

Sleep



The moonlight falls upon the foot of my bed and lies like a big, flat, pale stone.

When the full moon's form starts to shrink and its right side begins to wither – as one cheek of an aging face is first to wrinkle and waste away – at this hour a dull, tormenting unrest comes over me.

I sleep not and I wake not, and half in a dream my soul mingles things seen with things read and heard, like currents of different color and clarity flowing together.

I had read about the life of the Buddha Gotama before going to bed, and in a thousand variations, always starting over from the beginning, the words ran through my mind:

“A crow flew to a stone which resembled a piece of fat and thought: perhaps this is good to eat. Finding nothing good to eat, the crow flew away. Like the crow who came to the stone, so we – we, the tempters – abandon the ascetic Gotama when he no longer pleases us.”

And the image of the stone which resembled a piece of fat waxes to monstrous proportions in my mind:

I walk along a dry riverbed and pick up smooth pebbles.

Grey-blue ones flecked with glittering dust, which I ponder and ponder and yet can make neither head nor tail of – then black ones with sulfur-yellow dots like a child's petrified efforts to mold lumpish speckled salamanders.

And I want to hurl them far from me, these pebbles, but they slip from my hand every time, and I cannot ban them from my sight.

All the stones which ever played a role in my life crop up around me.

of the past – how often did the old doctor urge that upon me! You know, Zwakh, he always said, we have a certain method; we have walled up his illness with enormous effort, if I may – just as the scene of some tragedy is shut away because of the unhappy memory associated with it.” – –

The words of the marionette player had ambushed me like a butcher a defenseless animal and wrung my heart with rough, cruel hands.

As long as I could remember, a dull torment had gnawed at me – the suspicion that something had been taken from me and that I had walked much of my life’s path along an abyss like a somnambulist. And I had never been able to fathom the cause.

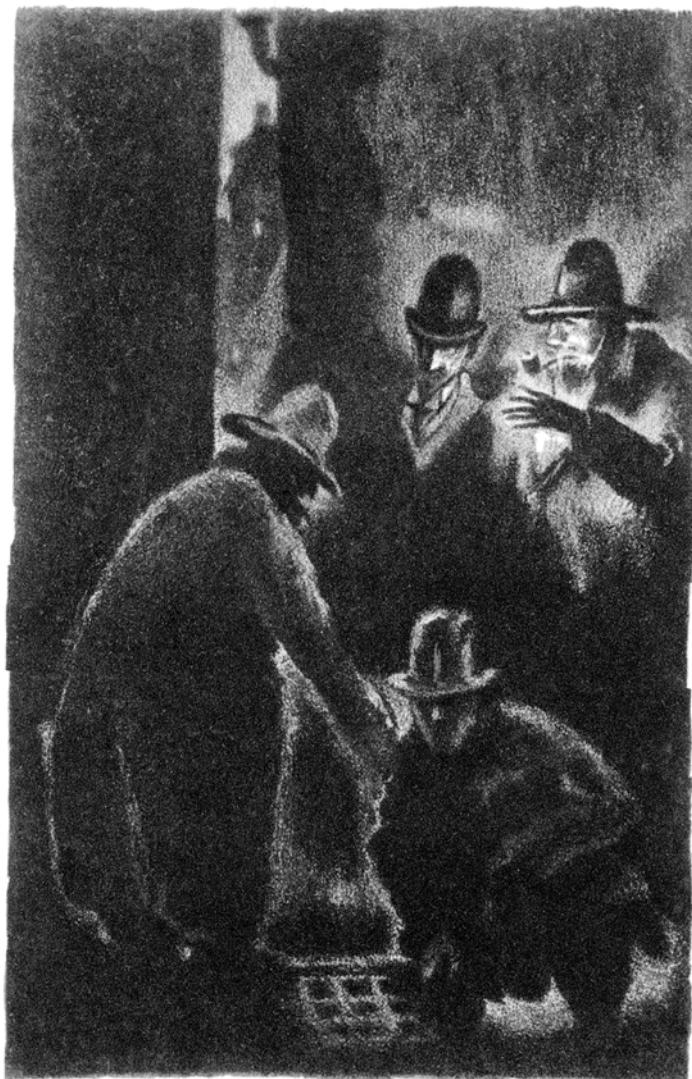
Now the solution to the riddle lay manifest before me, stinging unbearably like an opened wound.

My morbid reluctance to give rein to the memory of past events – then the strange, recurring dream that I was trapped in a house with a series of chambers I could not enter – the disturbing failure of my memory in things concerning my youth – all at once there was a terrible explanation: I had been insane, and hypnosis had been used to close off the “room” which led to those chambers of my brain, making me homeless amidst the life surrounding me.

And without hope of ever regaining the lost memory!

The motives of my thoughts and actions lie hidden in another, forgotten existence, I realized – never could I know them: a cut plant am I, a rice seedling that sprouts from a strange root. And if I managed to force my way into that locked “room”, wouldn’t I succumb once again to the ghosts which had been banned there?!

Zwakh’s tale of the “Golem” an hour ago passed through my mind, and suddenly I saw an enormous, mysterious connection between the legendary chamber with no door where that stranger was said to live, and my portentous dream.



“— can die no more?” – A dull pain seized me.

“Two paths run side by side: the path of life and the path of death. You took the Book of Ibbur and read in it. The spirit of life has impregnated your soul”, I heard him say.

“Hillel, Hillel, let me take the path all men take: the path of death!” my every fiber cried out wildly.

Schemajah Hillel’s face went rigid with gravity.

“Men take no path at all, neither that of life nor that of death. They drift along like chaff in a storm. The Talmud says: ‘Before God created the world, he held a mirror up to his creatures; there they saw the spiritual torments of existence and the delights to follow. Some took on these torments. But the others refused, and these God struck from the book of the living.’ But you *take* a path and have set out upon it of your own free will – even if you no longer know it: you have summoned yourself. Do not despair: gradually, when knowledge comes, memory will come as well. *Knowledge and memory are the same.*”

The friendly, almost affectionate tone in which Hillel’s speech ended, restored my composure, and I felt sheltered like a sick child who knows his father is at his side.

I looked up and saw that many figures had suddenly filled the room, encircling us: some in white shrouds, such as the old rabbis wore, others with three-cornered hats and silver buckles on their shoes – but Hillel passed his hand over my eyes, and the room was empty once again.

Then he accompanied me out to the stairs and gave me a burning candle to light my way back to my room. — — —

I went to bed and tried to sleep, but slumber did not come, and I passed instead into a strange state which was neither dreaming nor waking nor sleeping.

I had snuffed the light, yet everything in the room was so clear that I could distinguish each separate form. At the same time, I felt quite at ease and free of that unrest which usually torments one in such a state.

