

## **“Job, or a Meditation on Justice” -- (c) Alicia Suskin Ostriker**

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*It is a cold, raining November evening....Mail is strewn across the kitchen, where I left it this morning, along with the morning's New York Times, the day's poverty fattened by the day's advertisements. The cognitive dissonance, mothers of Chilean desaparecidos, holding photographs of their missing and by now probably tortured or killed children, embraced by a pre-Thanksgiving fur sale....For no apparent reason I pick up a notebook and begin to jot down some thoughts about the Book of Job and the idea of justice....*

No woman can read the story without thinking: other sons, other daughters, other cattle. Not the original ones...

And by the way, who compensates the wife, who has had to live with Job in all his phases: as righteous and complacent servant of God and super-holy man; as stricken beast; as the vibrant rhapsodist of an absent justice? ...Job has many lines to say in the Book of Job but Job's wife has one line and says it early: *Curse God and die*. That is woman's wisdom.... For she knows all along that God is not just. ...A husband is a sort of dinosaur, large and clumsy, bellowing when wounded. The wife feels herself to be like a green lizard, slipping among the pebbles between his feet. She could never curse God and die herself. Shrew that she is, she is too timid for heroism.

*I understand that because I too, shrew that I am, am shy, lizard-like, not yet angered enough. I who am wife and mother, like the nameless wife of Job. Like most women everywhere and at all times. We mutter if they kill our children. If they throw our men down mine shafts, into armies, on the garbage dumps of cities, we mourn. Look at us, materialized on the nightly news, swathed in our uniform black, keening and striking our breasts. Look at us in the famous prize-winning photographs....*

*Today I think: without rage, love is helpless. We are not yet angry enough. Not yet bitter enough. I look at the paper with its headlines as black as vultures and its old bad news....The woman of whom we are portions has not yet demanded justice.*

But one day it will be the woman who rises, wounded and agonized...God will be embarrassed by her as by her husband Job.

Or rather, he was waiting for her to issue her challenge. That is what really happens. God does not know how to be just until the children demand it. Then he knows. Then he responds....So she will need a large recompense because she will be asking: Where are my dead sons? What about the women executed as witches and whores? What of the beaten wives? What of the massacred Sioux, the deliberately starved Ukrainians? Why do the bones of many million Africans lie rotting below the Atlantic Ocean? Where are the souls who rose in smoke over Auschwitz? You teach me to say *The wicked shall vanish like smoke, when all tyranny shall be removed from the earth*, but it was innocent babies who vanished. She wants the unjustly slain to be alive and for singing and dance to come to the victims. Somewhere in her reptile brain she hopes the Lord will run the film backward, so that she can see, speedily in her time, the smoke coagulate and pour back down the chimneys, the stream of naked Jews Gypsies Poles partisans homosexuals grandfathers and schoolchildren walk backward out of the buildings still alive.

We already know what she wants. She wants justice to rain down like waters. She wants adjustment, portion to portion, so that the machinery of the world will look seemly and move powerfully and not scrape and scream. The children of God do not really say that God is just. But they invent the idea. They chew it over and over, holding it up to the light this way and that. And though blood drips from the concept, staining their hands, they are persistent. It is their idea. They want justice to rain down like waters. Justice to rain like waters. Justice to rain. Justice to rain.