

He took a few steps towards me, without removing his hat or uttering any greeting. I had the feeling that was how he behaved himself at home, and to me it seemed quite as it should be that this was the way of it.

He reached into his pocket and took out a book.

For a long time he stood there, turning over the leaves. The book was bound in metal, which was chased with rosettes and seals, in which were coloured enamels and small stones.

At last he found the place he wanted, and pointed to it. It was a chapter entitled Ibbur, or the Fecundation of the Soul.

Almost mechanically I noted that the initial letter, in red and gold, took up nearly half the page, and the edge of it was worn away.

It had been brought to me for restoration. The letter did not adhere to the parchment in the way I was familiar with in old books, but appeared to consist of two strips of thin gold, soldered together in the centre, and fixed to the edge of the parchment at each end.

Had it been necessary to cut a hole in the page in the place where the letter now was...and would the "I" show

reversed on the other side? I turned over the page, and found that it was so. Involuntarily, I read the page through, together with the one that followed.

I read on and on.

The book spoke to me as had my dream, only clearer and more coherently. Like an interrogation, it pierced straight to my heart. From an invisible mouth words were streaming forth, turning into living entities, and winging straight towards me. They twirled and paraded like gaily dressed female slaves, only to sink on the floor or evaporate in iridescent mist into the air, each giving place to the one that followed. For an instant each would pause, hoping to be the object of my choice, before making way for her successor.

More than a few of them there were that peacocked up and down in shimmering garments, with slow and measured steps; others, again, resembled aged queens, a lascivious crook to the corners of their mouths, and wrinkles foully besmirched with garish paint. They passed, and others succeeded them, a ceaseless procession of grey forms and faces, so humdrum and devoid of all expression that to memorise them seemed beyond the power of concentration.

Now they dragged in a woman, stark naked, gigantic as a feminine Colossus. For the space of a second she stood there, doing me reverence. The lashes of her eyes were the length of my whole body, and with a silent gesture she directed my gaze towards the pulse in her left wrist. It started to throb like an earthquake, and I felt within her the life of an entire world.

A throng of corybantes came rushing out of the distance.

A man and a woman were embracing. I saw them come from afar, and nearer and nearer came the throng. Now I heard the singing of the frenzied troop close to me, and my eyes sought out the embracing couple. But they had now turned into one single form, half male, half female—a hermaphrodite seated on a throne of mother-of-pearl. Its crown terminated in a piece of red wood, on which the

Worm of Destruction had gnawed mysterious runic figures. Pattering blindly behind came a flock of miniature sheep, in a cloud of dust-perambulating provender that the giant hermaphrodite trailed in its wake to feed its train of dancing' bacchantes.

And some of the figures that streamed forth still from this invisible mouth were risen from the dead, their features swathed in grave- clothes. Should they pause in my presence, they would let their wrappings suddenly fall, staring hungrily right into my heart with their predatory eyes that sent a stab of icy horror through my brain, and seemed to dam the swift course of my blood like a stream on which the skies have rained great chunks of stone, plumb to the very centre of its bed.

Now swept past me a woman. I could not see her face; that was turned from me; she wore a cloak made all of flowing tears.

A procession of masked forms then jiggled on its way, laughing and with no thought in their heads of me. The figure of a pierrot only gazed at me, full of thought, then turned back, and stood there looking at my face as though into a mirror. The faces he pulled were so fantastic, and the motions of his arms, now slow, now quick as lightning, so bizarre, that I was seized with an irresistible impulse to wink even as he did, to shrug my shoulders and twitch the corners of my mouth. Next moment he was shouldered along by the crowd behind him, all wanting to catch a sight of me as they passed. But not one of these creatures was endowed with reason. They were so many glittering pearls strung on a silken thread, the several notes of a single melody, welling forth from the invisible mouth.

It was no longer a book that spoke to me. It was a voice. A voice that wanted something from me I could not understand, try as I would. It tormented me with its fevered, incomprehensible questionings.

But the voice that uttered these visible words was dead to all eternity, and devoid of echo.

