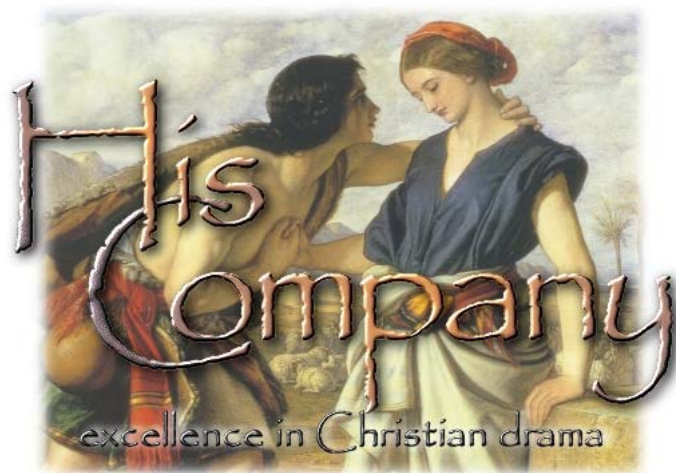


FAMILY

FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

by
David S. Lampel



AUTHOR’S NOTE

Family is based on the first eighteen verses of the book of Ruth.

5

The scene is the outskirts of the land of Moab. The boundary for Moab is the Zered River; on the other side is the land of Judah. The three have been traveling together, but now, before the river is crossed, it is time for Ruth and Orpah to return to Moab and resume their lives. Naomi intends to cross the river alone, to return to her homeland, Judah, and the city of Bethlehem.

CHARACTERS

10

NAOMI, widowed wife of Elimelech; in her mid-60’s.

Naomi is a woman at once at peace with her station and harboring great bitterness in her heart because of the turn her life has taken. She is capable of perfect, compassionate love toward her daughters-in-law; she is equally capable of a disturbingly morose anger toward Jehovah.

15

RUTH, widowed wife of Mahlon, elder son of Naomi; in her 30’s.

Ruth is the quintessential embodiment of unselfish love. She never places her own needs above those of her companions. There is a staggering purity to the love she has for Naomi.

20

ORPAH, widowed wife of Chilion, younger son of Naomi; in her 20’s.

Orpah, too, has a deep love for her mother-in-law, but it is a love tempered by the impetuosity of her youth. She was not married as long as Ruth or Naomi, and is therefore less attached to the past than she is to the possibilities of the future.

PROPERTIES AND SET

25

The three women are traveling through rugged, desert territory. They must have sandals on their feet and would be carrying two or three satchels with their provisions of bread, water, possibly some fruit. Naomi’s first speech, after sitting down, would be a good opportunity for Orpah and Ruth to break out some of their provisions. All three should have walking sticks for the journey. Remember, even though Ruth and Orpah are presumably not going the distance with Naomi, they still have come a considerable distance and would have provisions.

The set for *Family* could be kept basic: several “rocks” for the women to rest upon. These could be set pieces constructed to look like real rocks or as simple as carpeted blocks to blend with the church platform.

30

PRONUNCIATIONS

35

Naomi	NAY-OH-mee
Elimelech	ee-LIM-uh-lek
Ruth	rooth
Mahlon	MAH-lun (as in fallen)
Orpah	ORE-pah (as in horn)
Chilion	KEYE-lee-un
Moab	MOE-ab

40

House lights down.

Stage lights up.

45

Enter Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. The two younger women are assisting Naomi, whose journey so far has been a struggle because of her age and health. Ruth and Orpah lead Naomi toward a resting place just beyond center stage.

50

Ruth

C'mon, just a little more. I've found us a place to rest.

Naomi

(painfully)

Well it's about time! The bottoms of my feet are raw.

55

(sitting; exhausted)

Orpah, how far have we come?

Orpah

(amused at how quickly the older woman has become exhausted)

Why, we've only just started!

60

Naomi

(greatly disappointed; with a weary sigh)

Oh.

Orpah

(with a sarcastic tone)

65

And you expect to go all the way to Bethlehem? We've come such a short distance, and just look at you!

