

THE STORY OF RUTH

A Poem

The sun bled a line of dawn's approach
On the eastern horizon's edge,
While three women walked in silent thought
Toward Bethlehem, Judah ahead.
The famine had ended. Her sojourn was done.
So many years – ten – since had passed,
In the interim losing a husband, two sons,
For one woman, this journey her last.
A pledge to be honored, her duty upheld,
Still a daughter by marriage, though death
Had delivered her husbandless here on the road
Toward a strange land and people, bereft
Of all things familiar since youth she had known
All her kindred now leaving behind,
This one walked with her duty to mother-in-law
Caught in struggle, the heart over mind.
The third brushed her hair from her fair Eastern face,
Readjusted her bundle, walked on.
She too had lost, but the Almighty God,
She had gained from her time with Mahlon.

Oh, Elimelech, it was what had to be done,
Forced by famine to Moabite land,
How I wish you had seen your sons grown to be men,
Each one married, the futures they planned.
Mahlon, oh, Kilion, sons of my womb,
The Lord giveth, he taketh away,
You were mine for a time and my life had been blessed,
But my life is made bitter this day.
Naomi then stopped, turning, facing the sun,
To her daughters she spoke from her heart.
“Go back, both of you, to your own mothers' home,
The Lord bless you, and make a new start.”
“No, Naomi,” they cried, “we will go on with you,
To your people,” and weeping, they clung.
“Can I give you husbands, if even this day,
I could marry and bear two more sons?
Would you wait, still unmarried, until they grew up?
No, my daughters, you must return home,
The hand of the Lord is against me, my journey
Is bitter – I go on alone.”

So Orpah, she kissed her and turned her foot back
To the Moabite home of her youth,
But the other one, motionless, stayed where she was

Speaking kindly, Naomi said, "Ruth,
Look, your sister-in-law will be home again soon,
Going back to her people and gods,"
"Don't urge me," the Moabite, Ruth, then replied,
Resolute in her manner and cause.
"Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay,
Who your people are, they will be mine,
Your God is my God, where you die, I will die,
There be buried, or God for my crime
Deal severely with me if there ever be anything
Saving death come between you and I."
Seeing clearly that Ruth was determined,
Naomi turned westward toward Bethlehem's sky.

The women, they thronged at the well and inquired,
"Naomi, is it really you?"
Surmising the woman accompanying her,
They had heard of this Moabite, Ruth.
"No longer Naomi, but Mara, I'm called,
God afflicts me, misfortune belays
All my steps and this bitterness
Swallows my life. I left full, return empty," she says.

They sat in the glow of the last bit of oil,
The wick trimmed to barely alight.
Naomi was thinking of Boaz, her kin,
To appeal him to lessen their plight.
"Let me glean in the fields, as widows may do,
By your law," Ruth implored her consent,
"Go ahead then, my daughter," Naomi replied,
"Gather sheaves, the Lord bless your intent."

The barley bent ripe in the afternoon sun,
Sickles flashed, parting stalk from the grain.
The workmen, they gathered, the poor ones they bent,
To collect any sheaves that remained.
Ruth straightened a moment, uncurling her back,
Returned to her work, but not missed,
By the eyes of the landowner seated above
On his stallion, "What woman is this,"
He inquired of his foreman who promptly replied,
"It's the Moabite woman, come back
With Naomi, she asked, 'let me glean in your field'.
She works steadily, showing no slack."

Boaz swung round and the flash of the sun
On the flank of his steed caught her eye.
With her hand shielding glare, she looked up as he rode

With great ease, halting just at her side.
“My daughter, glean only in fields of mine,
With my servant girls, follow along.
To the men I have said, they must leave you alone,
Go and drink when you need from what’s drawn.
At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground,
“For your favor, Lord, what have I done?
I am lower than one of your lowliest girls,
And a foreigner browned by the sun.”

“I have heard of your kindness to one of my kin,
Towards Naomi, whose home is your own,
How you left both your mother and father to live
With a people that you’ve never known.
Come share with me now of the afternoon meal.”
He offered her more than her need.
She ate and she saved for Naomi the rest,
Returned to the field to glean.
“Don’t humble this woman, wherever she gleans,
Leave her more than you usually do.
Don’t speak to her harshly,” he ordered his men,
“Or the Lord deal harshly with you.”

