

Pride, that He has created out of a handful of dirt a being so grand. Pity, that in His botched universe a Hector must unjustly die, and his poor corpse be dragged in the dust. But Homer knows no Almighty God. There is Zeus, the father of the gods, but who can say what he is up to? Perhaps he is off mounting some bemused mortal girl in the disguise of her husband, or a bull, or a swan. Small wonder that Greek mythology is extinct."

The disgusted gesture with which Jastrow turns his page surprises an uncertain laugh from the rapt audience. Thrusting his notes into his pocket, Jastrow leaves the lectern, comes forward, and stares at his listeners. His usually placid face is working. He bursts out in another voice, startling Natalie by shifting to Yiddish, in which he has never lectured before.

"All right. Now let us talk about this in our mother-language. And let us talk about an epic of our own. Satan says to God, you remember, 'Naturally, Job is upright. Seven sons, three daughters, the wealthiest man in the land of Uz. Why not be upright? Look how it pays. A sensible universe! A fine arrangement! Job is not upright, he is just a smart Jew. The sinners are damned fools. But just take away his rewards, and see how upright he will remain!'

"All right, take them away,' God says. And in one day marauders carry off Job's wealth, and a hurricane kills all his ten children. What does Job do? He goes into mourning. 'Naked I came from the womb, naked I will return,' he says, 'God has given, God has taken away. Blessed be God's name.'

"So God challenges Satan. 'See? He remained upright. A good man.'

"Skin for skin,' Satan answers. 'All a man really cares about is his life. Reduce him to a skeleton—a sick, plundered, bereaved skeleton, nothing left to this proud Jew but his own rotting skin and bones—'

Jastrow loses his voice. He shakes his head, clears his throat, passes a hand over his eyes. He goes on hoarsely. "God says, 'All right, do anything to him except kill him.' A horrible sickness strikes Job. Too loathsome an object to stay under his own roof, he crawls out and sits on an ash heap, scraping his sores with a shard. He says nothing. Stripped of his wealth, his children senselessly killed, his body a horrible stinking skeleton covered with boils, he is silent. Three of his pious friends come to comfort him. A debate follows.

"Oh, my friends, what a debate! What rugged poetry, what insight into the human condition! I say to you that Homer pales before Job; that Aeschylus meets his match in power, and his master in understanding; that Dante and Milton sit at this author's feet without