Each noise in this our world of actuality is accompanied by its attendant echoes, just as each object casts its one big shadow together with a multitude of smaller ones. But this voice knew not its echoes any more; long ago they had faded and passed into oblivion.

I had read the book now through to its end, and still held it there in my hands, as though all this time I had been fumbling in my own brain, and not inside a book at all!

Everything the voice had uttered was there within me, had been there all my life, though smothered and forgotten, choked down beneath the weight of my own thoughts, till this, the day of delivery.

I glanced up. Where was the man who had brought the book? Had he gone? Would he fetch it when it was ready? Or ought I to take it to him? I couldn't remember that he had told me where he lived.

I tried to visualise him in my mind, but in vain.

How had he been dressed? Was he old? Was he young? What coloured hair had he? What coloured beard?

Not one single thing could I remember about him. The images I tried to conjure fled away, helter-skelter, before I could fix them in my mind.

I closed my eyes, pressing my lids down with my hand, trying to summon up a glimpse of him, be it ever so slight. Nothing. Nothing at all.

I took up a position in the middle of the room, as I had done at the moment of his arrival, and pictured the scene: thus had he groped round the corner, thus had he stolen along the tiled passage, thus had he stood outside, reading the letters on my door-plate: "Athanasius Pernath." And then he had entered.

It was all in vain.

Not for an instant could I recapture the least glimmer of his presence as it had appeared to me. I saw the book lying

there on the table, and conjured up in spirit the vision of that hand as it had emerged from its pocket and reached it out to me. I could not even remember if it had worn a glove or if it were bare, if it were young or old, plain or be-ringed.

Suddenly I was possessed with a strange idea.

It was like an irresistible inspiration.

I threw my cloak over my shoulders, put my hat on my head, and went out along the passage and down the stairs. Then, slowly, I returned towards my room. Slowly, slowly, slowly, just as he had done. As I opened the door, I noticed the shadows that already filled my room. But surely it had been full light of day when I went out?

How long had I been groping there, lost to all knowledge of time? I tried now to imitate the stranger in gait and gesture, yet still could recall nothing of him. How could I imitate him, when I had no point of contact with his personality?

Yet now it was the thing happened, quite other than the way I had imagined.

My skin, my muscles, the whole of my body, remembered suddenly, without telling my brain. They made movements I had neither willed nor desired. It was as though my limbs belonged to me no more. Without any warning my gait had become fumbling and strange to myself as I took a couple of steps within my room. It was the gait of a man for ever in fear of falling, so I said to myself.

It was his way of walking! Yes, it was! Yes, it was!

I knew now for certain that he was like that.

My unfamiliar face was now clean shaven, with prominent cheekbones, my eyes were slanting.

I could feel it, even though I could not see it.

“That is not my face!” I wanted to cry out. I wanted to feel it, but my hand did not obey my will; instead, it crept into my pocket, and pulled forth a book.

Precisely as he had done a short while ago.

All of a sudden I was sitting down, without my cloak, without my hat, at my own table. I-I-Athanasius Pernath.

Terror took me by the throat; my heart beat fit to burst. Those ghostly fingers, groping in the crevices of my brain, had ceased their fumbling, yet still, deep down in my innermost mind, I could feel the cold contact of their touch.

I knew now who the stranger was, and that at any moment I could feel his personality within me at my will; yet still was I unable to conjure up his actual presence before me, face to face. I knew I never should be able to.

He was like a negative, I recognised, an unseeable hollow form whose lines I cannot comprehend, into which I must slip if I was to become conscious of its form and its impact on my Self.

In my table drawer was a little iron box; in it I decided I would place the book and let it stay there till the effects of my brain-storm had passed away; then and not till then, would I see to the restoration of that letter "I."

I picked the book up from the table. I had a curious sensation as of not touching it, and the same thing happened when I tried to raise the box. It was as though my sense of touch needs must flow through a long, dark streak of nothingness before it merged into my conscious self, as though betwixt me and inanimate objects yawned a great gulf of time; as though they belonged to an age past and gone, of which I had once been part.