She gleaned until evening and measured her toil,
By the twenty-two liters she’d gained.
She gave this and what she had saved from her meal
To Naomi, who greatly exclaimed,
“Whose field is this? By what man are we blessed
To have profited by this amount?”
“By Boaz!”
“Lord bless him! A kinsman of mine,
A redeemer, a man of account.”
“He has told me, ‘Return to my field again,
Remain until harvest is done’.”
“It is good to remain with his women, no harm
Will befall you – his favor you’ve won!”

The harvest was finished, the barley and wheat
Lay in heaps for the threshing was nigh.
Naomi was thinking to find Ruth a home,
Find a husband and means to provide.
So she spoke to her, “Daughter, perfume your dark skin,
Dress to please, then go down to the floor,
Where the workmen lay after their meal and their wine,
Go to Boaz, but don’t go before
He has finished his dining and chosen a place
To retire, then, quietly, you
Will uncover his feet and lay down by your Lord,

He will tell you what you are to do.”

“Oh Lord, by a harlot he came to this world,
You have blessed him through Rahab, your maid,
Bless your servant girl, Ruth, as she humbles herself
Now to Boaz,” she fervently prayed.

“Whatever you say, I will do,” and she did.
It was silent as stars broke the sky,
As she made her way through Bethlehem’s winding streets
To the threshing floor where she would lie,
Hoping grace would befall her from Boaz’s hand,
That his kindness to her would prevail,
Or ashamed, she’d return when her purpose was done,
Face Naomi and tell her she’d failed.

All was quiet within, she had waited outside,
Noting Boaz and where he had lain,
They had finished their feasting and chosen their beds,
From the sleeping sounds, she ascertained
That the moment had come to accomplish her faith
In the plan that Naomi conceived.
Would he want her, a Moabite woman by birth,
Poor and fruitless, a widow bereaved?

When the shadows of owls cross the moon in the night,
Something startled the man from his sleep.
Boaz looked where the warmth met his skin and called out
In a low voice, “Who’s there at my feet?”
“It is I, Ruth, your servant -- Lord, spread over me
Just the edge of your garment, to say
As a kinsman-redeemer that I may be blessed
To become your maidservant this day.”
“Oh, Ruth, the Lord bless you,” he gently replied,
“Fair of face and of noble renown,
Any young man you chose would have fought for your love,
To an old man, you offer this crown.
I will do for you all that you ask,” he then vowed,
But a kinsman still nearer exists
Who may want to redeem you himself, it’s his right,
I’ll approach him tomorrow with this.
If he blesses you, good, that is how it must be,
If he doesn’t, the joy will be mine,
For your honor is known in the gates of this town,
To redeem you, I vow we’ll be joined.
Now lay down, Ruth, when morning approaches, depart.
No one need know a woman’s been here.”
In the soft gray of dawn, with her shawl full of grain,

He watched as her form disappeared.

The sun suffered hot as the men of the town
Took their business and wisdom to seat
In the shadow of walls thickly pressed to the Gate
As the incoming spilled through the streets.
Seated, Boaz looked 'round for the face whom he sought,
Waiting there 'til at last it was found.
Then he gathered ten others and asked them to sit,
Asked the kinsman to kindly sit down.
"There's a parcel of land that's available now
For redemption – Elimelech's lot.
It's for sale by Naomi, come back from Moab,
I'm suggesting you purchase, if not,
I will buy it myself, but the first right is yours,
I'm the next one in line after you."
"I will buy it."
"There's one other thing," Boaz said,
"Along with the land, there is Ruth.
She's the Moabite widow of Mahlon, you know,
The descendants you give her will own
Any right to the land in her dead husband's name."
"Well," he paused and rescindingly toned,
"I'm concerned at the risk to my own estate then –
You redeem her, I really cannot."
It was done, it was sealed by exchanging of shoes,
In the presence of witnesses, bought
By the vow of a kinsman and blessed by the men,
Many children they wished him by Ruth.
If they'd known that the line of the Savior they'd sealed,
They'd have danced on the tops of the roofs.

So Boaz went home and he gathered his bride,
She conceived, and she bore him a son,
To Naomi, the women of Bethlehem said,
"God has blessed you, oh fortunate one,
To be loved by a daughter who's better to you
Then seven more sons could have been,
From her womb, name him Obed, because of her love,
May his name through the country ascend."
In her lap lay the father of Jesse, that day,
Tiny limbs, shaking, waving the air,
To Naomi, a grandson, to Israel, King
From the flock of his grandsons, an heir,
Who would rule over Israel, having a heart
Like the heart of his God, David's name
Would ascend through the country, establish the line
Through which Jesus the Christ, Savior came.