

## KEINFREIND'S GOLEM

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In one concentrated spate of burglaries in Sali Keinfreind's immediate Elm Glade neighbourhood that had circumvented all security systems and frustrated the authorities, thieves had netted at the very least a solid million in art-works, jewellery, coin and stamp collections, and judiciously chosen Eastern statuettes, delicately woven wall-hangings and antiques. Himself a collector - in his case, of rare books, manuscripts, maps, charms, amulets and astronomical charts, his house being a most exquisitely veritable museum which, for reasons of safety, he was disposed to show to none - Keinfreind, ruffled by the news, set about exploring ways of protecting himself, his home and his possessions. With all conventional detectors, sonic alarms, coded police-station link-ups, and all other systems and devices having proved breachable to the last - indeed, the more complex they were, the more they challenged the house-breakers - Keinfreind looked beyond anything that technology, even at its most sophisticated, could devise.

Where he turned was to his own sturdy dark-wood cabinets, to the books of all sizes and bindings locked behind thick shock-proof glass, a goodly number of which dated back some near four hundred years to Prague, Venice, Amsterdam and Mainz. Among them were such time-honoured, still-seminal gems as *Divine Fire: On the Maker and His Work*, *Threads in the Tapestry of Being*, and *The Might That Slumbers in the Clay*. Empowered with the knowledge derived from books such as these, devotees had learned - so had he heard - to glide over long distances without once setting foot to ground; he had heard, too, of a man who had walked into the very heart of a fire, yet who, like Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, had emerged not so much as singed; and he had himself met a psychic, trustworthy to the core, who had described how, through her study of the classic, *Transcendental Twinings*, she had personally and permanently cured a young woman who, for years, had been written off as schizophrenic by exorcising the soul of a former loved one from her body. And that particular psychic had, in her turn, heard of others who had achieved no less remarkable things.

Goaded, then, by his purpose, Sali Keinfreind took from those cabinets one large antiquarian volume and another, sought out in each whatever he deemed even the least bit pertinent to his task, made notes in profusion - notes on both base and precious substances and the special properties of assorted humours, formulae and requirements for converting matter from one state to another, benedictions, supplications and chants conditional at different stages for success - and, having gathered these, and more, in copious reams, immersed himself then in a state of such intense and single-minded contemplation that at its end led to a wildfire illumination as numinous as any that the great Cardemus, or Ibn Rushdi, or Loew of Prague, whose work all he had so much admired, must have known.

He set his plans into motion soon after, when his wife Elka and sons Soram and Philip went north on vacation to Saffron Bay along the Auroran coast. Thus left alone, he could proceed undisturbed.

The first stage - the doubling in height of the white stone fences around his house and garden and the planting of additional pines along their perimeter - was nothing if not conventional.

But the second... - this was more elusive, more rare, with singular exceptions, the near-exclusive stuff of legend, kabbalistic folklore, esoteric texts and horror stories - namely, the creation, from highly select, meticulously treated, and perfectly primed clay, of a breathing, pulsating, moving humanoid with limbs, vision, voice and hearing, a being called golem, which possessed also hellfire fleetness, rage and matchless strength.

More elusive, more rare, and singular, to be sure - but Keinfreind, real-estate Midas, builder of a mansion with mirror-lined walls, golden door-handles and marble steps and colonnades as resplendent as those of any temple, a go-getting dynamo from whose lexicon, from his lowly birth on to his present fifty-five years, all reference to failure had been expunged, succeeded yet again. He created his creature called golem out of the clay; he created it in the form of a squat, stocky, dusky, deceptively lumbering simpleton; and, his task complete, led it to the gate where he gave it its instructions: very simply, to be a constant watchman over the estate and its master and let no unauthorised persons venture too close. In order to maintain contact with his sentry, Keinfreind clipped one end of a two-way speaker to the golem's belt and returned inside with the other. And, in the evening, before retiring, he looked across the long and lush expanse of his garden from his bedroom window,

took pride in his creation, which, clearly defined under the kerbside lamps, ambled watchfully about his now-protected domain, and snuggled beneath his covers a secure and contented man in a home which, like some past baron's castle, was his, his, all his, from here on to remain untrammelled, unbreachable, intact.

But the ensuing peace in which he slept became, near daybreak, the stuff of splintered crystal which woke him to a roughhouse ruckus of panicky screaming crossing with waves of gnarling, snarling and bellowing roars.