Naomi

(catching her breath)

Never you mind. I'll make it. It may take me forever, but I'll make it.

70

(peering into the distance; sudden recognition of the place)

Wait a minute—I've come this way before.

(brightening)

I recognize the landmarks.

75

Ruth*(with surprise)*

Mother, that was over ten years ago!

Naomi*(ignoring her)*

80

See that ridge, off to the left, on the far side of the river—where the rock changes to a darker red?

(smiling as the comfortable memories begin flooding back)

That's the precise spot Elimelech stood to survey our new homeland for the first time. Moab was a foreign land, and we knew as soon as we crossed this river there would be nothing familiar—all the people and customs would be strange to us.

85

Ruth offers Naomi some water, which she drinks before continuing.

90

Naomi

And there!

(pointing in a slightly different direction)

See that stand of trees just below the ridge—next to the riverbank? That's where we spent the night before crossing over into Moab.

95

(sighing, with a touch of sadness)

You're right, Ruth. That was a long time ago.

(grasping her back)

And I think I'm beginning to feel every one of those years.

Ruth

100

Well, the journey won't be so bad with Orpah and me along to help. We can—

Naomi*(absentmindedly at first, as she drinks)*

What?

105

(then realizing what Ruth has just said)

What?! You girls are going back.

Orpah*(with timid confidence)*

Naomi... uh, Ruth and I talked it over. We're coming with you.

110

*Naomi strenuously objects.***Ruth***(firmly)*

115

Mother, it's decided.

Naomi

I'll do the deciding around here.

Orpah

Why, you're an old woman—

120

*Naomi reels back, taking offense.***Orpah***(continuing without pause)*

125

—traveling alone through these hills—

(looking around, beginning to frighten even herself)

—wild beasts hiding behind every rock—

(getting excited and upset by the thought)

—thieves lying in wait behind every tree... !

130

Naomi*(amused by how quickly the girl's courage has evaporated; wryly)*

And you girls are going to save me from the wild beasts and thieves?

(dismissively)

Ruth, talk some sense into the girl—and take her back home with you.

135

Ruth*(a little embarrassed by Orpah)*

Our minds are made up.

Orpah

We've decided to go with you—

140 **Naomi**

I'll be all right!

Orpah

—and to your people.

Naomi

145 Now wait a minute! Just stop and think about what you're saying. I think you two have lost your hold on reality. You're not making any sense! What do you think? That I have two sons yet in my womb—husbands in waiting for you?

(laughing at the absurd thought; deciding to play it out further)

150 Okay, let's say I married this very night—and conceived—twins! You're going to wait around for these new sons to come of age?

(pause)

Would you really like to be nursemaids to your future husbands?

Orpah

155 *(beginning to see the wisdom in returning to Moab; naively)*

We would be willing.

Naomi

(seriously; a little surprised)

Orpah, how very young you are.

160 **Ruth**

It's just that she loves you, mother.

165 *Orpah moves away. She is torn between her love for Naomi and what she feels will be a brighter future by returning to Moab. She knows that her life, if she were to continue on with Naomi, would hold little promise, and she feels her heart tugging her back. But she is ill-equipped for the decision which must be made.*

Naomi

(tenderly)

170 Do you think I want to send you back? Do you think that would be the easiest solution for me? If you were my own children I couldn't love you more.

(sullenly)

175 But why should you have to share in the Lord's anger? His hand's against
me.

(feeling sorry for herself)

I don't know what I've done to deserve it! Somehow I've offended Him.

(to Orpah)

I want you away from me—away from His wrath.

180

Orpah looks to Naomi, then to Ruth. The two older women await her decision. What should she do? Which way should she go? Ruth, while sympathetic, gives no clue; the decision must be the girl's. As Orpah turns to Naomi to speak, Ruth moves quietly away from them.

185

Orpah

(frustrated)

Well, whatever my choice, my life would be changed.

190 *(she looks again to Ruth, then back to Naomi; struggling with her decision, then
bursting into tears she runs to embrace Naomi.)*

But I'll miss you so!

Naomi

(comforting Orpah)

Be strong, child.

195

Orpah

You were my last tie to Chilion—my only family.