The voice circling round me in the darkness, tormenting me with its queries concerning the stone and the fat, had at last passed me by! This time it missed me! I knew now that it emerged from the realm of sleep. What I had just experienced being on the plane of life, it failed to get in touch with me and track me down.

# PRAGUE

Beside me was standing the student Charousek, the collar of his shabby, threadbare overcoat undone, his teeth audibly chattering from cold.

“He’ll catch his death,” thought I, “in this icy archway,” and asked him to come up with me to my room.

But he refused. “Thank you, Master Pernath,” he gasped at me, shivering, “I’m afraid I haven’t time. I’ve got to hurry off into the town. Besides, we should get wet to our skins if we were to cross the street at this moment. One second’s enough to soak you, in this!”

The rain sheeted over the roofs and trickled down the house-fronts like a storm of tears. Stooping a little, I could catch sight of my window on the fourth floor, the panes of it obscured by drops of moisture that turned it to an unhealthy blister on the wall.

A dirty drain ran the length of the street, and the archway was filled with people waiting for the downpour to end.

“There goes a bridal bouquet,” said Charousek suddenly, pointing to a bunch of withered myrtle drifting along in the filthy water.

At which somebody behind us laughed out loud. Turning, I saw it to be an elderly, white-haired man, carefully dressed, with a bloated countenance, strangely reminiscent of a frog. Charousek glanced over his shoulder for a moment, then stood humming something to himself.

There was something unpleasant about that old man. I looked away from him, and gazed instead at the discoloured buildings, standing there side by side in the rain like a herd of derelict, dripping animals. How uncanny and depraved they all seemed. Erected without plan, from the look of them, as fortuitously as so many weeds rising from the

ground. Two of them were huddled up together against an old yellow stone wall, the last remaining vestige of an earlier building of considerable size. There they had stood for two centuries now, or it might be three, detached from the buildings around them; one of them slanting obliquely, with a roof like a retreating forehead; the one next to it jutting out like an eye-tooth.

Beneath this dreary sky they seemed to be standing in their sleep, without a trace revealed of that something hostile, something malicious, that at times seemed to permeate the very bricks of which they were composed, when the street was filled with mists of autumn evenings that laid a veil upon their features.

In this age I now inhabit, a persistent feeling clings to me, as though at certain hours of the night and early morning grey these houses took mysterious counsel together, one with another. The walls would be subject to faint, inexplicable tremors; strange sounds would creep along the roofs and down the gutters-sounds that our human ears might register, maybe, but whose origin remained beyond our power to fathom, even had we cared to try.

Often in my dreams would I witness the ghostly communings of these old houses, and in terror realise that they in very truth were the lords of the street, of its very life and essence, of which they could divest themselves at will, lending it during the day to its inhabitants, only to reclaim it, plus exorbitant interest, when night came round again. To say nothing of the curious beings living within their walls-beings not bom of flesh and blood-whose doings and strivings seem jumbled one against another, conglomerate, without a plan; as their spirits pass before me, more than ever am I convinced that such dreams as these conceal some dim truth within themselves which, in my waking hours, like the faint rainbow impress of a fairy-tale, shimmers only faintly in the depths of my soul.



Then, in mysterious fashion, comes into my mind the legend of the mysterious Golem, artificial man, whom once, long ago, here in the Ghetto, a rabbi learned in the Kabbala shaped from the elements, investing it with an unreasoning, automatic life when he placed a magical formula behind its teeth. And, as that same Golem stiffened into clay the instant that mysterious phrase was removed from its lips, so must, I thought, these humans dwindle to soulless entities so soon as was extinguished within them some slightest spark of an idea, some species of dumb striving, however irrelevant, already deteriorated with most of them, from the look of it, into a mere aimless sloth, or a dull waiting for they know not what.

Lurking and waiting... waiting and lurking... the terrible, perpetual motto of the Ghetto.

Never are its inhabitants seen in the act of work. Yet they are awake with the first dawning, and they wait, almost with stopped breath, as if for a sacrifice that is never performed.

