

# Gustav Meyrink

## THE GOLEM

### Illustrated

*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-indefatigable 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