

# RUTH

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Category: Radius Typescript 2023

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# RUTH

## Characters

Two Figures	Play different roles, English voices except where indicated.
Naomi	Middle aged. Irish voice
Ruth	Younger. English voice

The roles of Naomi and Ruth are played by two female actors with the appropriate age difference. All other parts in the story are played by two 'figures', who also act as voices in internal dialogues that Naomi and Ruth have at one or two points in the play. The figures can be of either sex; however, since one of them does provide the voice and movement for Boaz, it might be easier for the audience if at least one of them is male. In the 2022 production at St Mark's Church, Cambridge, the cast was supplemented by a harpist.

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## Introduction

This play is based on the biblical Book of Ruth. Ruth's story is a much-loved one, though perhaps less well known than many other bible stories. It is unusual in being a heavily female-driven story, and this play is written specifically to give an acting opportunity to women, though there is a possibility for male involvement.

## Setting and Props

The play is designed for very simple staging; it has been performed successfully in a church with no special staging. Costumes should be simple and free of association with any particular historical period.

The script indicates the use of cloths for various purposes, including representing male figures in the story. These need to be fairly long so that the actors can wrap themselves in them and generally treat them as if they were people.

# RUTH

- FIGURE 1: You can make bread.
- FIGURE 2: You could make bread out of stones. It only requires the will.
- NAOMI: There was no bread. There was nothing. This was a land of hunger.
- FIGURE 1: A land of want.
- FIGURE 2: A land of wanting.
- NAOMI: Want. Is that what you call it? Want?
- FIGURE 2: Want.
- FIGURE 1: Hunger.
- BOTH FIGURES: Dearth.
- NAOMI: Call it what it was. It was Famine. It was murder.
- RUTH: Mother?
- NAOMI: God sends the food. To all. Sufficient for all. Men hoard it. Men withhold it. Men watch others starve. And feast as they watch. It was murder.
- FIGURE 1: You can smell hunger, you know. It sounds strange, but it's true. A sickly smell. Quite unlike grief.
- NAOMI: I have tasted both. Drunk them to the dregs. Their taste is bitter.
- FIGURE 2: Eat bread.
- FIGURE 1: Know want.
- FIGURE 2: Taste grief.
- BOTH FIGURES: This is your lot. It is the lot of many.

FIGURE 1:           And one thing more. You must need friends. For support, for love.  
Without these, you stand solitary, lost.

NAOMI:               Who are you?

RUTH:                 Mother - mother!

NAOMI:               Who are you? Answer me!

FIGURE 1:           You know who I am.

NAOMI:               Show yourself. Tell me your name.

FIGURE 1:           I am hunger.

FIGURE 2:           I am death.

NAOMI:               Death, is it? Hunger? Then come for me! Come for me if you dare.

RUTH:                 Mother! Wake up!

NAOMI:               Ruth?

RUTH:                 You were talking again.

NAOMI:               Was I? What was I saying?

RUTH:                 You were talking to someone. You mentioned murder.

NAOMI:               Murder? And who was murdered? Did I say who it was?

RUTH:                 No, you didn't. Don't you know?

NAOMI:               It's gone. Sure, my dreams never stay.

RUTH:                 That's probably a good sign. You should eat. Delusions grow from an  
empty stomach.

NAOMI:               You're right. You usually are.

*(She sits with RUTH at a table with simple food on it - pitta breads,  
cheese, grapes.)*

NAOMI:               How was your work?

RUTH: I thought we were in trouble today.

NAOMI: What sort of trouble?

RUTH: The spare heads of corn. The gleanings I bring home.

NAOMI: Did the overseer change his mind? You said he always turns a blind eye.

RUTH: He does. But today the owner came to the field. He saw what we were doing.

NAOMI: Oh.

RUTH: I really thought we were in trouble. In fact, I think we were, until –

NAOMI: Until?

RUTH: He came over, very stern and official. And then he looked at me.

NAOMI: And?

RUTH: Nothing. He just stopped.

NAOMI: Stopped?

RUTH: Stopped. Nodded. Turned away. But then he turned back.

NAOMI: And?

RUTH: He smiled. At me. Then he went. I looked at the overseer. He winked.

NAOMI: A pretty face: always gets you out of trouble. Gets you into trouble too, mind. What about the gleanings? Do we still get them?

RUTH: That's the odd thing. I think we get more.

NAOMI: Well, now, look at this. This is what we used to eat. In the good times. Before the Famine. This is just what we used to eat.

RUTH: I thought so.

NAOMI: Sure, and how could you know? You weren't there. It was before you. It was long before. When he was alive.

FIGURE 2: *(Hands NAOMI a large cloth)* Elimelek. Rich. Handsome.

NAOMI: *(Opens the cloth out and holds it to herself)* Gorgeous man. Mine. All mine.

FIGURE 1: *(Handing her two more cloths)* Your sons.

NAOMI: Mahlon. Killion. Sure, how could I forget? It was the good time, I tell you. The time before.

FIGURE 1: The time before. The first signs. You remember?

NAOMI: I remember. Who could forget?

FIGURE 1: The first small, terrible signs.

NAOMI: The corn more shrivelled. And less of it. Much less.

FIGURE 2: A warning. The next year.

NAOMI: Nothing. Unbelievable. Unthinkable. Nothing. Just - nothing.

FIGURE 1: He knew what to do. Elimelek. He took the lead.

NAOMI: He did. We left. We gathered everything. *(She bundles the cloths up in her arms)* We fled.

FIGURE 2: Another country.

FIGURE 1: Other people.

FIGURE 2: Other ways.

FIGURE 1: Foreign.

NAOMI: No. We were the foreigners. There. Over the water. Elimelek. Me. Mahlon.