What Keinfreind saw this time on looking through his window was that, successful as he had been, he may have been too successful. He was just in time to see the local newspaper boy, Brendan, stark-eyed, hollering and frenziedly waving his arms about, scampering away for dear life with his bicycle, looking back unstrung at a savage semblance of a man now mercifully relinquishing its pursuit. Keinfreind relayed a message to his sentry that the newspaper boy was one who meant no harm and could safely be permitted access. But by this time, the boy was well gone and the golem had stationed itself like some unobtrusively docile pet by the gate. Irked, however, by not having his newspaper left in its box, Keinfreind phoned the newsagent. The newsagent, for his part, relaying to Keinfreind what he had, with what effort, managed to extract from his unnerved, quivering and stutteringly tongue-tied delivery boy, and reassured by Keinfreind that such incident would not recur, offered to deliver the paper in person. As a precaution, however, he would place it in Keinfreind's neighbour's box, it then being up to Keinfreind to fetch it.

So said, so done, and, soon after, Keinfreind, shaved, washed and dressed, emerged to collect the newspaper.

What he now encountered he had not foreseen. Nor had a single one of his manuals prepared him for it, not even Tomaso Toledano's *Intelligentia Artificialis: The Creator and the Created* which, as far back as Judah Loew's day, had so persuasively demonstrated the confines beyond which no creation could be autonomous of its maker. On opening the front door, Keinfreind conveyed to his sentry that he was himself about to come out, but scarcely had he reached the lower steps of his porch than his creation called golem bounded headlong towards him, and, with deep-throated rumbles and clicking tongue drowning out his own every appeasement, pranced vigorously about him, ushering him back inside, inside, forcing Keinfreind to retreat behind doors even as it had earlier driven the hapless newspaper boy away.

The suspicion set quickly into concrete recognition that he was without control over his creation. His every instruction to it through his speaker that might have been in the least wise contrary to its primary mission met with as much response from the golem as might have been obtained from the wind. But if it did not obey - the irony of the situation did not escape Keinfreind - it was not because his homunculus had become of itself free-willed or evil, but precisely because it meant well. For, just as it had driven the newsboy from his gate in obedience to its charge of keeping strangers at bay, conversely, by driving him, Keinfreind, back into the house, it had also clearly sought to protect him against potential menaces outside. With each human being within its sights the same, to distinguish friend from stranger was a lesson Keinfreind would yet need to teach his sentinel.

But how?

The incident led Keinfreind to notify his office that he would not be in that day and sent him back to his glass-encased antiquaria and esoterica. Toledano, he found on searching through that scholar's otherwise erudite and detailed treatise had little to say on the matter. The Iberian Carlos d'Esquirez, in a series of tractates translated as *Consensual Dialogues with Spirits of the Earth and the Cosmos*, had, by listening to, and noting down, the multitudinous cacophonies and murmurs extant through nature, devised languages by means of which one might commune with the elements; but his work had too much of the theoretical and textual and insufficient hard evidence to prove of value. Judah Loew of Prague had devised an ingeniously clever way of putting the golem down - removing an E from *EMET*, the Hebrew for Truth inscribed on its brow to convert it to *MET*, which meant Death - but that assumed the ability to get sufficiently near to it in the first place. But not one of the numerous mystics, clerics, metaphysicists and scientists who had experimented with, or written about, similar elemental creations in their time had ever evolved any foolproof formula securing consistent obedience, so preoccupied had each - from God onwards, it occurred to him - so preoccupied had each been with the actual creation of their separate golems and assigning of their tasks, that all consequences, obedience among them, had been of secondary import.

The broader implications of his position, all his volumes notwithstanding, struck Keinfreind to the fullest well before morning was far under way. If he had not succeeded in fetching the newspaper, how was he, Elka's absence, to take delivery of groceries, greens,

laundry? How was he to conduct his real estate, attend meetings, deal with banks, exchange documents and signatures, and in other ways attend to the numerous and necessary personal hands-on manner in which he conducted his business? With neither invoice nor cheque able to pass in and out of the house, how would he pay for electricity, gas, water or rates, all services to his home risking being cut off when accounts drew too far in arrears? And would he ever touch, caress, talk again, except early on by phone alone, with Elka or with the boys Soram and Philip, when, by the gate stood a demon of his own making that would chase them away no less than it had done poor Brendan or would do to any other, even as, from his window, he would call out, reach out, declare how much he loved them, dearly loved them, would always love them, come what may, come what may, come what may?