“Toothless, degenerate beasts of prey, stripped of their strength and their weapons,” said Charousek hesitatingly. And he looked at me. How could he have known what I was thinking of? “Sometimes,” thought I, “so strong is the burden of a man’s thoughts within him that, like spraying sparks, they leap from one’s brain into that of one’s next-door neighbour.”

“How do they live?” I asked, after a little while.

“Live! How do they live? More than one of them’s a millionaire.”

I looked again at Charousek. What on earth could he mean?

But the student gazed silently up at the clouds. The murmur of voices had ceased for a moment in the archway, and the only audible sound was the hissing of the rain.

What on earth did the fellow mean, with his “More than one of them’s a millionaire?” Again it was as though

Charousek had been responding to my thoughts.

He pointed to Wassertrum's old shop, past which the water swirled in reddish puddles, stained with the rust of scrap iron.

"Aaron Wassertrum, for instance! He's a millionaire. Owns a third of the Ghetto. Didn't you know that, Herr Pemath?"

I gasped. "Aaron Wassertrum? That old junkdealer is a millionaire?"

"Oh, I know all about him," continued Charousek venomously, as if he had only been waiting for me to ask him. "And I knew his son, Dr. Wassory. Never heard of him? Wassory the famous ophthalmologist? The whole town was mad about him a year ago. A great specialist, they used to call him. They never knew that not so long ago his name had been Wassertrum. He loved to play the part of a man of science who had renounced the world. Any awkward questions about his origin he'd turn aside with modest chat about his father in the Ghetto, his own humble beginnings, and how he had kept the lamp of learning alight despite sorrows and hardships. Sorrows and hardships! He was right there, but he never revealed whose sorrows and hardships, nor the means he had used. But I knew." Charousek seized my arm and shook it, none too gently.

"Master Pemath, I tell you I'm so poor it's almost past my own power to realise. I go about the streets half naked, like a tramp- look!-yet I'm a student of medicine, and a man of education!"

He undid his overcoat, and I saw, to my horror, that he had neither coat nor shirt beneath it; nothing, in short, but his bare skin.

"And I was every bit as poor when I dragged this dirty dog down to his ruin-this eminent God almighty Dr. Wassory-and not a soul knows to this day... I was the cause of it! All over the town it was believed that it was one Dr. Savioli who had exposed the rascal's methods, and driven him to take his life. But I tell you Dr. Savioli was nothing but a tool in my

hand. It was I thought out the plan and collected the evidence; sapped all the foundations, bit by bit, of the house of Wassory, till the mine was laid and wanted nothing but the merest spark to fire it! Not all the money on earth or the whole accumulated cunning of the Ghetto could save him. It took only the slightest push for a collapse. The way you play chess. Exactly the way you play chess.

Nobody knows it was I! Not a mother's son of them! Though old Aaron Wassertrum, I shouldn't wonder, has some sleepless nights, with a nasty feeling somewhere in the pit of his stomach that there's somebody none too far away, for all that he can't locate him, somebody other than Dr. Savioli, who must have had a hand in the game! But Wassertrum's the sort of chap who, for all those little squinny eyes of his can see through a stone wall, never allows for the fact that there are minds who know how to use long, invisible needles with poison on the end of them, that can penetrate those same walls, beyond gold and precious stones, till they reach the vital arteries behind them."

Charousek gave a wild laugh as he slapped his hand against his forehead.

"Aaron Wassertrum will know soon enough. On that same day he thinks to have Savioli by the throat-on that identical day! I know all the moves of this game down to the last move. It's going to be a King's Knight Gambit. There will be no possible move, up to the bitter end, against which I don't have a devastating reply. Anyone pitting himself against me will find himself dangling in the air like a marionette on strings... and I'll have the pulling of them. Mark my words, I'll manipulate them at my own sweet will."

The student rambled on like a man in a fever, and I gazed into his face, dismayed.

"What have Wassertrum and his son done to you for you to hate them so?"