Naomi

Soon you'll have a new husband—a new family.

Orpah

200

I'll never replace what I had.

Naomi

(almost sternly)

Forget the old—begin a new life.

(softening)

205

And may God grant you a happier life than you've had so far.

Orpah*(straightening; trying to be mature)*

I'll remember. I'll remember everything.

(turning to Ruth as she steps away from Naomi; "Are you coming with me?")

210 Ruth?

Ruth

Go ahead, Orpah. I need to speak to Naomi.

215 *Now that her decision has been made, Orpah exits happily, returning eagerly to her homeland. Ruth watches the girl leave, following her progress (offstage), with her back to Naomi. Naomi stands quietly, contemplating Ruth from across the stage. The moment is tense for Naomi, wondering whether she will be able to convince Ruth to go with Orpah.*

220 *The realization that Ruth probably intends to stay eases the tension, but does nothing for the emotional battle being waged inside Naomi. If Ruth does leave her, she will be cast adrift, alone on a dangerous journey to a people who are, possibly, no longer friendly toward her. She will also lose someone who has been closer to her than anyone else since the loss of her husband and sons. But the sensible choice is for the younger woman to return to her homeland, Moab, where she can begin her life anew in a familiar environment. After a long pause, Naomi speaks.*

225

Naomi*(with a steady tone)*

You have no intention of following after the girl.

Ruth

230 *(still away from Naomi; quietly, contemplatively)*

You said you wanted to save us from God's wrath.

Naomi*("what is she talking about?")*

Yes. Why should you—

235

Ruth

We've already shared in His wrath.

(now turning to Naomi; with gathering intensity)

When you lost your sons, we lost our husbands. And who can choose?

Which is the greater loss? Which hurts the most?

240

(compassionately; going to Naomi)

Mother, don't use your grief as a shield. Loneliness won't ease your pain.

Naomi

But my pain is so great—

Ruth

245 And let's not compare our sorrow. There's no winner in that. But let's
share our sorrow, so we might lighten the load for the other.

Naomi

(emphatically)

250 Child, I don't know what blinds you! You follow after the wrong person.
Go with your sister-in-law! Go back to family and home. Your family's in
Moab. Your father and mother are waiting for their daughter to return.

Ruth

(firmly)

Mother, I am your daughter.

255

Naomi

(anguished)

What blinds you?!

Ruth

(happily)

260 My eyes have been opened! Now they see clearly the love I feel for you.
For ten years you've been not only the mother of my husband, but
mother to me as well.

Naomi

But your parents—

265

Ruth

—have each other. Don't ask me to abandon you.

Naomi

Why should you leave your homeland? Listen, Judah is no paradise.

Ruth

270

And Moab is?

Naomi*(chuckling)*

Well, whatever it is—or isn't—it's at least familiar to you.

275

Ruth

Mother, you can't turn me away so—

Naomi*(firmly)*

Now you sit down and listen to me.

280

(collecting her thoughts; almost to herself)

I didn't want to bring this up...

(pause; reluctantly)

Even in our own small family you've experienced the conflict between our two cultures. It seems that for all of history Judah and Moab have been at each other's throats. Back and forth, back and forth they've fought! Slave and master switching from one generation to the next.

285

(pause)

You must know: you'll not be received favorably in Judah. Even when our two lands have been at peace, there's been an uneasy tension.

290

(almost sarcastically)

And my people are capable of being quite unpleasant toward your people.

Ruth*(after a pause; thoughtfully)*

295

Why did you come to my country, so long ago?

Naomi*(caught off guard)*

What?

Ruth

300

You left Judah with your husband and two sons and settled in Moab.

Why?

Naomi

(puzzled by Ruth's direction)

305 Well, there was famine in Judah—and there was rain in Moab.

Ruth

But there was another reason.

Naomi

(sarcastically)

310 Starvation wasn't enough?

Ruth

Would you have stayed behind in Judah with the rest of your family leaving for Moab?

Naomi

315 Of course not.

Ruth

Why?

Naomi

(irritated by Ruth's cross-examination)

320 Well, they were my family—my life.

Ruth

(resting her case)

You are my family. My life is with you.