So sequestered within his home, Keinfreind now came to feel himself reduced to ineffectuality. Where, in his private castle, he had always both been tall and walked tall, the very walls now, and the ceilings, staircases, windows and passageways - and with them all mirrors, glass, hardwood, marble and tapestried plushness - bore down upon him from every side. Where space had till then been his in grand abundance and perfect proportion, where light had penetrated into every corner, where freshness, polish, floral fragrances and domestic harmony had made of his home a most truly vaunted baron's castle, that home, that mansion, now took on for him the dimensions of a box, a dark, constricting, stifling box suddenly shorn of solace, stripped of future, and severed from all salvation, there being none who would henceforth be permitted in, there being no way by which he would be permitted out to renew communion outside of business necessities with other men. To live truly was to attract risk and a man might, in such living, be insulted, wounded, bruised or robbed, but to live in the world, and to belong to the world meant, no less than seeking its beneficences, also to hazard its barbs, its bristles, its thorns.

It was precisely to that world he now turned for aid. With the telephone his sole link with the outside, he called the police, who, on appraising the situation as being to their distinct disadvantage in their initial engagement with Keinfreind's golem, cordoned off the area, and, in turn, over successive days of failing to bridle their quarry, called in the fire brigade, called in army personnel, called upon the air-force, each in its own turn bringing in fire-trucks, armoured cars, combat units and helicopter crews in co-ordinated plans of diversionary measures, siege and direct assault. But, resistant to anything that mere men could devise, neither the bullets of sharp-shooters, nor tear-gas, water jets, grenades, flame or other incendiary devices so much as touched that composite of esoteric formulae and clay, while attempts to reach Keinfreind from above and air-lift him from his immurement met with bricks, rocks and dismembered marble hurled at the helicopter pilots, these all but bringing down the crews.

The siege lasted all of a fortnight. The story filled large sections of the daily newspapers, consumed hours of radio time beyond all calculating, was the constant fare of television newscasts which riveted a city to its sets through repeated subjections of Keinfreind's distraught wife and sons to serial questionings, through regular briefings with both the Minister and the Chief Commissioner of Police, and military strategists, public commentators, and with members of the public approached for their views on how best to subdue that servant-turned-monster, and became near-exclusive conversation in offices, factories, operating theatres, saleyards, building sites and shopfloors. Assorted psychics, clairvoyants, incantators and diviners came forward to offer their assistance, but they too, even where they received any official ear at all, proved of no avail.

In the end, with all pooled strategies, resources and brainstorming at the highest levels and of the highest ingenuity having become depleted while the golem remained with not the merest sign of weakening, the rescue attempt was abandoned. Public outcry against the decision was loud, there being more than a few who feared the golem running amok beyond its immediate confines, but the authorities protested its absence of alternative options, there being no-one anywhere, in all their searches, who possessed the requisite formulae for putting the golem down. More than that, however - and, with every day, increasingly more - the reasons were as much a bowing to the recognition of the futility of their assignment as they were logistical. For, by now, Keinfreind no longer appeared at his window, nor did anyone anymore report having spoken to him by phone. While it was reckoned that he must have had water in plenty, his supplies of food could only be exhausted, even those attempted droppings of parcels by the helicopters having been frustrated by a human beast who seemed to be everywhere, saw everything, thwarted everything, and rendered null by every available means every conceivable approach to the house. To dare shine the best light upon the situation, Sali Keinfreind was still alive but too weak to show himself; at the worst...

In either case, all attempts at rescue were, after that long and fruitless contest, abandoned and all cars, trucks, helicopters, vans, hoses, flame-throwers, firearms and cannon

withdrawn. Whereupon, when the defeated rescuers, worn out by the campaign and chagrined by failure, reached a safe distance from the house and looked back, they saw their squat outlandish homuncular adversary take up again what seemed a tame inoffensive stance beside the gate, behind which a formerly lush, immaculately-tended garden had, through fire, grenade and uprooting, been transformed into the mayhem of a battlefield.

It was in that condition that Keinfreind's estate was left. At prominent locations around it, signs were posted, road barriers were set up, and alternative routes laid down to divert any who might be inclined to venture too close. A few curious, sceptical or daredevil folk did for some time snub their noses at the strictures; but, confronted one-two by that swiftly-enlivened humanoid, resolved that, in their repertoire of responses and ordering of priorities, bravery had perforce to come a very distant second to survival. Keinfreind's widow Elka and sons Soram and Philip went on to make a life of sorts; his real-estate business did not go under, it merely changed hands; while burglars, too, the background cause of it all, gave that formerly much-prized quarry the widest berth - the estate thereby left unmolested to decay in the heart of an ever-growing ever-thickening jungle, in tandem with a man within who, having sought safety, had attained the ultimate form of it, his very remains protected now, along with his rare books, manuscripts, maps, charms, amulets and astronomical charts, by a squat coarse crude semblance of a man which tensed its palms, curled its lips, and let forth deep guttural rumbles whenever anyone dared venture too near.

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