

ever grasping him. Who was he? Nobody knows. Some old Jew. He knew what life is, that's all. He knew it as we in Theresienstadt know it."

He pauses, looking straight at his niece with sad eyes. Shaken, perplexed, on the verge of tears, Natallie is hungry for his next words. When he speaks, though he looks away, she feels he is talking to her.

"In Job, as in most great works of art, the main design is very simple. His comforters maintain that since one Almighty God rules the universe, it must make sense. Therefore Job must have sinned. Let him search his deeds, confess and repent. The missing piece is only what his offense was.

"And in round after round of soaring argument, Job fights back. The missing piece must be with God, not with him. He is as religious as they are. He knows that the Almighty exists, that the universe must make sense. But he, poor bereft boil-covered skeleton, knows now that it does not in fact always make sense; that there is no guarantee of good fortune for good behaviour; that crazy injustice is part of the visible world, and of this life. His religion demands that he assert his innocence, otherwise he will be profaning God's name! He will be conceding that the Almighty can botch one man's life; and if God can do that, the whole universe is a botch, and He is not an Almighty God. That Job will never concede. He wants an answer.

"He gets an answer! Oh, what an answer! An answer that answers nothing. God Himself speaks at last out of a roaring storm. 'Who are you to call me to account? Can you hope to understand why or how I do anything? Were you there at the Creation? Can you comprehend the marvels of the stars, the animals, the infinite wonders of existence? You, a worm that lives a few moments, and dies?'

"My friends, Job has won! Do you understand? God with all His roaring has conceded Job's main point, that the missing piece is with Him! God claims only that His reason is beyond Job. That, Job is perfectly willing to admit. With the main point settled, Job humbles himself, is more than satisfied, falls on his face.

"So the drama ends. God rebukes the comforters for speaking falsely of Him, and praises Job for holding to the truth. He restores Job's wealth. Job has seven more sons and three more daughters. He lives a hundred and forty more years, sees grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and dies old, prosperous, revered."

The rich flow of literary Yiddish halts. Jastrow goes back to the lectern, pulls the notes from his pocket, and turns over several sheets. He peers out at his audience.