325 *Naomi heaves a frustrated sigh; she is losing the argument and must fall back to regroup. She settles back, thinking. The two women separate, sinking back into their own thoughts and recollections.*

Naomi

(nostalgically)

330 We had good times... before... before—

Ruth

Let's not be sad.

335

Naomi*(exhaling with a deep sigh)*

Oh, His hand's heavy on me.

Ruth*(simply—not preachy)*

Tragedy isn't always sign of a god's displeasure.

340

Naomi*(cynically; with rising intensity)*

Displeasure. Such a gentle rendering for the Almighty's anger.

Displeasure. Oh yes, displeasure that wiped out my husband, my sons—
my family!

345

Ruth*(ruminating)*

Your God is still a stranger to me—companion to that strange land
awaiting us, I suppose.

350

Naomi*(quickly)*

You're going back!

Ruth*(ignoring her)*

I don't yet understand His ways. He seems most peculiar next to my gods.

355

How can He be everywhere, but not in anything? How could He have
created everything, yet so easily have it destroyed?

(to Naomi)

If He's given woman as a companion to man, why does He then make her
a widow?

360

Naomi*(wearily; as if reciting)*

We've always been taught that the Lord has a higher plan. His wisdom
isn't limited to our brief moment. And the companionship he permits us
may be taken away.

365

Ruth

Then you see? That's why I must go with you! The love you once had from Elimelech and Chilion and—

(sadly)

370

Mahlon—must now come from me. Their devotion to you has found a new home in me. My love for you has grown within my heart—to fill the emptiness left there when I lost my husband.

(with intensity)

And I can't stand the thought of your being alone.

Naomi

375

(pleading; almost angry)

You have no chance with me! No future. As God has designed, what is woman without man? What is a wife without a husband?

Ruth

You will be my future.

380

Naomi

(with intensity; a final effort)

What good is a lover without her mate?! The men in Judah will not have you! Turn back now, while you still can, while you're still young and beautiful—and desirable. If you go with me you'll become me: Old and dried up. Filled with God's bitterness.

385

Naomi finishes her speech in tears; Ruth holds her, comforting.

Ruth

390

(after a pause; with compassion)

Oh, how wise your God is.

Naomi

(trying to regain her composure)

Now what are you talking about?

395

Ruth

You speak as if God has abandoned you—turned your life inside out and left you to wither and die.

Naomi

(sarcastically)

400

A fair appraisal!

Ruth

(gently chastising)

And you accuse me of being blind.

405

Naomi

(wearily)

Don't toy with an old woman.

Ruth

Oh mother, can't you see? Can't you see how perfectly He's worked everything out? You're left needing a companion—and you've found that companion in me.

410

(pause)

But then there's my need. I've come out of a people who call upon silly and feeble gods—gods of myth and whimsy. Mother, you need a companion, but I need a God! You've found your companion—

415

(excitedly)

—and I've found my God!

Ruth allows her last statement to sink in before continuing; during Ruth's speech, Naomi is finally convinced, and abandons hope of changing Ruth's mind.

420

Ruth

(continuing with passion)

Don't send me away. Don't send me back to a land of ignorant people and useless gods. Don't push me out of your life. Where you go, I will go; and where you live, I'll live. Your people will be my people and your God! — my God. Where you die, I will die—and it's there I'll be buried.

425

430 *Naomi and Ruth embrace, sharing the joyful realization that they will, indeed, be staying together. For Naomi, there is now a light out of her dark bitterness; for Ruth, there is a future. And no matter what that future holds, no matter what trials are set before them, they will always have each other—and their God. Finally, they relax their embrace. Naomi is the first to speak.*

435 **Naomi**
I was wrong. Your future will be in Judah.

Ruth
(as she begins collecting their belongings)
Judah will be our future.

440
They start toward the exit.

Naomi
(proudly; with gathering excitement; babbling)
445 I can see it now. Oh, you'll just love it! Bethlehem is such a friendly little town and the countryside is so beautiful up in the hills. Oh, you'll just love your new home...

450

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